PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 198

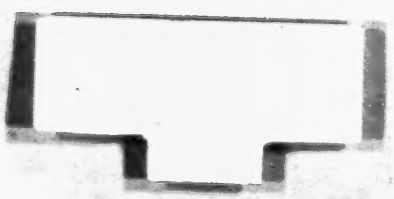
HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIFTH SESSION OF THE FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1991-92

COMPRISING PERIOD
31 October—15 November 1991



Chronology of "The Parliamentary Debates"

The Parliamentary History contains all that can be collected of the Legislative History of this country from the Conquest to the close of the XVIIIth Century (1803), 36 vols. The chief sources whence these Debates are derived are the Constitutional History, 24 vols.; Sir Simonds D'Ewes' Journal; Debates of the Commons in 1620 and 1621; Chandler and Timberland's Debates, 22 vols.; Grey's Debates of the Commons, from 1667 to 1694, 10 vols.; Almons Debates, 24 vols.; Debrett's Debates, 63 vols.; The Hardwicke Papers; Debates in Parliament by Dr. Johnson, &c. &c.

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES commenced with the year 1803, and the contents are set forth in the following Chronological Table:—

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Alphabetical List of Members

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Adams, Allender Steele (Paisley, North) *[died, September 1990]*
Adams, Gerard (Belfast, West)
Adams, Mrs. Katherine (Paisley, North) *[By-election, November 1990]*
Adley, Robert James (Christchurch)
Aitken, Jonathan William Patrick (Thanet, South)
Alexander, Richard Thain (Newark)
Alison, Rt. Hon. Michael James Hugh (Selby)
Allason, Rupert William Simon (Torbay)
Allen, Graham William (Nottingham, North)
Alton, David Patrick Paul (Liverpool, Mossley Hill)
Amery, Rt.Hon. Harold Julian (Brighton, Pavilion)
Amess, David Anthony Andrew (Basildon)
Amos, Alan Thomas (Hexham)
Anderson, Donald (Swansea, East)
Arbuthnot, James Norwich (Wanstead and Woodford)
Archer, Rt. Hon. Peter Kingsley QC (Warley, West)
Armstrong, Ms. Hilary Jane (North West Durham)
Arnold, Jacques Arnold (Gravesham)
Arnold, Sir Thomas Richard (Hazel Grove)
Ashby, David Glynn (North West Leicestershire)
Ashdown, Rt. Hon. Jeremy John Durham (Yeovil)
Ashley, Rt. Hon. Jack CH (Stoke-on-Trent, South)
Ashton, Joseph William (Bassetlaw)
Aspinwall, Jack Heywood (Wansdyke)
Atkins, Robert James (South Ribble)
Atkinson, David Anthony (Bournemouth, East)

B

Baker, Rt. Hon. Kenneth Wilfred (Mole Valley)
Baker, Nicholas Brian (Dorset, North)
Baldry, Antony Brian (Banbury)
Banks, Robert George (Harrogate)
Banks, Tony (Newham, North-West)
Barnes, Harold (North-East Derbyshire)
Barnes, Mrs. Rosemary Susan (Greenwich)
Barron, Kevin John (Rother Valley)
Batiste, Spencer Lee (Elmet)
Battle, John Dominic (Leeds, West)
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony Michael (Birmingham, Selly Oak)
Beckett, Mrs. Margaret Mary (Derby, South)
Beggs, Roy (East Antrim)
Beith, Alan James (Berwick-upon-Tweed)
Bell, Stuart (Middlesbrough)
Bellingham, Henry Campbell (North-West Norfolk)
Bellotti, David Frank (Eastbourne) *[By-election, October 1990]*
Bendall, Vivian Walter Hough (Ilford, North)
Benn, Rt. Hon. Anthony Neil Wedgwood (Chesterfield)
Bennett, Andrew Francis (Denton and Reddish)
Bennett, Nicholas Jerome (Pembroke)
Benton, Joseph Edward (Bootle) *[By-election, November 1990]*
Benyon, William Richard (Milton Keynes)
Bermingham, Gerald Edward (St. Helens, South)
Bevan, Andrew David Gilroy (Birmingham, Yardley)
Bidwell, Sydney James (Ealing, Southall)
Biffen, Rt. Hon. William John (North Shropshire)
Biggs-Davison, Sir John Alec (Epping Forest) *[died, September 1988]*
Blackburn, John Graham (Dudley, West)
Blair, Anthony Charles Lynton (Sedgefield)
Blaker, Rt. Hon. Sir Peter Allan Renshaw KCMG (Blackpool, South)
Blunkett, David (Sheffield, Brightside)
Boateng, Paul Yaw (Brent, South)
Body, Sir Richard Bernard Frank Stewart (Holland with Boston)
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas Cosmo (Upminster)
Boothroyd, Miss Betty (West Bromwich, West)
Boscawen, Hon. Robert Thomas MC (Somerton and Frome)
Boswell, Timothy Eric (Daventry)
Bottomley, Peter James (Eltham)
Bottomley, Mrs. Virginia Hilda Brunette Maxwell (South-West Surrey)
Bowden, Andrew MBE (Brighton, Kemptown)
Bowden, Gerald Francis TD (Dulwich)
Bowis, John Crocket OBE (Battersea)
Boyes, Roland (Houghton and Washington)
Boyson, Rt. Hon. Sir Rhodes (Brent, North)
Bradley, Keith John Charles (Manchester, Withington)
Braine, Rt. Hon. Sir Bernard Richard (Castle Point)
Brandon-Bravo, Martin Maurice (Nottingham, South)
Bray, Jeremy William (Motherwell, South)
Brazier, Julian William Hendy (Canterbury)
Bright, Graham Frank James (Luton, South)
Brittan, Rt. Hon. Leon QC (Richmond, Yorks.) *[Resigned, December 1988]*
Brooke, Rt. Hon. Peter Leonard (City of London and Westminster, South)
Brown, James Gordon (Dunfermline, East)
Brown, Michael Russell (Brigg and Cleethorpes)
Brown, Nicholas Hugh (Newcastle upon Tyne, East)
Brown, Ronald Duncan McLaren (Edinburgh, Leith)
Browne, John Ernest Douglas Delavalette (Winchester)
Bruce, Ian Cameron (South Dorset)
Bruce, Malcolm Gray (Gordon)
Buchan, Norman Findlay (Paisley, South) *[died, October 1990]*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt. Hon. Alick Laidlaw (Kincardine and Deeside) *[died, August 1991]*
Buck, Sir Philip Antony Fyson QC (North Colchester)
Buckley, George James (Hemsworth) *[died, September 1991]*
Budgen, Nicholas William (Wolverhampton, South-West)
Burns, Simon Hugh McGuigan (Chelmsford)
Burt, Alistair James Hendrie (Bury, North)

Alphabetical List of Members

Butcher, John Patrick (Coventry, South-West)
Butler, Christopher John (Warrington, South)
Butterfill, John Valentine (Bournemouth, West)

C

Caborn, Richard George (Sheffield, Central)
Callaghan, James (Heywood and Middleton)
Campbell, Ronald (Blyth Valley)
Campbell, Walter Menzies CBE QC (Fife, North-East)
Campbell-Savours, Dale Norman (Workington)
Canavan, Dennis Andrew (Falkirk, West)
Carlile, Alexander Charles QC (Montgomery)
Carlisle, John Russell (Luton, North)
Carlisle, Kenneth Melville (Lincoln)
Carr, Michael (Bootle) *[By-election, May 1990] [died, July 1990]*
Carr, Michael (Ribble Valley) *[By-election, March 1991]*
Carrington, Matthew Hadrian Marshall (Fulham)
Carttiss, Michael Reginald Harry (Great Yarmouth)
Cartwright, John Cameron (Woolwich)
Cash, William Nigel Paul (Stafford)
Chalker, Rt. Hon. Mrs. Lynda (Wallasey)
Channon, Rt. Hon. Henry Paul Guinness (Southend, West)
Chapman, Sydney Brookes (Chipping Barnet)
Chope, Christopher Robert OBE (Southampton, Itchen)
Churchill, Winston Spencer (Davyhulme)
Clark, Rt.Hon. Alan Kenneth McKenzie (Plymouth, Sutton)
Clark, David George (South Shields)
Clark, Michael (Rochford)
Clark, Rt. Hon. Sir William Gibson (Croydon, South)
Clarke, Rt. Hon. Kenneth Harry QC (Rushcliffe)
Clarke, Thomas CBE (Monklands, West)
Clay, Robert Alan (Sunderland, North)
Clelland, David Gordon (Tyne Bridge)
Clwyd, Mrs. Ann (Cynon Valley)
Cohen, Harry Michael (Leyton)
Coleman, Donald Richard CBE (Neath) *[died, January 1991]*
Colvin, Michael Keith Beale (Romsey and Waterside)
Conway, Derek Leslie (Shrewsbury and Atcham)
Cook, Francis (Stockton, North)
Cook, Robert Finlayson (Livingston)
Coombs, Anthony Michael Vincent (Wyre Forest)
Coombs, Simon Christopher (Swindon)
Cope, Rt. Hon. Sir John Ambrose (Northavon)
Corbett, Robin (Birmingham, Erdington)
Corbyn, Jeremy Bernard (Islington, North)
Cormack, Patrick Thomas (South Staffordshire)
Couchman, James Randall (Gillingham)
Cousins, James Mackay (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central)
Cox, Thomas Michael (Tooting)
Cran, James Douglas (Beverley)
Critchley, Julian Michael Gordon (Aldershot)
Crowther, Joseph Stanley (Rotherham)
Cryer, George Robert (Bradford, South)
Cummings, John Scott (Easington)
Cunliffe, Lawrence Francis (Leigh)
Cunningham, John Anderson (Copeland)
Currie, Mrs. Edwina (South Derbyshire)
Curry, David Maurice (Skipton and Ripon)

D

Dalyell, Tam (Linlithgow)
Darling, Alistair Maclean (Edinburgh, Central)
Davies, Rt. Hon. David John Denzil (Llanelli)
Davies, John Quentin (Stamford and Spalding)
Davies, Ronald (Caerphilly)
Davis, David Michael (Boothferry)
Davis, Terence Anthony Gordon (Birmingham, Hodge Hill)
Day, Stephen Richard (Cheadle)
Dean, Rt. Hon. Sir Arthur Paul (Woodspring)
Devlin, Timothy Robert (Stockton, South)
Dewar, Donald Campbell (Glasgow, Garscadden)
Dickens, Geoffrey Kenneth (Littleborough and Saddleworth)
Dicks, Terence Patrick (Hayes and Harlington)
Dixon, Donald (Jarrow)
Dobson, Frank Gordon (Holborn and St. Pancras)
Doran, Frank (Aberdeen, South)
Dorrell, Stephen James (Loughborough)
Douglas, Richard Giles (Dunfermline, West)
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Edinburgh, West)
Dover, Densmore Ronald (Chorley)
Duffy, Sir Albert Edward Patrick (Sheffield, Attercliffe)
Dunn, Robert John (Dartford)
Dunnachie, James Francis (Glasgow, Pollok)
Dunwoody, Hon. Mrs. Gwyneth Patricia (Crewe and Nantwich)
Durant, Sir Robert Anthony Bevis (Reading, West)
Dykes, Hugh John Maxwell (Harrow, East)

E

Eadie, Alexander BEM (Midlothian)
Eastham, Kenneth (Manchester, Blackley)
Edwards, William Edward Huw (Monmouth) *[By-election, May 1991]*
Eggar, Timothy John Crommelin (Enfield, North)
Emery, Sir Peter Frank Hannibal (Honiton)
Evans, David John (Welwyn Hatfield)
Evans, John (St. Helens, North)
Evennett, David Anthony (Erith and Crayford)
Ewing, Harry (Falkirk, East)
Ewing, Mrs. Margaret Anne (Moray)

F

Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas Hardwick QC (Perth and Kinross)
Fallon, Michael Cather (Darlington)
Farr, Sir John Arnold (Harborough)
Fatchett, Derek John (Leeds, Central)
Faulds, Andrew Matthew William (Warley, East)
Favell, Anthony Rowland (Stockport)
Fearn, Ronald Cyril (Southport)
Fenner, Dame Peggy Edith (Medway)
Field, Barry John Anthony (Isle of Wight)
Field, Frank (Birkenhead)
Fields, Terence (Liverpool, Broadgreen)
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey MBE (Hampstead and Highgate)
Fishburn, John Dudley (Kensington) *[By-election, June 1988]*
Fisher, Mark (Stoke-on-Trent, Central)
Flannery, Martin Henry (Sheffield, Hillsborough)
Flynn, Paul Phillip (Newport, West)

Fookes, Dame Janet Evelyn (Plymouth, Drake)
Foot, Rt. Hon. Michael Mackintosh (Blaenau Gwent)
Forman, Francis Nigel (Carshalton and Wallington)
Forsyth, Michael Bruce (Stirling)
Forsythe, Clifford (South Antrim)
Forth, Eric (Mid-Worcestershire)
Foster, Derek (Bishop Auckland)
Foulkes, George (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley)
Fowler, Rt. Hon. Sir Peter Norman (Sutton Coldfield)
Fox, Sir John Marcus MBE (Shipley)
Franks, Cecil Simon (Barrow and Furness)
Fraser, John Denis (Norwood)
Freeman, Roger Norman (Kettering)
French, Douglas Charles (Gloucester)
Fry, Peter Derek (Wellingborough)
Fyfe, Mrs. Maria (Glasgow, Maryhill)

G

Galbraith, Samuel Laird (Strathkelvin and Bearsden)
Gale, Roger James (North Thanet)
Galloway, George (Glasgow, Hillhead)
Gardiner, Sir George Arthur (Reigate)
Garel-Jones, William Armand Thomas Tristan (Watford)
Garrett, John Laurence (Norwich, South)
Garrett, William Edward (Wallsend)
George, Bruce Thomas (Walsall, South)
Gilbert, Rt. Hon. John William (Dudley, East)
Gill, Christopher John Fred RD (Ludlow)
Gilmour, Rt. Hon. Sir Ian Hedworth John Little (Chesham and Amersham)
Glyn, Sir Alan ERD (Windsor and Maidenhead)
Godman, Norman Anthony (Greenock and Port Glasgow)
Golding, Mrs. Llinos (Newcastle-under-Lyme)
Goodhart, Sir Philip Carter (Beckenham)
Goodlad, Alastair Robertson (Eddisbury)
Goodson-Wickes, Dr. Charles (Wimbledon)
Gordon, Mrs. Mildred (Bow and Poplar)
Gorman, Mrs. Theresa Ellen (Billericay)
Gorst, John Michael (Hendon, North)
Gould, Bryan Charles (Dagenham)
Gow, Ian Reginald Edward TD (Eastbourne) *[died, July 1990]*
Gower, Sir Herbert Raymond (Vale of Glamorgan) *[died, February 1989]*
Graham, Thomas (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde)
Grant, Bernard Alexander Montgomery (Tottenham)
Grant, Sir John Anthony (South-West Cambridgeshire)
Greenway, Harry (Ealing, North)
Greenway, John Robert (Ryedale)
Gregory, Conal Robert (York)
Griffiths, Sir Eldon Wylie (Bury St. Edmunds)
Griffiths, Nigel (Edinburgh, South)
Griffiths, Peter Harry Steve (Portsmouth, North)
Griffiths, Winston James (Bridgend)
Grist, Ian (Cardiff, Central)
Grocott, Bruce Joseph (The Wrekin)
Ground, Reginald Patrick QC (Feltham and Heston)
Grylls, William Michael John (North-West Surrey)
Gummer, Rt. Hon. John Selwyn (Suffolk, Coastal)

H

Hague, William Jefferson (Richmond, Yorks) *[By-election, February 1989]*
Hain, Peter Gerald (Neath) *[By-election, April 1991]*
Hamilton, Rt. Hon. Archibald Gavin (Epsom and Ewell)
Hamilton, Mostyn Neil (Tatton)
Hampson, Keith (Leeds, North-West)
Hanley, Jeremy James (Richmond and Barnes)
Hannam, John Gordon (Exeter)
Hardy, Peter (Wentworth)
Hargreaves, Andrew Raikes (Birmingham, Hall Green)
Hargreaves, Joseph Kenneth (Hyndburn)
Harman Ms. Harriet Ruth (Peckham)
Harris, David Anthony (St. Ives)
Haselhurst, Alan Gordon Barraclough (Saffron Walden)
Hattersley, Rt. Hon. Roy Sydney George (Birmingham, Sparkbrook)
Hawkins, Christopher James (High Peak)
Hayes, Jeremy Joseph James (Harlow)
Hayhoe, Rt. Hon. Sir Bernard John (Brentford and Isleworth)
Haynes, David Francis (Ashfield)
Hayward, Robert Antony (Kingswood)
Heal, Mrs. Sylvia Lloyd (Mid-Staffordshire) *[By-election, March 1990]*
Healey, Rt. Hon. Denis Winston CH MBE (Leeds, East)
Heath, Rt. Hon. Edward Richard George MBE (Old Bexley and Sidcup)
Heathcoat-Amory, David Philip (Wells)
Heddle, Bentley John (Mid-Staffordshire) *[died, December 1989]*
Heffer, Eric Samuel (Liverpool, Walton) *[died, May 1991]*
Henderson, Douglas John (Newcastle upon Tyne, North)
Heseltine, Rt. Hon. Michael Ray Dibdin (Henley)
Hicks, Mrs. Maureen Patricia (Wolverhampton, North-East)
Hicks, Robert Adrian (South-East Cornwall)
Higgins, Rt. Hon. Terence Langley (Worthing)
Hill, Stanley James Allen (Southampton, Test)
Hinchliffe, David Martin (Wakefield)
[illegible]d, Kenneth Harvard (West Lancashire)
[illegible]oey, Catharine Letitia (Vauxhall) *[By-election June 1989]*
Hogg, Hon. Douglas Martin QC (Grantham)
Hogg, Norman (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth)
Holland, Stuart Kingsley (Vauxhall) *[Resigned, May 1989]*
Holt, James Richard (Langbaurgh) *[died, September 1991]*
Home Robertson, John David (East Lothian)
Hood, James (Clydesdale)
Hordern, Sir Peter Maudslay (Horsham)
Howard, Rt. Hon. Michael QC (Folkestone and Hythe)
Howarth, Alan Thomas CBE (Stratford-on-Avon)
Howarth, George Edward (Knowsley, North)
Howarth, James Gerald Douglas (Cannock and Burntwood)
Howe, Rt. Hon. Sir Richard Edward Geoffrey QC (East Surrey)
Howell, Rt. Hon. David Arthur Russell (Guildford)
Howell, Rt. Hon. Denis Herbert (Birmingham, Small Heath)
Howell, Ralph Frederic (North Norfolk)
Howells, Geraint Wyn (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North)
Howells, Dr. Kim Scott (Pontypridd) *[By-election, February 1989]*
Hoyle, Eric Douglas Harvey (Warrington, North)
Hughes, John (Coventry, North-East)
Hughes, Robert Gurth (Harrow, West)
Hughes, Robert (Aberdeen, North)

Alphabetical List of Members

Hughes, Royston John (Newport, East)
Hughes, Sean Francis (Knowsley, South) *[died, June 1990]*
Hughes, Simon Henry Ward (Southwark and Bermondsey)
Hume, John (Foyle)
Hunt, Rt. Hon. David James Fletcher MBE (Wirral, West)
Hunt, Sir John Leonard (Ravensbourne)
Hunter, Andrew Robert Frederick (Basingstoke)
Hurd, Rt. Hon. Douglas Richard CBE (Witney)

I

Illsley, Eric Evelyn (Barnsley, Central)
Ingram, Adam Paterson (East Kilbride)
Irvine, Michael Fraser (Ipswich)
Irving, Sir Charles Graham (Cheltenham)

J

Jack, John Michael (Fylde)
Jackson, Robert Victor (Wantage)
Janman, Timothy Simon (Thurrock)
Janner, Hon. Greville Ewan QC (Leicester, West)
Jessel, Toby Francis Henry (Twickenham)
John, Brynmor Thomas (Pontypridd) *[died, December 1988]*
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey (Wealden)
Johnston, Sir David Russell (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber)
Jones, Gwilym Hadyn (Cardiff, North)
Jones, Ieuan Wyn (Ynys Môn)
Jones, Martyn David (Clwyd, South-West)
Jones, Robert Brannock (West Hertfordshire)
Jones, Stephen Barry (Alyn and Deeside)
Jopling, Rt. Hon. Thomas Michael (Westmorland and Lonsdale)

K

Kaufman Rt. Hon. Gerald Bernard (Manchester, Gorton)
Kellett-Bowman Dame Mary Elaine (Lancaster)
Kennedy Charles Peter (Ross, Cromarty and Skye)
Key, Simon Robert (Salisbury)
Kilfedder, James Alexander (North Down)
Kilfoyle, Peter (Liverpool, Walton) *[By-election, July 1991]*
King, Rt. Hon. Thomas Jeremy (Bridgwater)
King, Roger Douglas (Birmingham, Northfield)
Kinnock, Rt. Hon. Neil Gordon (Islwyn)
Kirkhope, Timothy John Robert (Leeds, North-East)
Kirkwood, Archibald Johnstone (Roxburgh and Berwickshire)
Knapman, Roger Maurice (Stroud)
Knight, Gregory (Derby, North)
Knight, Dame Joan Christabel Jill (Birmingham, Edgbaston)
Knowles, Michael (Nottingham, East)
Knox, David Laidlaw (Staffordshire, Moorlands)

L

Lambie, David (Cunninghame, South)
Lamond, James Alexander (Oldham, Central and Royton)
Lamont, Rt. Hon. Norman Stewart Hughson (Kingston upon Thames)
Lang, Rt. Hon. Ian Bruce (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale)
Latham, Michael Anthony (Rutland and Melton)
Lawrence, Ivan John QC (Burton)
Lawson, Rt. Hon. Nigel (Blaby)
Leadbitter, Edward (Hartlepool)
Lee, John Robert Louis (Pendle)
Leigh, Edward Julian Egerton (Gainsborough and Horncastle)
Leighton, Ronald (Newham, North-East)
Lennox-Boyd, Hon. Mark Alexander (Morecambe and Lunesdale)
Lester, James Theodore (Broxtowe)
Lestor, Miss Joan (Eccles)
Lewis, Terence (Worsley)
Lightbown, David Lincoln (South-East Staffordshire)
Lilley, Rt. Hon. Peter Bruce (St. Albans)
Litherland, Robert Kenneth (Manchester, Central)
Livingstone, Kenneth Robert (Brent, East)
Livsey, Richard Arthur Lloyd (Brecon and Radnor)
Lloyd, Anthony Joseph (Stretford)
Lloyd, Sir Ian Stewart (Havant)
Lloyd, Peter Robert Cable (Fareham)
Lofthouse, Geoffrey (Pontefract and Castleford)
Lord, Michael Nicholson (Central Suffolk)
Loyden, Edward (Liverpool, Garston)
Luce, Rt. Hon. Sir Richard Napier (Shoreham)
Lyell, Rt. Hon. Sir Nicholas Walter QC (Mid-Bedfordshire)

M

McAllion, John (Dundee, East)
McAvoy, Thomas (Glasgow, Rutherglen)
McCartney, Ian (Makerfield)
McCrea, Rev Robert Thomas William (Mid-Ulster)
McCrindle, Sir Robert Arthur (Brentwood and Ongar)
McCusker, James Harold (Upper Bann) *[died, February 1990]*
MacDonald, Calum Alastair (Western Isles)
McFall, John (Dumbarton)
Macfarlane, Sir David Neil (Sutton and Cheam)
McGrady, Edward Kevin (South Down)
MacGregor, Rt. Hon. John Roddick Russell OBE (South Norfolk)
McKay, Allen (Barnsley, West and Penistone)
MacKay, Andrew James (East Berkshire)
McKelvey, William (Kilmarnock and Loudoun)
Maclean, David John (Penrith and The Border)
McLeish, Henry Baird (Fife, Central)
Maclennan, Robert Adam Ross (Caithness and Sutherland)
McLoughlin, Patrick Allen (West Derbyshire)
McMaster, Gordon (Paisley, South) *[By-election, November 1990]*
MacNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick Michael Ernest David (New Forest)
McNair-Wilson, Sir Robert Michael Conal (Newbury)
McNamara, Joseph Kevin (Kingston upon Hull, North)
McTaggart, Robert (Glasgow, Central) *[died, March 1989]*
McWilliam, John David (Blaydon)
Madden, Maxwell Francis (Bradford, West)
Madel, William David (South-West Bedfordshire)

Alphabetical List of Members

Maginnis, Kenneth (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Mahon, Mrs. Alice (Halifax)
Major, Rt. Hon. John (Huntingdon)
Malins, Humfrey Jonathan (Croydon, North-West)
Mallon, Seamus (Newry and Armagh)
Mans, Keith Douglas Rowland (Wyre)
Maples, John Cradock (Lewisham, West)
Marek, Dr. John (Wrexham)
Marland, Paul (West Gloucestershire)
Marlow, Antony Rivers (Northampton, North)
Marshall, David (Glasgow, Shettleston)
Marshall, James (Leicester, South)
Marshall, John Leslie (Hendon, South)
Marshall, Sir Robert Michael (Arundel)
Martin, David John Pattison (Portsmouth, South)
Martin, Michael John (Glasgow, Springburn)
Martlew, Eric Anthony (Carlisle)
Mates, Michael John (East Hampshire)
Maude, Francis Anthony Aylmer (North Warwickshire)
Mawhinney, Brian Stanley (Peterborough)
Maxton, John Alston (Glasgow, Cathcart)
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robert John (Tiverton)
Mayhew, Rt Hon. Sir Patrick Barnabas Burke QC (Tunbridge Wells)
Meacher, Michael Hugh (Oldham, West)
Meale, Joseph Alan (Mansfield)
Mellor, Rt. Hon. David John QC (Putney)
Meyer, Sir Anthony John Charles (Clwyd, North-West)
Michael, Alun Edward (Cardiff, South and Penarth)
Michie, Mrs. Janet Ray (Argyll and Bute)
Michie, William (Sheffield, Heeley)
Millan, Rt. Hon. Bruce (Glasgow, Govan) *[Resigned, October 1988]*
Miller, Sir Hilary Duppa (Bromsgrove)
Mills, Iain Campbell (Meriden)
Miscampbell, Norman Alexander QC (Blackpool, North)
Mitchell, Andrew John Bower (Gedling)
Mitchell, Austin Vernon (Great Grimsby)
Mitchell, Sir David Bower (North-West Hampshire)
Moate, Roger Denis (Faversham)
Molyneaux, Rt. Hon. James Henry (Lagan Valley)
Monro, Sir Hector Seymour Peter AE (Dumfries)
Montgomery, Sir William Fergus (Altrincham and Sale)
Moonie, Dr. Lewis George (Kirkcaldy)
Moore, Rt. Hon. John Edward Michael (Croydon, Central)
Morgan, Hywel Rhodri (Cardiff, West)
Morley, Elliot Anthony (Glanford and Scunthorpe)
Morris, Rt. Hon. Alfred (Manchester, Wythenshawe)
Morris, Rt. Hon. John QC (Aberavon)
Morris, Michael Wolfgang Laurence (Northampton, South)
Morrison, Hon. Sir Charles Andrew (Devizes)
Morrison, Rt. Hon. Sir Peter Hugh (City of Chester)
Moss, Malcolm Douglas (North-East Cambridgeshire)
Mowlam, Ms. Marjorie (Redcar)
Moynihan, Hon. Colin Berkeley (Lewisham, East)
Mudd, William David (Falmouth and Camborne)
Mullin, Christopher John (Sunderland, South)
Murphy, Paul Peter (Torfaen)

N

Neale, Sir Gerrard Anthony (North Cornwall)
Needham, Richard Francis (North Wiltshire)
Nellist, David John (Coventry, South East)
Nelson, Richard Anthony (Chichester)
Neubert, Sir Michael Jon (Romford)
Newton, Rt. Hon. Antony Harold OBE (Braintree)
Nicholls, Patrick Charles Martyn (Teignbridge)
Nicholson, David John (Taunton)
Nicholson, Miss Emma Harriet (Torridge and West Devon)
Norris, Steven John (Epping Forest) *[By-election, December 1988]*

O

Oakes, Rt. Hon. Gordon James (Halton)
O'Brien, William (Normanton)
O'Hara, Edward (Knowsley, South) *[By-election, September 1990]*
O'Neill, Martin John (Clackmannan)
Onslow, Rt. Hon. Cranley Gordon Douglas (Woking)
Oppenheim, Phillip Anthony Charles Lawrence (Amber Valley)
Orme, Rt. Hon. Stanley (Salford, East)
Owen, Rt. Hon. Dr. David Anthony Llewellyn (Plymouth, Devonport)

P

Page, Richard Lewis (South-West Hertfordshire)
Paice, James Edward Thornton (Cambridge, South East)
Paisley, Rev. Ian Richard Kyle (North Antrim)
Parkinson, Rt. Hon. Cecil Edward (Hertsmere)
Parry, Robert (Liverpool, Riverside)
Patchett, Terry (Barnsley, East)
Patnick, Cyril Irvine (Sheffield, Hallam)
Patten, Rt. Hon. Christopher Francis (Bath)
Patten, Rt. Hon. John Haggitt Charles (Oxford, West and Abingdon)
Pattie, Rt. Hon. Sir Geoffrey Edwin (Chertsey and Walton)
Pawsey, James Francis (Rugby and Kenilworth)
Peacock, Mrs. Elizabeth Joan (Batley and Spen)
Pendry, Thomas (Stalybridge and Hyde)
Pike, Peter Leslie (Burnley)
Porter, David John (Waveney)
Porter, George Barrington (Wirral, South)
Portillo, Michael Denzil Xavier (Enfield, Southgate)
Powell, Raymond (Ogmore)
Powell, William Rhys (Corby)
Prescott, John Leslie (Kingston upon Hull, East)
Price, Sir David Ernest Campbell (Eastleigh)
Primarolo, Ms. Dawn (Bristol, South)

Q

Quin, Ms. Joyce Gwendolen (Gateshead, East)

R

Radice, Giles Heneage (North Durham)
Raffan, Keith William Twort (Delyn)
Raison, Rt. Hon. Sir Timothy Hugh Francis (Aylesbury)
Randall, Stuart Jeffrey (Kingston upon Hull, West)
Rathbone, John Rankin (Lewes)
Redmond, Martin (Don Valley)

Alphabetical List of Members

Redwood, John Alan (Wokingham)
Rees, Rt. Hon. Merlyn (Morley and Leeds, South)
Reid, John (Motherwell, North)
Renton, Rt. Hon. Ronald Timothy (Mid-Sussex)
Rhodes James, Sir Robert Vidal (Cambridge)
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon Meredith (Kensington) *[died, May 1988]*
Richardson, Miss Josephine (Barking)
Riddick, Graham Edward Galloway (Colne Valley)
Ridley, Rt. Hon. Nicholas (Cirencester and Tewkesbury)
Ridsdale, Sir Julian Errington CBE (Harwich)
Rifkind, Rt. Hon. Malcolm Leslie QC (Edinburgh, Pentlands)
Roberts, Allan (Bootle) *[died, March 1990]*
Roberts, Rt. Hon. Sir Ieuan Wyn Pritchard (Conwy)
Robertson, George Islay Macneill (Hamilton)
Robinson, Geoffrey (Coventry, North-West)
Robinson, Peter David (Belfast, East)
Roe, Mrs. Marion Audrey (Broxbourne)
Rogers, Allan Ralph (Rhondda)
Rooker, Jeffrey William (Birmingham, Perry Barr)
Rooney, Terence Henry (Bradford, North) *[By-election, November 1990]*
Ross, Ernest (Dundee, West)
Ross, William (East Londonderry)
Rossi, Sir Hugh Alexis Louis (Hornsey and Wood Green)
Rost, Peter Lewis (Erewash)
Rowe, Andrew John Bernard (Mid-Kent)
Rowlands, Edward (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney)
Ruddock, Ms. Joan Mary (Lewisham, Deptford)
Rumbold, Rt. Hon. Mrs. Angela Claire Rosemary CBE (Mitcham and Morden)
Ryder, Rt. Hon. Richard Andrew OBE (Mid-Norfolk)

S

Sackville, Hon. Thomas Geoffrey (Bolton, West)
Sainsbury, Hon. Timothy Alan Davan (Hove)
Salmond, Alexander Elliott Anderson (Banff and Buchan)
Sayeed, Jonathan (Bristol, East)
Scott, Rt. Hon. Nicholas Paul MBE (Chelsea)
Sedgemore, Brian Charles (Hackney, South and Shoreditch)
Shaw, David Lawrence (Dover)
Shaw, Sir John Giles Dunkerley (Pudsey)
Shaw, Sir Michael Norman (Scarborough)
Sheerman, Barry John (Huddersfield)
Sheldon, Rt. Hon. Robert Edward (Ashton under Lyne)
Shelton, Sir William Jeremy Masefield (Streatham)
Shephard, Mrs. Gillian Patricia (South-West Norfolk)
Shepherd, Colin Ryley (Hereford)
Shepherd, Richard Charles Scrimgeour (Aldridge-Brownhills)
Shersby, Julian Michael (Uxbridge)
Shore, Rt. Hon. Peter David (Bethnal Green and Stepney)
Short, Clare (Birmingham, Ladywood)
Sillars, James (Glasgow, Govan) *[By-election, November 1988]*
Sims, Roger Edward (Chislehurst)
Skeet, Sir Trevor Herbert Harry (North Bedfordshire)
Skinner, Dennis Edward (Bolsover)
Smith, Andrew David (Oxford, East)
Smith, Christopher Robert, (Islington, South and Finsbury)
Smith, Sir Cyril MBE (Rochdale)
Smith, Sir Dudley Gordon (Warwick and Leamington)
Smith, Rt. Hon. John QC (Monklands, East)
Smith, John William Patrick (Vale of Glamorgan) *[By-election, May 1989]*
Smith, Timothy John (Beaconsfield)
Smyth, Rev. William Martin (Belfast, South)
Snape, Peter Charles (West Bromwich, East)
Soames, Hon. Arthur Nicholas Winston (Crawley)
Soley, Clive Stafford (Hammersmith)
Spearing, Nigel John (Newham, South)
Speed, Herbert Keith (Ashford)
Speller, Antony (North Devon)
Spicer, Sir James Wilton (West Dorset)
Spicer, William Michael Hardy (South Worcestershire)
Squire, Robin Clifford (Hornchurch)
Stanbrook, Ivor Robert (Orpington)
Stanley, Rt. Hon. Sir John Paul (Tonbridge and Malling)
Steel, Rt. Hon. Sir David Martin Scott (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale)
Steen, Anthony David (South Hams)
Steinberg, Gerald Neil (City of Durham)
Stern, Michael Charles (Bristol, North-West)
Stevens, Lewis David MBE (Nuneaton)
Stewart, Andrew Struthers (Sherwood)
Stewart, Rt. Hon. Sir Bernard Harold Ian Halley RD (North Hertfordshire)
Stewart, John Allan (Eastwood)
Stokes, Sir John Heydon Romaine (Halesowen and Stourbridge)
Stott, Roger CBE (Wigan)
Stradling Thomas, Sir John (Monmouth) *[died, March 1991]*
Strang, Gavin Steel (Edinburgh, East)
Straw, John Whitaker (Blackburn)
Sumberg, David Anthony Gerald (Bury, South)
Summerson, Hugo Hawksley Fitzthomas (Walthamstow)

T

Tapsell, Sir Peter Hannay Bailey (East Lindsey)
Taylor, Sir Edward Macmillan (Southend, East)
Taylor, Ian Colin, MBE (Esher)
Taylor, Rt. Hon. John David (Strangford)
Taylor, John Mark (Solihull)
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V

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W

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THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIFTH SESSION OF THE FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 25 JUNE 1987]

FORTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES — VOLUME 198

FIRST VOLUME OF SESSION 1991-92

House of Commons

Thursday 31 October 1991

The House met at twenty-five minutes past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Message to attend Her Majesty:

The House went; and having returned:

The Sitting was suspended until half-past Two o'clock, and then resumed.

SESSIONAL ORDERS

ELECTIONS

Ordered,

That all Members who are returned for two or more places in any part of the United Kingdom to make their Election for which of the places they will serve, within one week after it shall appear that there is no question upon the Return for that place; and if anything shall come in question touching the Return or Election of any Member, he is to withdraw during the time the matter is in debate; and that all Members returned upon double Returns do withdraw till their Returns are determined.

Resolved,

That no Peer of the Realm, except a Peer of Ireland, hath any right to give his vote in the Election of any Member to serve in Parliament.

Resolved,

That if it shall appear that any person hath been elected or returned a Member of this House, or endeavoured so to be, by Bribery or any other corrupt practices, this House will proceed with the utmost severity against all such persons as shall have been wilfully concerned in such Bribery or other corrupt practices.

WITNESSES

Resolved,

That if it shall appear that any person hath been tampering with any Witness, in respect of his evidence to be given to this House, or any Committee thereof, or directly or indirectly hath endeavoured to deter or hinder any person from appearing or giving evidence the same is declared to be a high crime and misdemeanour; and this House will proceed with the utmost severity against such offender.

Resolved,

That if it shall appear that any person hath given false evidence in any case before this House, or any Committee thereof, this House will proceed with the utmost severity against such offender.

Metropolitan Police

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Commissioner of the Police of the Metropolis do take care that during the Session of Parliament the passages through the streets leading to this House be kept free and open and that no obstruction be permitted to hinder the passage of Members to and from this House, and that no disorder be allowed in Westminster Hall, or in the passages leading to this House, during the Sitting of Parliament, and that there be no annoyance therein or thereabouts; and that the Serjeant at Arms attending this House do communicate this Order to the Commissioner aforesaid.

2.33 pm

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): You may remember, Mr. Speaker, that last year I raised with you the problem of coaches parked in and around Parliament square, which makes it impossible for the Sessional Order to be complied with. You said that you would refer the matter to the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. I have been in correspondence with him since then and he tells me that it would not be possible to give enforcement "high priority".

There appears to be a clear conflict between your discussions and the Sessional Order on one hand, and the priorities of the Metropolitan police on the other. Will you please ask the Commissioner to ensure that the Sessional Order is given the highest priority so that we can get to this place without being obstructed by coaches?

Mr. Speaker: I will certainly refer the matter again, although, as the hon. Member knows, there are difficulties about this.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): It has become the fashion to make a few comments about the Sessional Orders, which is very useful. I think that the House should

[Mr. Bob Cryer]

take the matter seriously. I refer especially to the Sessional Order that deals with witnesses to the House. There have been occasions——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have already gone past that order. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to deal with the order under discussion, I shall hear him.

Mr. Cryer: We have agreed to the order, Mr. Speaker, and I am pleased that we have: I said "Aye" along with the others.

I want to refer to the third Sessional Order, Mr. Speaker, dealing with access—the last one to which you referred. I do not wish to oppose the previous order, although it is debatable—merely to refer to it in passing, to say that I hope that, when the Select Committee on Health takes evidence on the national health service trusts, no witnesses will be intimidated by threats of disciplinary action intended to prevent them from giving evidence.

Mr. Speaker *rose*——

Mr. Cryer: I now wish to go on to the order concerning access.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is ingenious, but his remarks are miles wide of the order under discussion, which concerns the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. I think that we should move on.

Mr. Cryer: I was about to refer to the order dealing with access. As you, Sir, will know, in two successive years, I have raised the question of access for Members, which is most important, because it allows us to exercise our right to come here carrying information, messages and representations on behalf of the people whom we represent. By and large, their message is that we should get rid of this Government as quickly as we can and put a Labour Government in their place. In two successive years, I have pointed out that, although we take serious action on giving access to Members of Parliament, we take little action on, and treat with scant seriousness, the question of access to this place for disabled people. I have raised the question three times, and it is about time that something was done about it.

Mr. Speaker: That is a matter for the Administration Committee, not for discussion in connection with the order.

Question put and agreed to.

VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS

Ordered,

That the Votes and Proceedings of this House be printed, being first perused by Mr. Speaker; and that he do appoint the printing thereof; and that no person but such as he shall appoint do presume to print the same.

OUTLAWRIES

A Bill for the more effectual preventing Clandestine Outlawries; read the First time; to be read a Second time.

JOURNAL

Ordered,

That the Journal of this House, from the end of the last Session to the end of the present Session, with an index thereto, be printed.

Ordered,

That the said Journal and Index be printed by the appointment and under the direction of Sir Clifford John Boulton, KCB, the Clerk of this House.

Ordered,

That the said Journal and Index be printed by such person as shall be licensed by Mr. Speaker, and that no other person do presume to print the same.

Queen's Speech

Mr. Speaker: I have to acquaint the House that this House has this day attended Her Majesty in the House of Peers, and that Her Majesty was pleased to make a Most Gracious Speech from the Throne to both Houses of Parliament, of which I have, for greater accuracy, obtained a copy.

I shall direct that the terms of the Gracious Speech be printed in the Votes and Proceedings. Copies are available in the Vote Office.

The Gracious Speech was as follows:

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

I look forward to visiting Australia in February, the European Parliament and the Council of Europe in Strasbourg and Malta next May, France in June and Germany in October.

My Government attach the highest importance to maintaining our security. For nearly half a century NATO has formed the cornerstone of our defences. It will continue to be the principal focus, but the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the other welcome developments in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe permit changes to NATO's strategy and will enable us to maintain our security with smaller forces. Nevertheless instability and other risks remain in Europe and elsewhere, and substantial and effective nuclear and conventional forces will be maintained.

The United Kingdom will work for balanced and verifiable arms control agreements including early ratification of the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty. Efforts will continue to control the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and to encourage greater international responsibility in the transfer of conventional weapons. The completion of multilateral negotiations on the abolition of chemical weapons will be pursued.

My Government will require full, unconditional compliance by Iraq with the United Nations Security Council Resolutions, including the disposal of its missiles and weapons of mass destruction. They will press for long-term peace in the Middle East, including a settlement of the Palestinian problem. They will continue their efforts to secure the release of hostages in the Middle East.

They will continue to work for a stronger, more effective United Nations.

My Government will, with our Community partners, pursue the successful conclusion of the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations. Within the Community, they will continue to play a constructive role in the two Inter-Governmental Conferences on Political Union and Economic and Monetary Union; and will work to complete the Single European Market, to promote budgetary discipline, and to reform the Common Agricultural Policy. They will prepare for the United Kingdom's Presidency of the Community beginning on 1st July 1992.

The United Kingdom will continue to develop our good relations with the Soviet Union and its republics, and to encourage their integration into the world economy; and will work to help Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania re-establish themselves in the international community.

My Government will further encourage the development of democratic institutions and market economies in central and eastern Europe; and pursue the completion of Association Agreements with Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia. They hope for a peaceful settlement in Yugoslavia. They will contribute constructively to the Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

My Government will encourage all sides in South Africa to pursue peaceful means of constructing a democratic, non-racial society.

A substantial aid programme aimed at promoting sustainable economic and social progress and good government in developing countries will be maintained.

My Government will continue to support the Commonwealth.

My Government will continue to administer Hong Kong in the interests of its people and to cooperate in implementing the Sino-British Joint Declaration.

My Government will continue their fight against terrorism in the United Kingdom and elsewhere. They will vigorously pursue their policies to combat drug trafficking and misuse of drugs, nationally and internationally.

The United Kingdom will work for a successful United Nations Conference on Environment and Development next June.

Members of the House of Commons

Estimates for the Public Service will be laid before you.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

My Government will pursue, within the framework of the Exchange Rate Mechanism, firm financial policies designed to reduce inflation further and maintain the conditions necessary for sustained growth. They will promote enterprise and training and improve the working of the economy. They will continue to prepare for the privatisation of the British Railways Board and the British Coal Corporation.

They will maintain firm control of public spending with the aim of keeping its share of national income on a downward trend over time.

My Government attach the highest priority to improving public services. They will implement the programme of reform in the White Paper on the Citizen's Charter, including bringing forward Charters for individual public services.

Legislation will be introduced to reinforce the regulation of privatised utilities.

Legislation will be introduced to provide for a new council tax, to establish a review of local government structure in England, and to enhance competitive tendering for local authority services.

Action will be taken to improve quality and choice in education. Legislation will be introduced to reform funding of further education and sixth form colleges and to reform higher education in England and Wales, and to make information available about the performance of individual schools.

My Government will continue to develop policies to enhance the nation's health and to improve the effectiveness of the health and social services, and the social security system.

Work for the regeneration of our cities will continue.

A Bill will be introduced to enable applications for asylum in the United Kingdom to be dealt with quickly and effectively.

A Bill will be presented to create an offence of prison mutiny and to increase the maximum penalty for aiding prisoners to escape.

Legislation will be introduced to revise health and safety arrangements for offshore installations.

[Mr. Speaker]

A Bill will be introduced to replace private legislation as the means for authorising transport development schemes.

A Bill will be introduced to provide for a Cardiff Bay Barrage.

For Scotland, legislation will be introduced to reform further and higher education.

In Northern Ireland, my Government will resolutely seek to defeat terrorism through [redacted]led and energetic enforcement of the law; to promote political progress; to strengthen the economy; and to create equality of opportunity and equity of treatment for all sections of the community. They will maintain positive relations with the Republic of Ireland.

Legislation will be introduced to improve the supervision of charities.

Other measures will be laid before you.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

I pray that the blessing of Almighty God may rest upon your counsels.

Debate on the Address

[FIRST DAY]

Mr. Speaker: Before I call the proposer and the seconder of the motion on the Loyal Address, it may be for the convenience of hon. Members if I inform the House that the proposed subjects for debate for the rest of this week and for next week are as follows:

Friday 1 November—foreign affairs and defence; Monday 4 November—employment and education; Tuesday 5 November—rights, freedoms and responsibilities; Wednesday 6 November—the council tax; Thursday 7 November—the economy.

It may also be for the convenience of the House to know that, on Friday 8 November, there will be a debate on the environment, on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

2.38 pm

Mr. Peter Walker (Worcester): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

I very much appreciate the honour of moving this motion, but I have one sadness—the fact that Alick Buchanan-Smith, a colleague and great personal friend of mine, a person who served this House, the Government and his constituency so well, is not with us today. He was a remarkable parliamentarian and, as a Minister, he was with me for many years. He loved his constituency, his country and the House of Commons, and I know that he will be sadly missed by hon. Members on both sides of the House. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

There have been occasions over the past 30 years when the attendance in this House for my speeches has not been quite as large as it is today. Perhaps the reason for that is similar to a reason given to George Ward, my predecessor as Member for Worcester, who represented the constituency from 1945 to 1959. During his last election campaign, he arrived at Worcester guildhall for his eve-of-poll meeting. The hall was packed to capacity, with standing room only. Encouraged by that, he began his speech: "Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, this is my fifth campaign as your Conservative candidate. Never before at all the meetings that I have attended have I seen such enormous attendances as I have seen during this campaign and that is illustrated by this packed audience tonight." To which a voice from the back of the guildhall shouted, "We've come to say good-bye."

It was in 1945, as a 13-year-old schoolboy witnessing the general election campaign, that I first had aspirations to become a Member of this House. I recognised at school that I had the talent to become a politician when, at the end of a particularly bad term, the headmaster wrote on my report, "One cannot help but be quite captivated by him, provided one gives him no work to do."

At the same school I also recognised the importance of freedom of choice, when I approached what was then the equivalent of O-levels. It was suggested that, among other subjects, I should take Latin. There was no possibility of

my passing Latin. On the afternoon of the Latin exam, a very good film was being shown at the neighbouring cinema to my school. I went to the cinema considering that that would be of more benefit than taking a Latin exam that I could not pass. I was caught and summoned to the Latin master, who said to me, "Walker, you didn't turn up for the Latin exam." To which I replied, "No, sir." He said, "Walker, I've now known you for four years, and this is the first intelligent thing that you have done."

I fought my first general election campaign in 1955, with eagerness and enthusiasm. In 1961, I was fortunate enough to win a by-election in the constituency of Worcester. After that by-election, I remember taking my place in this House and walking nervously towards Mr. Speaker. To my surprise, voices from the Labour Benches shouted, "Put him on the Scottish Grand Committee." That was a form of punishment reserved for English Tory Members at the time—[HON. MEMBERS: "It still is."] Little did I realise that I would end my ministerial career by spending much of my time on the Welsh Grand Committee.

It was a great privilege to become the Member for Worcester. I am very proud of my constituency, which has immense quality. It is a microcosm of England. It has the old and the new, and it has industry and agriculture. It is known as the "faithful city"—*[Interruption.]* As Opposition Front Bench spokesmen are murmuring, I will say that it has a Labour council; that has been the reason for my increasing majority. Worcester's motto is the faithful city because we were involved in certain civil wars way back.

Shortly after I became the Member for Worcester, the Queen Mother visited my constituency. Over the entrance to our guildhall we have an effigy of the head of Cromwell, pinned back by his ears by two large nails. As I pointed to it, I said to the Queen Mother, "You see, Ma'am, how badly they treat parliamentarians in this constituency," to which she swiftly replied, "Ah, yes, Mr. Walker, but they are very good to royalists."

It has been a faithful city, and I am glad to say that, throughout this century, it has been very faithful to the Conservative party. Indeed, I recall the experiences of the person who was Prime Minister when I first came into this House—Mr. Harold Macmillan. I remember how he had fought Stockton-on-Tees six times. He said how on three occasions he won but on three occasions he lost. He said in his own inimitable way, "On the three occasions that I lost, I reflected upon the stupidity of an electoral system whereby everybody, no matter how ill educated, how ignorant, or even how evil, was able to vote. On the three occasions I won, I reflected upon the inherent good sense of the British people." So, Sir, I have been able to reflect on the inherent good sense of the people of Worcester over the years I have been privileged to be the Member for that constituency.

We have, of course, many famous products. We produce sauce for the benefit of tomato juice throughout the world. We have produced, over several centuries, some of the finest porcelain the world has ever seen. I am delighted to say that both previous Prime Ministers under whom I served are avid and enthusiastic collectors of that porcelain. The present Prime Minister, if he has not already started his career of collecting Royal Worcester porcelain, will be very welcome if he visits the Royal Porcelain Worcester works. Nearby is the county cricket ground. I can think of no better, happier or more beautiful place for watching his county side being defeated than the Worcestershire county cricket ground.

It is also a constituency which inspired Elgar to his greatest music. It is a constituency which possesses the oldest newspaper in Europe. Those were the days, when it started several hundred years ago, when sensationalism was not the habit of the press. Indeed, one will find the announcement about the death of Queen Anne in the right-hand bottom column of page 3 of the newspaper.

I have had the immense privilege of serving the people of Worcester over the past 30 years. In that capacity, I particularly welcome the Queen's Speech today. Looking at the passages in the Queen's Speech that refer to matters abroad, I reflect upon remarks made to me when I was a very young person, eager to enter politics, by the father of my right hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Amery). Indeed, I owe a great deal to Leo Amery for his wisdom, advice and the views that he expressed. He said to me in, I suppose, 1947 or 1948: "If you enter politics, you will find that in your lifetime the world will become a very small place. Matters taking place in one part of the world will immediately affect the world as a whole." Certainly in this Parliament we have seen that happen.

The Queen's Speech refers to events in the Soviet Union, in eastern Europe and in South Africa. For all hon. Members, our most remarkable experience over the past few years was the sight of the transformation of two regimes, both in their different ways hostile to democracy and in favour of diminishing freedom for large numbers of people. Suddenly, two people—Mr. Gorbachev and President de Klerk—have, in such a short time, transformed the attitudes of those countries. Whatever problems they have, and whatever disasters in some spheres affect those countries, I believe that history will judge them as two remarkable and courageous men.

As an observer of that scene, I think that, when history is accurately written, there will be great tribute to the manner in which help, encouragement and advice of considerable quality were given and to the mobilising of the western world to accept that change was taking place. Great credit for that goes to my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher).

As I have said, we have seen enormous changes, but I advise my right hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench and all hon. Members who will continue to serve in Parliament in the coming years that the changes that have taken place in those countries in the past few years could well be repeated on an enormous scale in other countries.

The Queen's Speech refers to the relationship between China and Hong Kong. I strongly predict that the changes that have come about in the Soviet Union are likely to come to China in a different form but to the same degree in the years that lie ahead. There will be a change of leadership in China. Hong Kong has transformed the regions surrounding it in the past five or six years. If the same impact was made on the whole of China after 1997, there would be growth economies and expansion on a scale never before seen. That will pose considerable challenges to all politicians—whatever party is in power.

The Queen's Speech is important not only for the way in which it deals with matters abroad, but also for its emphasis on matters at home. I welcome especially its emphasis on education. More than anything else, the key to equality of opportunity is the availability of a

[Mr. Peter Walker]

marvellous education service. I welcome the efforts that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science is making to improve the quality of education in this country.

I should like to refer briefly to something in which my right hon. and learned Friend knows that I have a passionate interest. I hope that there will be a crusade in the coming years to encourage more reading in every home in our country. I have had help from the right hon. Members for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) and for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) in advocating that my right hon. and learned Friend should tackle the problem of dyslexia. Thousands of people suffer the handicap of not being able to read or write properly, but that handicap could be eradicated if we put our minds to it in the coming years.

I welcome the proposals in the Queen's Speech on the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill. I regret the delay that has already occurred and shall watch with great interest the manner in which the Labour party mobilises its forces to support that measure.

I also welcome the mention in the Queen's Speech of the problems in our cities and the progress that we intend to make. I had the privilege of being the first Secretary of State for the Environment when we combined the Ministry of Public Works, the Ministry of Housing and Local Government and the Ministry of Transport. When we were discussing the name of the new Department, I remember a senior civil servant suggesting to the Prime Minister that, with all those powers, it should be called "The Department for Living". That idea was immediately rejected when somebody pointed out that that would make Peter Walker the Secretary of State for Life.

I also welcome the citizens charter. The essence of the Queen's Speech is that it deals with the problems that affect every family in our land, such as those that they encounter with the public services and those relating to education, health and the inner cities.

Returning to the advice that Leo Amery gave me as a young man, I remember reading widely from the great autobiographies and biographies that he recommended, including the works of Lord Milner.

In one of his writings, Lord Milner endeavoured to define patriotism, which he expressed as being the desire to ensure that everybody who is born a citizen of one's country should rejoice in the birthright of being a citizen of that country. He argued that, to achieve that, one had to carry out policies that would eradicate the poverty, misery and difficulties facing those citizens. He said, "Abroad, one should pursue policies so that when a citizen of one's country travels abroad, he is admired by the rest of the world for the policies being pursued in that country." This Queen's Speeech reflects that attitude of patriotism.

I believe that, in his attitudes to politics and policies, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has an immense desire to tackle the problems of the ordinary families of this country. Abroad, he has already attained a high respect internationally for the manner in which he is endeavouring to help the third world and to play a responsible part in eastern Europe. So, Sir, because of that quality of the Queen's Speech, I support it and recommend it to the House. I believe that it will be the first of many Queen's Speeches prepared by my right hon. Friend.

2.54 pm

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): I am delighted to second the motion that has been so ably and amusingly moved by my right hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker). He and I do not perhaps instantly fit into the standard parliamentary stereotypes of the steady old stallion and the keen young foal who are usually harnessed together for this occasion. Perhaps we were selected by some mysterious computer which recorded the fact that we have each served a 17-year sentence—mine on the Back Benches, his in the Cabinet. We were perhaps selected by someone with a sense of humour who thought that we might be the right couple to bring in a Queen's Speech which increases the penalties for mutiny in prisons. Whatever the selection process might have been, we both know that proposing this motion is an honour, not so much for us as for our constituents.

My constituency of Thanet, South deserves one or two compliments. It is at first glance a paragon of English coastal charm and tranquility. Our traditional attractions include the beginnings of the white cliffs of Dover, historic monuments such as the landing places of St. Augustine and Julius Caesar, and the medieval cinque port of Sandwich, whose parliamentary representation stretches back in an unbroken line to the days of Simon de Montfort. A more recent parliamentary tradition is 13,000-plus Tory majorities.

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): Unlucky for some.

Mr. Aitken: The hon. Gentleman who seems to suggest that those 13,000 majorities might not be so solid is, of course, right. My hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) and I intend to increase them.

At second glance, Thanet, South is perhaps not such a typical Tory seat. The principal town of Ramsgate, Britain's second biggest channel port, could be described as Pop Larkin country by the sea. Our political exchanges there are robust. On the hustings in my first election campaign in February 1974, the casualty list among officers of my association consisted of one broken nose, two black eyes and the lady chairman drenched by a bucket of water, which the candidate had ducked.

Since then, over the past 17 years, I have had to fight off challenges of various kinds from representatives of the Kent miners, the Socialist Workers party, the Communist party, the Green party, an exotic assortment of independents and the National Front. That rich mixture is likely to continue into the next election, because already it has been announced that the prospective parliamentary candidates for the Thanet, South seat in the next election will include a Mr. William Pitt and the leader of the Corrective party, Miss Whiplash. Her electioneering methods will, I presume, give a whole new meaning to that old political maxim, "There is no such thing as a safe seat."

You will gather from that thumbnail sketch, Mr. Speaker, that my constituents have had no problem in following my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's recent exhortations to create a classless society. Indeed, when we hold a Conservative party function in Thanet, South, it is not one of those black-tie, celebrity-packed £500-a-plate dinners at the Park Lane hotel which the Labour party

holds. No, when we have a fund-raiser in Thanet it is more likely to be in the nature of a "Knees Up, Mother Brown" in the Eagle cafe at the end of Ramsgate harbour. We had just such a function there last Saturday, where the consensus was that making a living was getting a bit easier, that the economy was startling to move forward, and that, by the time we get round to the season of the darling buds of May, the prospects for Her Majesty's Government might well be "perfick, just perfick". We shall see.

My constituents' feelings of optimism will be increased by several of the proposals in the Gracious Speech. In particular, there will be a warm welcome for the Government's commitment to our great public services and for their determination to improve standards by implementing the citizens charter. I particularly welcome the priority given to the patients charter, which will reduce appointment waiting times and waiting lists in hospitals, and to the schools charter, which will make sure that parents get the fullest information on their children's education. The citizens charter reform means that the Government are making a determined effort to move away from the era when the gentlemen in Whitehall always knew best towards a more open, accountable public service, striving to do better.

One part of the public service that is somewhat unsung is the immigration service. We certainly appreciate it at the channel ports. It is also being recognised that immigration may become a hot political problem on the international scene. If one looks at the continuing difficulties in eastern Europe and the disintegration of the Soviet empire, which some now call the UFFR—the union of fewer and fewer republics—one sees that those troubles could trigger off large movements of displaced persons across national frontiers. There are some signs that that is already happening.

It is not generally known that there are more than 1,000 applications a week at the Home Office for political asylum from new arrivals. With that record number of 50,000 asylum-seekers each year passing through our slow and antiquated legal procedures, it has become vital that we reform the system in the interests of fairness to the genuine political refugee. Therefore, I welcome the passages in the Gracious Speech that promise an asylum Bill to introduce these reforms.

Mention of frontiers is a reminder that the Thanet, South constituency, geographically at least, is Britain's closest to Europe. From my home in Sandwich bay, on a clear day I can look across the English channel and see the coast of France. I understand that from nearby Broadstairs, from the boyhood home and birthplace of my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), the same continental shoreline is equally visible. It is a case of same view, slightly different vision. *[Laughter.]* There will be many different visions of Europe, particularly if it widens, as I hope it will, and extends the hand of friendship to countries such as Hungary, Czechoslavakia, Poland and member countries of the European Free Trade Association.

I recall that my right hon. Friend and I campaigned together on the same side in favour of a "yes" vote in the 1975 referendum on whether Britain should remain in the European Community. We both believed, and we believe now, that Britain should be where it is, at the heart of Europe, benefiting enormously from the economic and political advantages of membership of a community of 330 million people.

Our shared experience in that campaign was in marked contrast to the role played by the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) who, throughout that campaign, spoke vociferously and vigorously against Britain's membership of the European Community. According to *Tribune* on 5 May 1975, he even said:

"The EEC and its political and economic dimensions is the robber of the real sovereignty of the people."

Talk about a poacher turned gamekeeper. When I listen to him now, gung-ho for Delorsism, I can only reflect that Saul on the road to Damascus was nothing compared to Neil on the autoroute to Brussels.

The Gracious Speech rightly emphasises Britain's constructive role in the two intergovernmental conferences on political union and on economic and monetary union. As we approach the climax of the negotiations, it is inevitable that there will be deep feelings and some divisions on both sides of the House.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): In your party.

Mr. Aitken: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman should suggest that there are divisions in the Conservative party but not in his party. Labour Members should take a journey from Stepney through Bolsover to Chesterfield, ending up at Hemsworth, where there are two Labour candidates, with two different views on Europe, in the by-election. Then they would not talk about divisions——

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Get on with it.

Mr. Aitken: I shall not go on being hard on the Labour party, because I think it natural and right that there should be different views on Europe. The treaties have the potential to change our constitutional arrangements and the powers of Parliament.

This is not the moment to rehearse the arguments for and against the various options with which we may be presented in December, so I leave the House with two brief thoughts. First, we would be wise to trust our negotiators. My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary are good Europeans, but also sound British parliamentarians. They will be shrewd judges of what would be acceptable to the House and the country and what would not. I do not share the fears of some of my Euro-sceptic friends that a giant sell-out is being secretly prepared.

Secondly, I am impressed by the way in which my right hon. Friends have negotiated so positively on some aspects of the treaties, while at the same time drawing the line so firmly with our European partners on those parts of the treaties that we cannot accept. I occasionally wonder whether anyone in Brussels listens to what is said in the House, but my right hon. Friends have made it clear that Britain cannot accept any defence arrangement that would weaken NATO or the Atlantic alliance, and that we cannot accept any declaration of intent or prior commitment to a single currency. Neither can we accept that Community foreign and security policy should be decided by majority voting. The Government have taken a stand on the right principles, and when my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister goes to Maastricht to uphold them, he will have the overwhelming support of the House and the country, whatever the outcome of the summit.

Finally, the opening day of a Queen's Speech debate is one of our most agreeable parliamentary occasions. My sense of honour and enjoyment in taking part in it has been

[Mr. Aitken]

enhanced by one sentimental memory. Twenty-nine years ago to this day, this motion on the Loyal Address was moved by the then hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds, my late father, William Aitken. So far as I can discover, this appears to be some sort of first parliamentary double.

If my father could look down on our proceedings, once he had recovered from his astonishment at who was speaking, he would be even more surprised by the political symmetry between the two debates. In 1962, the Queen's Speech debate was dominated by Europe. Almost every speaker concentrated on that issue——

Mr. Foulkes: And we won the next election.

Mr. Aitken: Almost every speaker concentrated on the European issue, because we were then in the middle of crucial negotiations about Britain's future in Europe and our membership of what was then called the common market.

Those particular negotiations failed through no fault of anyone in Britain, but we did learn that the European process is full of second thoughts and second chances, because, later, under the leadership of my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), we got an even better deal. Twenty-nine years ago, there was certainly a recognition in the House that a bad agreement was much worse than no agreement, and there may be a message in that for us today.

After all, all those who know and love this House of Commons well understand that it is not just a vehicle for legislative progress or a machine for rubber-stamping international treaties. Above all, it is a sensitive arena of our national will and mood, in which the dogs bark but the caravan does not always move on. Perhaps that is one of the safeguards that has made this country such a successful and stable parliamentary democracy.

I beg to second the motion.

3.10 pm

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): It is a happy custom of this House that, on this occasion, the Leader of the Opposition congratulates those hon. Members who moved and seconded the Loyal Address. I do so today with great enthusiasm in the case of the right hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker) and the hon. Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken).

On a sober note, I should also like to echo what the right hon. Member for Worcester said about Alick Buchanan-Smith. He was regarded on both sides of the House not only as charming, but as very honest and courageous, and I think that we can genuinely say that he had friendships on both sides. The same is true of an hon. Member who sadly left the Labour Benches during the summer recess, George Buckley, whose courage no one could ever fail to admire, especially the way in which he carried his mortal illness. His honesty and loyalty is a model to everyone who wishes to be an authentic representative of the people he served in a variety of capacities for so many years. We are going to miss Alick and George deeply. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear".]

The right hon. Member for Worcester will be leaving the House at the end of this Parliament, and I wish him well. I know that one of his reasons for leaving is that he genuinely wants to be able to spend more time with his family. That is understandable, especially as he obviously has such delightful children. Last year provided an instance of that, when the television cameras were congregated around the right hon. Gentleman's home at the time of his departure from Government. His daughter, then five years old, was asked whether she understood why there was such excitement. She said, "Yes, of course. It is because my daddy is getting a new car."

I had a similar experience back in 1978, when I was elected to the national executive committee of the Labour party. I called home and spoke to my then seven-year-old daughter who had been rehearsed by her grandparents about what she should appropriately say. She lisped over the telephone, "Congratulations, daddy, on being elected to the national executing committee of the Labour party". *[Laughter.]* There was a pause and my daughter then said, "Daddy, does this mean you will be getting a car with electric windows?" Such is the nature of priorities.

The right hon. Gentleman's record in politics is not only distinguished, but it has been distinctive to say the least. He has been a member of every Conservative Cabinet since 1970, despite the fact that, by his own testimony, he is strongly against monetarism, non-interventionism, the high interest rate policy, the poll tax, the European Community policy of the previous Prime Minister and, last but not least, the promotion of hospital opt-outs. That record testifies to a certain dexterity in politics. It is also proof of the high regard that the right hon. Member for Finchley had for the right hon. Gentleman and his presence in her Cabinet. I shall not mention Lyndon B. Johnson's maxim about tents—but there may have been a slight hint of that in the right hon. Lady's strategic thinking.

The right hon. Member for Worcester has said in characteristically self-deprecating phrases that he does not have a great desire to be remembered but I am sure that, given his record, he will take it as an accolade to be thought of, in H. L. Mencken's happy phrase, as a politician who could sit on the fence and have both ears to the ground at the same time.

Clearly, the right hon. Member for Finchley prized the right hon. Gentleman's presence in her Cabinet. When I consider the mover and seconder of the Loyal Address today, I cannot escape the feeling that, while the right hon. Member for Worcester was in successive Tory Governments because of his cleverness, the hon. Member for Thanet, South may have been kept out of successive Tory Governments for exactly the same reason. I noted what the hon. Gentleman said in his biblical reference; it occurred to me that he should be a little more careful when talking about St. Paul. If he is acquainted with the New Testament, he should remember that it was after St. Paul's conversion that he exercised such great influence over all future history.

The record of the hon. Member for Thanet, South shows that he is a man of persistent commitment and deep passions. He is against the channel tunnel; he is against Government secrecy; he is against the concentration of press ownership. To his considerable credit, he persisted with the cause of press freedom even when his stand threatened to take him to gaol 20 years ago. He has had the great distinction of having to deny past intelligence experience—when the former Cabinet Secretary made his allegation a few years ago.

It might be thought that the hon. Gentleman's independence of mind and spirit owe something to his

background. He is, after all, the former assistant tennis and funerals correspondent of the *East Anglian Daily Times*. After that experience, some might think that his career slipped a little when he joined the *Evening Standard*, but he is clearly thriving in that career. As he was picked to second the Loyal Address today, I think that he can confidentiy look forward after the next general election to a leading position on the Opposition Front Bench.

There are proposals in this Queen's Speech which we can welcome. The commitment to balanced and verifiable arms control, the commitment to ensure that Iraq complies in full and unconditionally with the United Nations Security Council resolutions, the commitment to fight terrorism and trafficking in narcotics—all these have our support. Naturally, we back other elements of policy, including the efforts to achieve a successful completion of the Uruguay round of GATT and a productive United Nations environment and development conference next year.

We had hoped to be able to support measures on so-called joyriding, on the establishment of an Environmental Protection Agency and on better employment conditions for women, but it appears that the Prime Minister's enthusiasm for this last came too recently for its inclusion in the Queen's Speech. Still, there may be chances, even during the course of what will be a relatively short Session of Parliament, for amends to be made.

Unfortunately, so far such improvements are nowhere to be seen, and we can only speculate on the reasons for their absence.

Sir Giles Shaw (Pudsey): As the right hon. Gentleman is talking about matters in which there may be joint agreement, and as he has visited Langbaurgh and Hemsworth in recent days, will he comment on the fact that both the Labour party candidates for those constituencies have invested in newly privatised industries? Does he agree, therefore, that he too might wish to recommend such investment, or does he propose to disown the Labour party candidates for Langbaurgh and Hemsworth?

Mr. Kinnock: As it happens, I do not share the investments that my good friends the Labour party candidates happen to have made. The hon. Gentleman may have noticed that this is a free country. Those candidates exercise their freedoms and I defend those freedoms—*[Interruption.]* If the freedoms which Conservative Members say they want to uphold were so widespread, they would not only define freedom in terms of the power to own shares in a company but would seek to defend it in terms of being able to get a job in that company, in a country with getting on for 2·5 million unemployed.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kinnock: No, I shall not do so for a second, because it will prolong matters.

We are glad to see that the Government continue in their efforts to press for long-term middle east peace and the settlement of the Palestinian problem. Today, everyone in the House will join in thanking those responsible for bringing about the peace conference that opened in Madrid yesterday. It is appropriate on this occasion to record particular gratitude to Mr. James Baker, the United States Secretary of State. We must all hope that, despite great odds, the process now under way will achieve a fruitful and mutually satisfactory outcome, however long it takes.

We are debating the Queen's Speech today because the Government are afraid to face the British people. If the Government were not fearful of the electorate, we would not be debating the Queen's Speech today, because there would be a general election next Thursday. Some Conservative Members wanted that. The Home Secretary said, "Go," the chairman of the Conservative party said, "No," and, in a bold act of leadership, the Prime Minister got the Secretary of State for Energy to call a few favourite newspapers and leak the news that there would be no November election—government by seepage. There has still been no clear personal statement from the Prime Minister. The nearest that we have had to a declaration so far is an off-the-cuff remark to journalists in Harare last week, when the Prime Minister said:

"There are eight months to go."

Now that he is back among us, will the right hon. Gentleman say whether there are really eight months to go? I shall gladly give way if he wishes to make an announcement—*[Interruption.]* The Prime Minister simply smiles enigmatically but does not otherwise respond. It is obvious that he will subject Britain to a guessing game, while the British people must endure more of the poll tax, which they hate; more hospital opt-outs, which they oppose; more business failures and home repossessions; rising unemployment and falling investment. Little can be more disreputable than a Government who hang on to their jobs while pursuing policies that guarantee that thousands of other people will lose theirs.

Nothing in the Queen's Speech can offer better prospects It says that the Government will promote training, but they have cut it. It says that they will promote enterprise, but they are responsible for wiping out more enterprises than any Government in British history.

The Queen's Speech says that the Government will improve the working of the economy, but what is that pledge worth? The Government's policies have sent the construction industry into a nosedive, brought a 30 per cent. reduction in motor sales, caused the loss of 150,000 jobs in engineering, hit every high street in the land and resulted in the biggest fall in investment since 1932.

Who can trust such a Government when they pledge to improve the working of the economy? Far from improving the working of the economy, with their policies they have stopped the economy from working for many families and firms throughout the land. The Chancellor says that all that is a price well worth paying to reduce inflation—of course, the Chancellor has not yet had to pay that price, but he will.

The Chancellor and the Prime Minister are patting themselves on the back for the fact that they have managed to reduce British inflation rates to something like the German levels, but there is a difference between the two. Germany has an inflation rate of 4 per cent. and a growth rate of plus 4 per cent. Britain has an inflation rate of 4·1 per cent. and a growth rate of minus 2·5 per cent. The Government have reduced inflation only by imposing the second Tory slump in 10 years. That is the price the Chancellor and the Prime Minister think is worth paying —the price of decline and despair for families, the price of the dissolution of industries upon which we in this country depend for our future.

[Mr. Kinnock]

The Prime Minister and the Chancellor are now promising recovery. To be sure, the whole country needs recovery. People in every industry, service and region need recovery. We need recovery in my constituency, where unemployment has risen by 39 per cent. in the past 12 months. They need recovery in the Chancellor's constituency of Kingston upon Thames, where unemployment has risen by 102 per cent. during the past 12 months. They need recovery in Huntingdon, the Prime Minister's constituency, where unemployment has risen by 111 per cent. and youth unemployment has risen by 126 per cent. in the past 12 months.

We all need recovery, and the question is: under this Government, when will recovery come? The Confederation of British Industry says that the recovery will not come for many more months. It says that it will be patchy and hesitant and that, even then, Britain will be at the bottom of the growth, investment and employment leagues for the fourth year in succession under a Tory Government.

There is the more vital question: under this Government's policy, will recovery stay, and will it be strong? With this Government, the answer to that question must be no.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Why?

Mr. Kinnock: If the hon. Gentleman listens, I shall tell him.

In 12 years, all the Government have ever done, and all they are doing now, is hope that the increase in consumer demand will eventually refloat the economy. But that cannot and will not achieve sustained recovery—experience here and everywhere else proves that.

In order to bring about sustained growth, the Government will have to reverse the cuts that they have made in the training budget and develop a long-term programme to increase the quantity and quality of skills throughout British industry. They refuse to do that. In order to achieve sustained growth, the Government would have actively to encourage industrial investment with a tax regime promoting the purchase of new plants and machinery. They will not do that.

They would have to put private money into public transport projects. They will not do that. They would have to allow—*[Interruption.]* So much of this is obvious. Faced with congestion and crisis in many areas of British Rail, why do not the Government do what the French Government do, and allow the national rail company to float a bond on the British market to raise funds to finance the modernisation of railways properly?

If the Government wanted sustained recovery and growth, they would have to allow councils to start to use their assets to build and improve homes. That is the way to pull the construction industry out of its slump and to combat the growing housing crisis. Those basic actions must be taken to start building for long-term economic strength. Those actions must be taken to ensure that investment leads our country out of recession.

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): The right hon. Gentleman has spoken about an election, for which he will need policies. Why have the policies advocated by the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) led to his suspension, when they are exactly the same policies that were advocated by the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) 10 years ago?

Mr. Kinnock: I will regard that intervention as what members of the Government Front Bench might call a blip, and continue with my speech.

As to the policies that I am addressing, I suppose that they are a significant ingredient, in that, despite the best efforts of the Conservative party, Labour continues to enjoy a substantial lead in the polls and will again take another seat from the Conservatives next Thursday. That is the best evidence that the public support our policies on the health service, education, industry, training, pensions, transport, the environment, and a whole galaxy of other issues of pressing importance to the British people.

The combination of policies to achieve sustained recovery that I was advocating, and do advocate, and on which we will win the general election, have worked, and do work, in our competitor countries. We must implement those strategies here if we want to compete effectively in the single European market and in the world economy.

As the Queen's Speech again makes clear, the Government have not learnt and will not learn from the success of others. They do not even learn from their own failures. That is true not only in respect of economic policies but in many other areas—not least, in the Government's policy towards local taxation.

The council tax is said to be the centrepiece of the Queen's Speech. [HON. MEMBERS: "It is their flagship."] Then it is the only flagship in history to sink its own fleet. In place of a flagship, the Government now have an iceberg, called the council tax. When the Prime Minister read the Queen's Speech, perhaps he was surprised that it made any reference to a replacement for the poll tax, because only four weeks ago he told *The House Magazine:*

> "There were problems . . . a year or so ago; the community charge was one, but we have abolished that."

A month ago, the Prime Minister said that he thought that the Government had abolished the poll tax. If only that were the case.

We know that the Prime Minister claims that he was bounced into the poll tax, but he seems to think that he can bounce out of it as well. Sadly, that is not the case. He cannot do so and, much more importantly, millions of British people will have to go on paying the poll tax—including those who must pay the 20 per cent. levy even though they are the poorest people in the land.

Every week that the poll tax continues, it falls into further chaos. Non-payment is currently running at £1·5 billion. In many areas, the police are refusing to pursue court orders, because, they say, they do not have the resources to do so. Still the Government refuse to take the action that would ensure that the poll tax was quickly and completely abolished. Still they will not take up our offer of co-operation in introducing the Labour party's fair rates system. That is the only way in which every last remnant of the poll tax can be lifted off the shoulders of the British people.

Now we have the council tax, which retains many features of the detested poll tax. The uniform business rate stays. Like the poll tax, the council tax will require a register. The Government told us that the average poll tax bill would be £178, but it turned out to be double that amount. They are now telling us that the average council tax will be £400. Nobody can believe that.

The council tax will be arbitrary in its effects on people and households, as several right hon. and hon. Members —including some on the Government Benches—are beginning to point out. The poll tax system caused, and is still causing, turmoil, and the council tax system is even less well prepared. Council treasurers, local government finance experts, software manufacturers and the Audit Commission are warning the Secretary of State of the complexities and the cost of the council tax system, but still the right hon. Gentleman charges on.

The right hon. Gentleman proves that, like the authors of the poll tax, the architects of the council tax ignore the advice of experts and the pleas of friends. The president of the valuation officers, like many other independent experts, warns that the council tax scheme is a "recipe for disaster".

The right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) has told his own Government:

"more than 3 million pensioners will lose out because of the council tax".

He has warned that it will cause "uproar", and that another

"group of losers . . . will take their vengeance on the Government at the next election."

That is rather reminiscent of what we used to hear from the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), but now the poacher has turned gamekeeper, and the Conservative party critics of the council tax will be treated with arrogant disdain.

Other critics of other Government policies will be not just ignored but abolished. Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools, with all its independence and integrity, is to be privatised. It has criticised the Government for cutting resources and has drawn attention to the fact that one third of all British school children, in its view, "get a raw deal". It has voiced concern at low teacher morale and crumbling buildings. Rather than taking the inspectors' expert advice, the Government have got rid of them. Rather than heeding the critics, they have privatised them.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Will my right hon. Friend— [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] I am too generous; it is in my nature. Will the right hon. Gentleman, before he comes to the end of his speech, let us know where he stands on the Common Market? The Labour party has had seven views on the Common Market in 20 years. Does it stand for negotiating for Britain or for a federal Europe? It cannot stand astride the fence for ever. Where does it stand on Europe? Ten years ago, it stood for one thing, but now it stands for another. What is its precise position today?

Mr. Kinnock: There cannot seriously be a single Member of Parliament who does not stand for effectively negotiating for a leading position in the European Community. The question that Members such as the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) have to face up to is whether we maximise the essential influence that we must exert in the European Community by taking a back seat—he may not want to take that view—or by pressing our Community partners to ensure that, as there is a process of monetary union, we gain both the safeguards and conditions necessary to make it a success for Britain and the rest of the European Community. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinnock: As far as I know, the only party in the European Community, in any of its parliaments and assemblies, that is not interested in securing the necessary safeguards for progress is the British Liberal party. Even the Conservatives are interested in getting some kind of square deal with conditions such as those that are beginning to be inserted in the draft treaty that is the subject of the Maastricht deliberations.

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kinnock: If I get on, I shall give way to the right hon. Gentleman later.

The privatisation of the—*[Interruption.]* Mr. Speaker, I am conscious of the fact——

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the Leader of the Opposition chooses not to give way, right hon. and hon. Members must resume their seats.

Mr. Kinnock: I am conscious of the time. I shall give way to the right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell), but it will have to be the last intervention in my speech.

Mr. Howell: The right hon. Gentleman has reached an important part of his speech but, unfortunately, it is not a clear part. Will he tell us—it is important for the nation —the policy of the Labour party, in a nutshell, on European monetary union and the single currency? *[Interruption.]* Will he do that briefly—ideally, in fewer than 234 words? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Kinnock: Because of the row from the Government Benches, I could not catch everything that the right hon. Gentleman said. I think, however, that I have his drift.

The answer can be simply given, and it should be given to every Member of this place. The answer is to secure the best possible deal for Britain, in the knowledge that there is, as I have pointed out in the House before, a process under way in the European Community which, as it moves towards its conclusion, holds a danger—*[Interruption.]* —for any country that chooses to be left outside that process. It may be that, in defiance of his past, the right hon. Gentleman would choose to be left outside. He will have to live with that. I say as leader of the Labour party, and on behalf of my party, that we shall not let the British people be left outside, because in that way——

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Norman Lamont): May I ask the right hon. Gentleman one further question? He has criticised the Government's position because he says that it is not positive enough towards a single currency. Will he tell us what he would commit the Labour party to that the Government are not prepared to do? That is the question.

Mr. Kinnock: I said that the Government are not positive towards the European Community——

Mr. Lamont: Answer the question.

Mr. Kinnock: The right hon. Gentleman asked the question, and he will get the answer. When I say that the Government are not positive, that is because they have sought no undertakings on regional policy, growth policy or employment policy. They have sought no undertakings whatsoever. Unless the Government pursue policies of that sort, the Tory party will, and certainly not for the first

[Mr. Kinnock]

time in history, be taking us naked into that kind of arrangement within the European Community. It is— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let us get on.

Mr. Kinnock: The privatisation——

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kinnock: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me——

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The leader of the Labour party has made a specific attack on my party. Is it not a tradition of this House that, when a specific attack is made——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Attacks on parties are frequently made in the House of Commons. They are rather different from attacks on hon. Members.

Mr. Kinnock: The privatisation of the inspectorate of schools is a most—*[Interruption.]* It is a matter of great interest to millions of parents who are deeply concerned about the way in which the Government have allowed standards of provision and of performance in schools throughout the country to be jeopardised. It may be of only partial interest to the Conservative party, because so few Conservative Members send their children to maintained schools.

The privatisation of the schools inspectorate is only the most recent evidence of the obsession with privatisation shown by the Government. Because the British people know about that obsession, they do not trust the Government's claim to have a commitment to a free national health service. They know that the Government are continuing with their process of privatisation.

The public saw what happened only last week, when the Secretary of State for Health dared to say that tax relief on private health insurance should be dropped. The Prime Minister was away on duty out of the country at the time, so he did not see the Secretary of State say on Mr. Walden's programme that tax relief on private health insurance

"has not worked very well".

[Interruption.] For once we are grateful for the fact that the passage of those exchanges is on film, so that even the Conservatives cannot fabricate any stories about that. The Secretary of State for Health said that the system

"has not worked very well . . . is expensive to administer . . . and has not been taken up very widely."

He could also have added fairly that it is costing £150 million over three years.

Now that the Prime Minister is here, perhaps he will tell us whether he agrees with the Secretary of State for Health's assessment of tax relief on private health insurance for the over-60s. While he is doing that, perhaps he will tell us what on earth tax relief on private health insurance has to do with a classless society. What have eye test charges and dental check-up charges to do with a health service that is supposed to be free of charge? While the Prime Minister gets round to answering those questions, perhaps he will tell us his position on opted-out hospitals and what it would be were he the Conservative party candidate in the Kincardine and Deeside by-election.

As the Prime Minister says that he believes passionately in free hospital services, what does he think should be done when NHS facilities are closed and charging services are opened, as has happened in Basildon and Thurrock and in the North East Thames region with regard to varicose vein surgery and wisdom teeth extraction? The right hon. Gentleman knows something about that—he had his wisdom tooth operation this time last year on the national health. What would he have done to get that operation in the North East Thames region?

These are essential questions for the Prime Minister to answer. What would he say to the lady from Norwich who was asked to pay £20 for a steel corset needed because of a back injury, when she has never had to pay any such charges for equipment before? What would he say to the Salford lady on income support who has been told that she will have to pay £100 for a nebuliser that she needs to help her breathe?

Does the Prime Minister think that it is a good idea that hospitals such as the new Princess Royal hospital in Haywards Heath are hiring out whole wards to the private sector? Is that what he had in mind when he said a few weeks ago that he wanted "more co-operation" between the public and private sectors? If he did have that kind of arrangement or asset-strip in mind, does he think that such privatisation—because that is what it is—is consistent with what he called

"his programme for the 90s—the power to choose and the right to own"?

What does that noble expression really mean when the power to choose is denied to those who cannot buy? What does it really mean when community ownership is being given away as public assets—hospitals—are handed over wholesale to the boards of business men who run the trusts?

In the Queen's Speech, we see references to the citizens charter by a Government who have spent 12 years running down the public services. We see promises of economic policy that are contradicted by the record of the highest unemployment and slowest growth decade since the war. We see the council tax chaos being introduced to replace catastrophe.

When we look at the Queen's Speech, we know that what Britain is being offered by the Government today is not a programme for the future, but a paint job over the past. It is an attempt to cover over the injustices and failures of the Government's making. It will not succeed. The British people remember too well the damage that has been done to them: the huge mortgage repayments, the jobs that have been lost and the essential services that have been run down or withdrawn. They know that any further extension of Tory government would mean more of the same.

That is why, whenever the Prime Minister works up the nerve to call the general election, there will be no further extension of Tory power. The Government will be beaten, and the British people will give themselves the chance to make a fresh start with a Labour Government.

3.49 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): I join the Leader of the Opposition in congratulating my right hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker) and my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken) on their splendid speeches in moving and seconding the Loyal Address. I am also grateful to the Leader of the

Opposition for his generous remarks about Alick Buchanan-Smith which will have been much appreciated by his family and by all of us on the Conservative Benches. The right hon. Gentleman's tribute to his colleague George Buckley was moving. We share that tribute and express admiration for his courage.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Worcester has been a distinguished Member of the House for 30 years and he was a Cabinet Minister for almost half that time. To all the posts that he held he brought not only an acute mind, but an intensely independent one. He brought genuine concern to the problems that he faced. Twenty years ago when my right hon. Friend was Secretary of State for the Environment and I was a local councillor, I saw those qualities at first hand in Lambeth and I am happy to thank him for them all these years later.

I was intrigued by my right hon. Friend's reference to Oliver Cromwell's ill-treatment in Worcester and by his subsequent invitation to visit his constituency. I will reflect on that invitation and recall that Cromwell was the Member for Huntingdon and perhaps take some care.

More recently, my right hon. Friend the Member for Worcester served as Secretary of State for Wales. At the time, some thought that that appointment was surprising, but it turned out to be inspired—both for my right hon. Friend and for Wales. He developed a great affection for the Principality and found that it was reciprocated. He got to know Wales extremely well in a series of unscheduled visits. On one occasion when a startled shopkeeper said to him, "You don't half look like Peter Walker", my right hon. Friend replied, "A monstrous slander."

When I was Chief Secretary to the Treasury I learnt that Wales was the first priority of my right hon. Friend the Member for Worcester. Public spending control came perhaps a narrow second during those turbulent years. It was therefore always a relief when he applied his powers of persuasion overseas to attract record levels of inward investment to the Principality. He attracted the money and then he opened the factories. He opened so many that when I visited Wales recently, I heard him referred to affectionately as "Peter the Plaque."

My hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South ably seconded the Loyal Address and, as he said, followed a family tradition. His father, Sir William Aitken, proposed the Loyal Address 29 years ago and referred to a subject in terms that may be familiar to the House today. He referred to it as

"a matter of controversy in the days, weeks and months to come."—[*Official Report*, 30 October 1962; Vol. 666, c. 11.]

He was referring to Britain's negotiations with the European Community—plus ça change, as my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South implied earlier. *[Interruption.]* Travel broadens the mind.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South is also something of a political forecaster. In his book many years ago, "The Young Meteors", he picked as rising stars three men then aged 30 or under. They are now my right hon. Friends the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretary of State for Social Security and the Leader of the House. My hon. Friend's percipience was very remarkable so many years ago. It says something, perhaps, of my hon. Friend's independence of mind that, although he has sometimes taken a sceptical view of politics, he has always taken a very vigorous stand for the interests of his constituents, of this House, of Britain and of Europe. I believe that he showed that again today in his remarkable speech.

I will refer to the substance of the Queen's Speech in a few moments, but before I do so, I wish to respond to some of the points which the Leader of the Opposition made. He said, as he has said on a number of occasions in recent weeks, that he would like to have an election. But what is he going to tell people about his programme? Who was it who said in 1983,

"If we were to abandon the definition of our Socialism and the policies that go with it there is no reason why anybody should vote for us"?

It was the right hon. Gentleman. So upon that test, does he still believe, as he said then,

"We want out of Europe"?

There was some hilarity a few moments ago as the right hon. Gentleman tried to reconcile his past with his present on that subject. Does he still believe in what he referred to as

"a major extension of public ownership of control",

or has he ditched that as well? Does he still say:

"We do not subscribe to the effective defence of our country by the possession of nuclear weapons"?

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that he still believes those things—that he is still an anti-European nationaliser who believes in unilateralism? If not, is there any reason why, in his own words, anybody should vote for him because of what he said earlier? We have heard today the speech from a Front Bench that is prepared to surrender any principle, abandon any commitment, and promise anything to anyone and, indeed, everything to everyone. Opposition Members can promise, but, when it comes to the election, they will not deliver. That is not our way, for we will keep to our principles and the lasting values that underpin them.

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian) *rose*——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) *rose*——

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central) *rose*——

The Prime Minister: I shall give way a little later.

We will keep to an enterprise economy, the power to choose and the right to own, for our philosophy has not collapsed around the world, as has the right hon. Gentleman's socialist philosophy. Our philosophy is getting stronger while socialism disappears in the dustbin of history. Our policies emphasise our belief in personal ownership.

Mr. Eadie *rose*——

The Prime Minister: I shall give way later.

We must give each and every person the chance to build up for themselves and for their families something of their own—their own home, their own pension, their own shares, their own stake in the future—a stake that they can pass on without fear of penal tax rates, soaring inflation or interference by the state. It is that principle which most clearly distinguishes this Government from that Opposition. The Opposition fought the right to buy and conceded defeat only grudgingly. They fought against the campaign for personal pensions and they threaten them still. They campaigned against privatisation while they bought their shares on the quiet. The right hon. Gentleman says today that he believes in choice, but he would never have given the choice to people and they would never have been able to exercise it.

Mr. Eadie *rose*——

The Prime Minister: No—[HON. MEMBERS: "Give way."] No. The Labour candidate in Hemsworth—not just any old candidate, but the candidate who was specially selected and imposed in a flying visit by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) —bought BT shares, and good for him. But why?

Mr. Eadie *rose*——

The Prime Minister: Just a moment. The hon. Gentleman can intervene when I have finished this point.

But why did that Labour candidate buy shares? His minder told us why. He said:

"He bought them when they came on offer because he has a family of four and wanted that security."

But what about the security of the 8 million people who have bought shares and who the Labour party will threaten with its policies at the next general election? The Labour party's motto is clear. It is, "Don't do as I do, do as I say."

Mr. Eadie: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. Based on what he is telling the House about the confidence that he feels in his Government when he compares their policies to those announced by the Opposition, can he tell us why he decided to announce to the nation in that clandestine way that he would not hold an election in November if he is so confident about what he is telling Parliament today?

The Prime Minister: It comes ill from a party that is now committed to fixed Parliaments to complain that we are going on—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] I have just answered. Let me pursue the point that I was dealing with —[HON. MEMBERS: "No, answer that point."] I have, and this is germane to that point. I have here a leaflet that will help us during the campaign and—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Prime Minister.

Hon. Members: Answer.

The Prime Minister: I have here—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps in a moment the Leader of the Opposition will answer this point—*[Interruption.]*

Hon. Members: They do not like it.

The Prime Minister: The Leader of the Opposition and his right hon. and hon. Friends may not like it, but they are going to get it. I have here a leaflet that is a remarkable endorsement of Conservatism. It states:

"Many people today are wealthier than they imagine, especially those who have been able to buy their own home."

I am very glad to have that endorsement of Conservative success. It comes from the Labour party. But the people of this country might feel more reassured if that same political party was not at the same time threatening to increase taxes on ordinary people—on their income, on their savings and on their wealth. The leaflet— *[Interruption.]* Let me just refer to the leaflet— *[Interruption.]* I am prepared to wait until Opposition Members will listen. The leaflet—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Are you in a position to know whether the Prime Minister is quoting from a Labour party leaflet or from some brief that he has been given by Conservative Central Office? Is he quoting or not?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a point of order. The House should now get on and settle down. I call the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: I shall show the House a leaflet explaining how legacies can help the Labour party. It states:

"Whatever the size of your donation to the Labour Party, no inheritance tax whatsoever is payable on it."

Of course, what Labour does not state is that under its plans inheritance tax would be paid on smaller legacies and at a higher rate than today. So now we know; under Conservative legislation, one can pass on one's wealth to the Labour party—that is permitted—but under Labour plans, someone passing it on to his children would be taxed and taxed and taxed again.

A year ago this month Britain entered the exchange rate mechanism. In the debates which followed, the shadow Chancellor made it clear that he accepted that we were right to join the ERM. He agreed with the rate at which we entered. He asked me to forecast the benefits of membership and posed two perfectly fair questions. "Was it my judgment", he asked,

"that the rate at which we agreed to join is sustainable?"—[*Official Report*, 15 October 1990; Vol. 177, c. 930.]

We now know the answer. Sterling has remained firm against other Community currencies and the mechanism has given business the exchange rate stability that it wanted.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman also asked whether the balance of payments deficit would be progressively reduced. Yes again. Our exports to the rest of the Community have shot up. Our imports have fallen. Our trade deficit with Europe has been slashed and manufactured exports, far from declining, recently hit record levels.

Of course, some of the right hon. and learned Gentlemen's colleagues were less cautious. The Leader of the Opposition asserted that inflation was still rising. Wrong. I said that we would bring it down. We have done so and we will carry on doing so—down below the Community average; down to the levels of the best in Europe.

When we joined the ERM and cut the interest rate the Leader of the Opposition called it a cynical expedient. That was distinctly odd, for three days before he said that we should "cut interest rates" and

"be negotiating entry into the ERM".

What changed in those three days other than that we did what he had advised us to do? What changed was the right hon. Gentleman. He may or may not have changed his mind. But he certainly changed his tune.

Mr. Foulkes: The Chancellor of the Exchequer made a major announcement yesterday that there had been an increase—a seasonally adjusted increase—in optimism. How do the Government measure optimism and how do they seasonally adjust it?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman looked at the surveys from the Association of British Chambers of Commerce, the Institute of Directors and the Confederation of British Industry, he would see the return of confidence that is coming and the way in which it will lead to a return of growth. During the past year our policies within the exchange rate mechanism have brought inflation down to 4 per cent., allowed eight reductions in interest rates, reduced our balance of payments deficit and

kept sterling stable. That has set the basis for steady growth with low inflation in the years of Conservative government that lie ahead.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: Not at the moment.

Getting inflation down is not easy. It is painful. But the measures are unavoidable and necessary for stable growth in the future. It is always tempting to call for interest rate cuts and the easy course, but that carries great dangers. We are not prepared to play fast and loose for some short-term gain, for we know that inflation is the tax which bears hardest on those in society least able to afford it.

As inflation falls we are moving out of recession and back to stable growth. The Opposition need not just take my word for it. They should listen to British industry and what the chambers of commerce and others are saying. As the Association of British Chambers of Commerce has said:

"The country is unmistakably experiencing a turnround in economic performance . . . commerce and industry is on the road to recovery".

The Institute of Directors says the same and so does the CBI. The CBI's latest survey shows business confidence up, more businesses expecting new orders, more businesses expecting to increase investment and more businesses intending to take on new workers. The International Monetary Fund also forecasts that our growth next year will be as good as or better than that in France, Italy and Germany.

Mr. Bell: The House is listening with great interest to the Prime Minister on the state of the economy and our relations with Europe. If things are so good, why cannot he give us an election date?

The Prime Minister: Things will get better and then the hon. Gentleman will get one. Britain is getting back on track again, back to the growth that provides the only way of putting people back in permanent work so that we can add to the 800,000 extra jobs that we have created since 1979.

Mr. Bell: Jobs are being lost.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman talks about jobs. We will turn to that. The Leader of the Opposition says that he is concerned for the unemployed. Let us test it. Let us put it into action now. He could persuade his own union, the Transport and General Workers Union, to drop its boycott on youth training, employment training and the training and enterprise councils. Will he do it? No, he will not. Let me try him on another point.

Ms. Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South) *rose*——

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman could tell the Trades Union Congress that it was wrong to boycott employment action even before the scheme had started. Will he? The right hon. Gentleman will not.

Ms. Primarolo *rose*——

The Prime Minister: Perhaps most importantly of all, the right hon. Gentleman could drop his plans for a statutory minimum wage.

Ms. Primarolo *rose*——

The Prime Minister: The hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) says that no jobs would be lost as a result of that policy. But that is not what every independent commentator says. It is not what the CBI says. The CBI says that the first phase would cost 200,000 to 300,000 jobs. "Oh, no", says the hon. Member for Sedgefield, "it will make industry more competitive".

There is a gem of Labour newspeak—adding to one's costs makes one more competitive. That is Labour's understanding of the economy.

Ms. Primarolo *rose*——

The Prime Minister: We hear a lot from Opposition Members about the supply side. When they are not lecturing the CBI or threatening to sack the Governor of the Bank of England they are keen to quote those sources. Earlier this year they were very keen to quote the CBI as saying that we were in recession. They can update that. They can tell us who said recently:

"There is at present one economy in Western Europe where manufactured exports have been increasing faster than world trade; where import penetration remains below that in West Germany; where investment in skills and innovation is at record levels and still rising; where private sector inflation is under 4 per cent. and falling."

Opposition Members do not like to hear such words because they can only talk the country down, but those were the words of the director-general of the CBI.

Ms. Primarolo *rose*——

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, South) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Prime Minister is not giving way, so the hon. Lady must resume her seat. I understand that the hon. Gentleman is anxious to participate in the debate. Let us get on with it.

The Prime Minister: I shall give the hon. Lady her chance in just a moment. The words that I quoted were those of the director-general of the CBI and the country about which he was speaking was Britain, a country which attracts more investment from America and Japan than does the rest of Europe put together.

Ms. Primarolo: Earlier this week the Prime Minister revealed his deeply held conviction that it is necessary to further the equality of women in our society. If that was a firm pledge, why are there no legislative proposals in the Queen's Speech to further women's equality, such as a proposal to introduce universal child care?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady should not doubt our commitment on that issue. She had better wait and see.

The Opposition like to talk about investment. What they usually mean by investment is more public spending of taxpayers' money.

Mr. Cryer: Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman's hon. Friends had the opportunity to intervene on several occasions. I invite him to wait a while.

It is interesting that the principal paymaster of the Leader of the Opposition, the TGWU, refuses to welcome investment from Japan, especially in Scotland and Wales. What do they call it? *[Interruption.]* What do they call investment from Japan? They call it "alien". That is what Japanese investment in Scotland and Wales is called. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman can tell us: does he

[The Prime Minister]

personally think that Japanese investment in Scotland and Wales is alien? Does he want to see the £4 billion that Japanese investment adds to our trade balance, and the 400,000 new jobs that it could bring to this country, or not? Which does he back: the TGWU—his paymasters—or Japanese investment? Let him tell us.

Mr. Kinnock: I had the great good fortune to have the first Japanese-owned factory in Wales, Takiron, opened in my constituency back in 1973. Since then, as the right hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker) and others know, I have worked assiduously to secure such inward investment. I am delighted to say that Aiwa is flourishing in my constituency. I should like the Prime Minister to introduce policies on retraining, transport, technology, research and development, and science that would make our country more attractive not only to Japanese investment but to British investment.

The Prime Minister: It is under our policies that that investment has come here. I assume that the right hon. Gentleman now condemns the TGWU motion.

The House and the country face a clear choice on the supply side. The Opposition propose new levies, new regulations and new quangos. We believe in lightening the burden on new business. The Opposition want to extend new powers to the unions—enforced recognition and complete immunity from dismissal for strikers. Those are powers which even the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) dared not introduce in the 1970s. In contrast, we believe in giving managers the right to manage and in giving the unions back to their members.

The Opposition propose a new tax on savings. We know that savings are the fuel for the very investment that they claim this country needs. They propose higher taxes on earnings. We accept that that would enrich industries and laboratories, but it certainly would not enrich them in this country. It would just send scientific and managerial talent abroad.

The Opposition still believe in nationalisation—the only party east or west of the old iron curtain that still does. We know where that policy ends. The private sector of industry would be the bit that the Government controlled and the nationalised sector would be the bit that nobody controlled.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: Not at the moment.

In the months ahead we have a full programme for a Session of Parliament. Within it, we intend to carry forward the citizens charter, to extend parental choice, to raise education standards and to establish a stable and lasting relationship between local and central Government.

First, the citizens charter. The best guarantor of effective service to the consumer is competition. That is why we have already extended competition in telecommunications and why we are taking powers to end the monopoly in gas and we are increasing competition in the water industry. The legislation will also bring the powers of all the utility regulators up to the level of the strongest, so that they can set guaranteed service standards and secure compensation, if those standards are not met. The legislation will also include enabling powers to resolve disputes between the utilities and individual customers about the accuracy of bills.

The legislation will put more power in the hands of the individual. That is the essence. That is central to the citizens charter. The charter applies not just to the privatised utilities, but throughout the public services. We do not intend public service to mean second-best service.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

The Prime Minister: I have given way amply.

As well as making the big utilities more responsive to their customers, we shall give parents a greater say in their children's schools and make local councils provide a better service to their electors.

This Session we can put to the test the Opposition claim to care about public services.

Mr. Frank Cook: Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: I have said to the hon. Gentleman, who appears not to understand, that I do not propose to give way to him now.

We will wait with interest to see how the Labour party votes. Will it vote with us for the charter and for the public or against us, as usual, and for the trade unions and the second rate?

We shall introduce three Bills on education this Session. We will require the publication of local league tables on exam results, staying-on rates and truancy rates for all schools. Parents have a right to that information and they will get it. They also have a right to short, clear reports on their child's school prepared by independent inspection teams, and they will get that, too. *[Interruption.]* I must say, Mr. Speaker, that if the public at large could see the behaviour on the Opposition Benches, they would know why Labour Members are unfit for government. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the Opposition not to point across the Chamber. It is very bad behaviour indeed.

Mr. Skinner: The Prime Minister has sent the hon. and learned Member for Colchester, North (Sir A. Buck) off to sleep.

The Prime Minister: This coming year we will begin to introduce national vocational qualifications to schools, bringing in the high calibre technical qualifications that have been missing in education for so long—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members may not regard further and higher education as importantly as we do—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hurrah."] Perhaps they could cheer this. We will give further education colleges and sixth form colleges the same freedom from town hall control as we gave to the polytechnics. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hurrah."]

I wish that we could get the support of the Opposition for those policies, but I doubt that we can. The Opposition voted against the teachers' pay review body and in favour of strikes. They voted to take schools out of the hands of head teachers and governors and to put them back in the hands of NALGO officials. They voted against the national curriculum and against simple tests. There is no doubt that they will vote against parents getting reports on their child's school. For the Opposition, parental ignorance is bliss. They simply do not trust parents to have the interest in their children that we believe parents should have.

In the national health service we will put patients first. The right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) may care to listen as he professes such an interest in the NHS. The Opposition fight our reforms because they believe that compassion and efficiency are incompatible. In that they are wrong. Compassion without efficiency is mere sentimentality. Compassion with efficiency delivers more and better health care. That is not a new principle; it is an old principle. It was understood very well 140 years ago by Florence Nightingale, but if the Labour party had been around then, it would undoubtedly have opposed her reforms with the same vehemence as it opposes ours.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North West) *rose*——

The Prime Minister: For our part, we will continue with our reform of the NHS because only by doing so will patients get the best possible care from the resources that we devote to the NHS.

No one can honestly doubt the Government's commitment to the NHS. It is a commitment to the 1 million patients who use the service each day. It is a commitment that is re-emphasised in the patients' charter, published only yesterday. It is a commitment reinforced by our determination to modernise the service. We are modernising the service and have no intention of abandoning it. Labour Members know that modernisation is necessary, but they have no policy whatever to achieve that.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: Not at the moment.

As a result, the Opposition trot out the old canard about privatising the NHS.

We have seen that sort of trick before previous elections. Colleagues may recall the scare that we would reintroduce conscription, that no roads would be built in Britain and that we would stop raising pensions in line with inflation. Then in 1983 from Labour's health spokesman came a real scare—that if the Conservatives were re-elected we would, within five years of 1983, end the NHS. Well, it is now 1991, and the health service is going strong, with £32,000 million worth of resources from the Conservative Government.

If the right hon. Gentleman does not have the grace to admit that Labour were wrong before, does he have the grace to accept it now when I say that there will be no charges for hospital treatment or for visits to the doctor and that there will be no privatisation of health care in whole or in part? Does the right hon. Gentleman have the grace to accept that?

Mr. Kinnock: Will the Prime Minister at last acknowledge that where there were once free services, and those free services are no longer available, so that people are obliged to purchase, because of the pressures of the system, he is privatising the health service and will continue to privatise it?

The Prime Minister: Were the Labour Government privatising in 1951 when they introduced charges? The right hon. Gentleman knows that there is no privatisation actual or intended in the national health service and that he is deliberately trying to scare people again and again.

The right hon. Gentleman's retreat on privatisation has been matched only by his creeping retreat on funding. Last month the Labour health spokesman affirmed that party's commitment to restore fully what he called the

"underfunding of the past decade"—

an amount that Labour has not identified and cannot identify. They have slithered back from that. Now the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) says:

"We very much hope to"

and

"we will seek to".

Even that is too much for Labour Treasury spokesmen, who say that only "some" of the alleged underfunding could be put right. What weasel words.

Even that game of grandmother's footsteps came to an end when the hon. Member for Livingston admitted:

"We shall do it next time because we did it last time".—*[Official Report*, 21 October 1991; Vol. 196, c. 673.]

What did Labour do last time? They put up waiting lists, cut nurses' and doctors' pay and slashed the hospital building programme.

The Conservative party has increased the share of the nation's wealth given to the NHS. I give the House this further pledge now: in each and every year the NHS will, under us, get a real increase in its resources for patient care. That is what a Conservative Government can promise. Labour cannot promise, for their record shows that they cannot.

Mr. Allen *rose*——

The Prime Minister: I have given way enough already.

Our local government legislation will put the council tax in place. That system will reflect ability to pay and ensure that most people contribute something to council services. It will be certain and fair. It will be in place from 1993 and bills will be restrained.

When we introduce the council tax my only regret will be that my former colleague Richard Holt, who played such a part in helping us to frame so many of the proposals, will not be here to see them carried through. We shall all miss him very much.

We shall extend competition into more council services and give new powers to the Audit Commission so that it can name names, authority by authority and service by service, so as to spread best practice and root out incompetence. We shall reform the structure of local government to give people councils with which they can identify, to which they can feel loyalty, and which deliver good services at a reasonable cost.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Will the Prime Minister tell us whether the council tax legislation will include the existing provision in the poll tax legislation for the imprisonment of non-payers? Is he aware that of the 84 people who have so far served a prison sentence, many have been pensioners? The oldest such person is Richard Northover, who, at 80 years old, was sentenced to 30 days in Her Majesty's prison in Dorchester, although he had paid his poll tax. He was the first person, at 80 years of age, to be sent to prison for not having filled in the registration form two years earlier.

As the Prime Minister voted to abolish imprisonment for debt under the Debtors (Scotland) Act 1987, will he now give a commitment to transfer that measure to England and Wales and stop this medieval barbarity?

The Prime Minister: That question comes ill from the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist), who has played such an ignoble role in encouraging people to get into debt and not to pay their bills. Much though we may sympathise with the hon. Gentleman at the way in which his Front-Bench colleagues have treated him, he should not give such a bad example while he sits in this House as a law-maker by encouraging people to be law-breakers. The law is set and it must be obeyed or the penalty paid.

The Opposition like to pretend that services do not have to be paid for—the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East is living proof of that. However, too many of the Opposition and their councillors do not pay. Even as those councillors were setting inflated bills for others, they would not pay—but not any more. We propose to stop that abuse and to do so in this Session—if they can't pay, they won't vote. That will happen this year.

Recent years have brought home to people the simple truth that high bills do not always mean better services, usually the reverse. Some councils are excellent, but too often standards are unacceptable. Shoddy service comes with the ready-made excuse, "We have special problems". Let us look at two services that the social composition of a borough does not affect.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

The Prime Minister: No, not even to a friend.

Why does it cost nearly three times as much in Labour Camden to empty the bins as it does in Conservative Wandsworth?

Ms. Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I have heard nothing that is out of order. What is the point of order?

Ms. Gordon: I want to check whether I heard the Prime Minister say, "If they can't pay, they won't vote." I want to make sure that *Hansard* does not alter that.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady knows exactly what the policy is; if people won't pay——

Mr. Nellist: The right hon. Gentleman said "can't".

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman has set a standard of stupidity in this House that is rarely excelled. He knows what the policy is. He should not try to follow the lead of the Leader of the Opposition in another area and try to pervert what that policy is.

Why does it cost seven times more in Lambeth to issue a library book than in the most efficient councils?

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I have heard nothing out of order. Is it a matter with which I can deal?

Mr. Wilson: It is a genuine point of order arising from the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms. Gordon). The House is not interested—nor, I am sure, are you, Mr. Speaker—in what the Prime Minister meant to say. What we and the *Hansard* writers are interested in is what the Prime Minister did say. There is no doubt that he said "can't pay, won't vote".

The Prime Minister: Let me make this quite clear to the hon. Gentleman so that he will not find himself in the position of being able to scare people over this matter. The policy applies to councillors. That is perfectly clear and it is well known to the House. I am happy to reiterate that now. If, by a slip of the tongue, I said otherwise, I am happy to correct it in the interests of ensuring that the Opposition do not, as has been their habit elsewhere, seek to scare people with what is expressly not Government policy. Let me make it clear to the hon. Gentleman that we are referring to councillors. We are also referring to people who are in a position to pay, but do not. There is a full range of rebates in the scheme we propose.

Mr. Allen: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way—on rebates?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman will not tempt me. The Opposition are clearly determined, if they can, to disrupt as much as they can. I think that that will be evident to anyone listening to this debate.

In the Labour party's own words, it says that Labour councils

"demonstrate as far as the public is concerned what a Labour Government would be like".

There can be no more awful warning for people as we come to the next general election.

On developments in the European Community——

Mr. Haynes: Will the right hon. Gentleman give me further consideration?

The Prime Minister: Tempting though the hon. Gentleman is, I wish to discuss the European Community and Britain's place in forthcoming developments.

Britain belongs to the mainstream of Europe and must remain at the heart of the Community. In the past 20 years, despite many frustrations, we have gained enormously from our membership——

Mr. Frank Cook *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must tell the hon. Gentleman that he puts his place on the list in jeopardy if he continues to interrupt in this way.

Mr. Cook: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. With the deepest respect for you and for your position in the Chair, I remind you that the Prime Minister said that he had no intention of giving way to me at the moment. He said nothing about giving way later. He said that at 4.19 pm.

The Prime Minister: I believe that it is within the knowledge of the House that I have given way rather more often than the Leader of the Opposition did. I now wish to consider something that I believe is of acute importance to every Member of the House and to millions of people beyond it—the negotiations in which we are currently engaged on the intergovernmental conferences.

In the past 20 years we have gained enormously from our membership of the Community. I believe that the Community has gained also from our membership because Britain has determined its direction in so many ways—on budget reform, on reform of the common agricultural policy, on the single market, on free competition within Europe and on free trade with the rest of the world. Too often we overlook the extent to which Britain leads the Community and too frequently we recall the difficulties we sometimes face in it.

Mr. Frank Cook: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

The Prime Minister: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman at the moment; not in this speech.

I do not doubt that over the next 20 years the Community's evolution will be as marked as it has been in the nearly 20 years since we joined. We cannot dictate what our children will make of the Community, but we must leave them in a position where they can effectively influence the shape of Europe, and that Europe must be one in which we retain our distinct national identity.

The intergovernmental conferences now under way raise vital issues for the future of this country. They involve hard judgments of where our best interests lie. In our approach to those negotiations, we have been guided by the views expressed in debates in the House. We have made progress in a number of areas. We are working to achieve an agreement at Maastricht in December, but it must be an agreement that I could make in the confident expectation that I could commend it to the House.

On economic and monetary union, it would be irresponsible for any Government to ask the people of Britain to decide now that we should adopt, at a future date, a single European currency which will have far-reaching implications for the conduct of monetary and economic union. A move to a single currency that was not backed by convergence between the two economies of the member states of the Community would be a recipe for economic disaster. That is not in the interests of this country, or of our partners in Europe.

This country is in the first rank of the European Community and will remain so. But I am not prepared to commit our country to a single currency. We must be able to judge nearer the time—Parliament must judge nearer the time—whether a single currency is in the interests of Britain. We should not achieve what is best for Britain or the Community by giving up now our right to independent judgment then.

There is still some way to go before we have an agreement on economic and monetary union, but the discussions so far have shown that it is possible to thrash out a sensible position in negotiations. It is our aim to do the same on the draft treaty on political union. The issues raised are more diverse and just as difficult. They include the conduct of defence and foreign policy, and the powers of the European Parliament, the Commission and the European Court. We have to satisfy ourselves that, if we reach an agreement, it is an agreement in the overall British interest. It must be in Britain's interest to work more closely with like-minded European countries on foreign policy, defence and security.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

The Prime Minister: I shall give way to the right hon. Gentleman in a moment.

It would not be in our interests to set up new defence structures that would undermine the role of NATO in safeguarding our defence.

Mr. Ashdown: As the Prime Minister has been commenting on changes in policy, I congratulate him and the Government on having moved so far on Europe since the summer. On the subject of defence, may I remind him that less than a month ago he signed an agreement containing the following words:

"Political union implies . . . a common foreign and security policy and stronger European defence identity with the longer term perspective of a common defence policy"?

The Prime Minister said that on 5 October this year. Will he confirm that it remains the Government's objective?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is taking that statement out of context and is not listening to what I am saying. I shall be explicit in a moment and then again later on these points.

It makes sense to co-operate with other European countries on judicial, police and immigration matters; but at a time when more and more member states are concerned about illegal immigration, the spread of drugs and the threat of terrorism it makes no sense to agree to measures that would weaken the unique and effective controls in this island. It makes sense to recognise that the European Parliament, directly elected, will have an increasing say in the conduct of European business, but it would not make sense to give the European Parliament powers of decision-making equal to those of the Council of Ministers. The European Parliament should have a larger role in curbing the undemocratic powers of the Commission. Commissioners are answerable to the Commission, not to the Governments who appointed them. The Commission is effectively answerable to no one. It must be answerable to an elected body and that body can only be the European Parliament. The European Parliament must be able to make its influence felt, but it must be the Council that decides on the Community's policies for the future.

At Maastricht the issues may not be laid out in black and white; there will he hard judgments to be made. The crucial judgment for the Government will be to determine what is in the best interests of Britain and acceptable to this House. That is why we are arranging a two-day debate on 20 and 21 November. I and my right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor of the Exchequer will set out in detail the issues at stake and where Britain's interests lie. This will be a vital opportunity for Members to set out their views. It will also be an opportunity for the Opposition to let the people of Britain know where they stand, if anywhere, on issues vital to the future of our country.

The Labour party has consistently sold Britain short in Europe. Out of Government, its members opposed membership; in Government, they bungled the negotiations on fair terms for our country. Now the Opposition have gone to the other extreme—"If it's made in Brussels, it's good enough for the Labour party." No money back and no questions asked.

Nowadays the Opposition try to pass themselves off as modern and moderate. They say that they now accept the agenda which we set through the 1980s and which we will continue to set through the 1990s—but who can believe them? Who could trust them? Are they political chameleons or political turncoats?

We know that what this country needs is sound money, competitive industries, accountable public services, the extension of ownership and choice, and strong defences —and everyone knows who can be trusted to provide these things: not the half-hearted, reluctant converts among the Opposition, but a Government who genuinely believe in these things, a Government who will do what is right for

[The Prime Minister]

this country without flinching, this year, next year and for years to come. That Government will remain on the Government side of the House after the election.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I call Mr. Ashdown—*[Interruption.]* I ask hon. Members who are not remaining to leave quietly and rapidly.

4.43 pm

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): If what we have seen in this House for the past two and a quarter hours is to set the tone for the rest of this Session and through the general election, God help us. I wonder whether hon. Members understand the appalling impression conveyed by the way in which we conduct our business. The nation will have seen on its television sets the scenes that we witnessed here this afternoon—scenes that were, as an example of what we should and could be doing, an absolute disgrace—*[Interruption.]* Both sides of the House were guilty. The nation and the House have a right to hear the Leader of the Opposition and the Prime Minister. The scenes of this afternoon prove the desperate necessity to change our procedures. Today the House recommended what voters in the forthcoming by-elections should do. We have no right to tell those people how to behave when we behave in this fashion——

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashdown: Not on this point; I shall give way in due course.

I start by echoing the comments of the Leader of the Opposition and the Prime Minister——

Mrs. Mahon *rose*——

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): The right hon. Gentleman is too sanctimonious.

Mr. Ashdown: I challenge the hon. Gentleman to go out and ask his constituents how they feel about what they have just seen. Let them decide whether what I am saying is sanctimonious. Hon. Members may not agree with me but the feeling that I describe is widespread in the nation—it is time the House reformed the way in which it conducts its business.

Mrs. Mahon: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashdown: No.

Hon. Members: Give way!

Mr. Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman is not giving way.

Mr. Ashdown: I shall give way later in my speech if hon. Members want to intervene on points of substance. I have made it clear to the hon. Lady that on this point I am not giving way.

I echo the comments of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition about those who spoke first in the debate, the right hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker) and the hon. Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken). Both of them entertained the House enormously

Mrs. Mahon: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The right hon. Gentleman has cast aspersions on the behaviour of all hon. Members today. Surely, if I have a point to make about that, it would be courteous if he gave way to me.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Lady has been here for a number of years now, and she knows that if a right hon. Member does not give way she must resume her seat. The right hon. Gentleman has said that he is not giving way at the moment.

Mr. Ashdown: The hon. Member for Thanet, South reflected on how these decisions are made. When I learnt that he and the right hon. Member for Worcester were to move and second the Loyal Address I fell to thinking along the same lines. The right hon. Member for Worcester represents the most pro-European part of the Conservative party; the hon. Member for Thanet, South, the most anti-European. Their selection portrayed precisely the dilemma facing the Conservative Government.

I also echo the comments of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition on the three hon. Members who are absent from our deliberations today. Alick Buchanan-Smith was widely respected and loved, not only in the House but in his constituency. George Buckley was a strong voice for his community, and I am delighted that the Prime Minister mentioned Richard Holt, whose peculiarly rumbustious style in the House will be greatly missed.

This was a curious Gracious Speech—half an apology, half a speech in mitigation for what the Government have done in the past. It was half a statement to the British people that the Government are awfully sorry for some of the things that they have done and that they promise to try to put those things right before the people go to vote when the Prime Minister chooses the date for an election. Nevertheless, half the Speech makes it clear that the Government intend to continue in precisely the same way. They intend to ram through the council tax, just as they rammed through the poll tax, and I predict that that will have the same appalling consequences.

It struck me that the Gracious Speech was the programme of a Government who have nothing further to say. It should never have been presented to the House because we should either have had a general election or be in the process of one.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Our Parliament runs for five years.

Mr. Ashdown: The hon. Gentleman may not have noticed, but we do not have a fixed-term Parliament. But he raises an important point, because the Prime Minister, quite rightly, desperately wants and needs a mandate. However, he has not dared to go to the electorate to get one and has had to postpone the election twice. He has twice turned away from the people of Britain because he knows that they have turned away from his Government. He lacks a mandate, and that shows in the Queen's Speech.

We should have had a new Parliament, a new programme and a new mandate today. Instead, we have the tail end of an old Government portraying old ideas and determined to drag out their old life to the bitter end. The Queen's Speech lifts the curtain on the general election, which will not—however much the Conservative party

may try to persuade the public that it will—be a judgment on the new Prime Minister. Rather, it will be a judgment on the Government over a period of a full 12 years in which the Prime Minister and his Front Bench have been fully and consistently implicated.

We can look at one of two aspects of the Queen's Speech: an affirmation that the Government have been right for the past 12 years and that they intend to continue —a convincing conviction that that is the right way to proceed; alternatively, we could look for a new direction under the new Prime Minister—a new spirit. The question is, continuity or change? The answer is that the Government are confused. They have now been revealed as unable to justify their past and having no clear idea of where they want to go in the future. That split seems to run right through the Cabinet, some members of which support the continuation of the past while others are opposed to it. Some are prepared to tell Mr. Walden on Sunday that they are opposed to it and then say, the following Wednesday, that they are prepared to support it because of their colleagues.

That does not add up to a programme for the 1990s, nor to a justification for what happened in the 1980s. We should not be surprised, because the record of the 1980s and the past 12 years is pretty miserable. The Prime Minister tried to massage the figures in his speech but people know what has happened in the past 12 years. Despite their propaganda, we now clearly see that the Government have brought about no economic miracle. There has been no industrial renaissance. As in the previous three decades, prices have risen ahead of the average for OECD countries; the balance of payments deficit returns to stalk our economy again and again; and Britain has been forced around the back-breaking cycle of boom and bust twice. Wages have continued to rise ahead of inflation faster than those of our competitors, just as they did in the previous 30 years. Despite the Government's promise, inflation has returned to beset us and it must now be tackled in a way that damages our industry and loses jobs.

The Government say that inflation is now going down. Good. They say that it will stay down. We shall wait and see because we have heard that before. If the Government have achieved that, has not it been done at a terrifying price? Throughout the country, today and increasingly in the approaching months, thousands of business men and tens of thousands of their employees are paying with their livelihoods and jobs for the Government's economic mismanagement. That will increase, as all the figures, including those of the Government, now show. We are approaching what will come to be known as the bleak mid-winter of 1991 for lost jobs and lost employment.

However the Prime Minister may like to dodge the fact, our industry has been weakened by two recesaions, starved of investment and denied access to the skills that it needs to compete. It is too emaciated to meet the demand which the Government desperately hope will occur around Christmas this year. If that demand occurs as the Government want, our industrial base may fail to meet consumer demand. We know what happens next because we have seen it before. Demand goes up, British industry cannot supply it and imports are sucked in. That results in a balance of trade deficit, the pound comes under pressure and round we go again on the appalling cycle which, decade after decade, has broken the back of British industry and the morale of our people.

Britain now lies exhausted after two Conservative recessions in a single decade, with its infrastructure under-funded, its education system demoralised, its public services in decline and its private sector burdened with debt. The public must now ask, what has changed after 12 years of this Government? Almost nothing has changed. I do not deny some of the changes that the Government have made with respect to the trade union movement. They were necessary, important and should not be undone. But the fundamentals of our economy remain unchanged. Britain has now suffered 40 years of decline under the Conservative and Labour parties. They have shared equally in the government of our country and we have not pulled out of what has happened consistently for 40 years. Those two parties share the responsibility for that and, if they have their chance, it will continue.

The leader of the Labour party spoke about his promises and undertakings for our country, but how are they to be delivered? The Labour party is good at complaining. It complains about under-funding of the health service but will not guarantee a penny more to spend on it. It is rather poor on action. Labour Members complain about under-investment in education but will say not a single word about a commitment to increase that fundamental investment in our education and training system which this nation needs so badly. We often hear about the Labour party's priorities—whatever the subject this week, it is always a priority. The problem with the Labour party is that everything is always a priority, but nothing is ever a commitment.

The Labour party now says that it has changed its mind on Europe. That is not unusual, as it has done so twice each decade for the past 40 years. There is a new solution. Since yesterday, we now understand that the Labour party will accept a single currency, but it attaches a series of conditions to that. If those conditions were attached, could the Leader of the Opposition have signed the text now proposed by the Dutch at Maastricht? The Labour party says that it is in favour of Europe but the conditions that it attaches are such that it could not now sign the deal which we hope the Government will sign in Maastricht later this year. Indeed, it now imposes conditions on the running of European monetary union that are totally irresponsible. Without an independent central bank we cannot have that central rock upon which a firm anti-inflationary European economic policy must be based.

The Government say that they are not prepared to propose solutions on Europe that are unacceptable to the House. The Labour party says that the conditions that it proposes would be unacceptable to the German parliament. I suspect that they would be unacceptable to almost every other parliament.

Britain would be mad to choose either of those two parties. Why should we allow the Government, who are responsible for two recessions in one decade, to take over the continuous economic running of this country? Why should the people of this country entrust the recovery, if it comes, and the next Parliament, into the hands of a Government who have given us two recessions in a single decade? Why should the people trust the Opposition, who have abandoned all their past policies and principles, and refuse to say how they will fund their present ones?

Sir Ian Lloyd (Havant): Has not the right hon. Gentleman been hoisted by his own petard? I understand

[Sir Ian Lloyd]

that as the leader of an Opposition party he prides himself on his understanding of economic matters and his use of economic statistics. Therefore, he will surely know that the recession which has inflicted itself on this country has also done so on all the countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. However, the right hon. Gentleman called it a Conservative recession and laid responsibility for it on the Conservative Government. What would the Liberal party have done to prevent the world-wide recession from hitting this country?

Mr. Ashdown: The hon. Gentleman should look at my speech. I did not say that it was a Conservative recession. I said that the Government had given us two recessions in a decade, and I shall explain my statement to the hon. Gentleman. I agree that there has been a world-wide recession and it is fair to say that no Government could have dodged that. But the hon. Gentleman must answer the difficult question: why is it that Britain entered the recession before, plunged into it deeper and will come out of it after its competitor nations? Britain did so despite the huge bonanza of North sea oil that it has enjoyed. It cannot be doubted that, as the country comes out of this recession—as I hope it will soon—we shall find that, during the course of the recession, Britain's share of the world markets has fallen below that which it originally held, whereas other countries' shares will have increased or returned to their former levels.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. John Maples) *rose*——

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) *rose*——

Mr. Ashdown: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond).

Hon. Members: What about the Minister?

Mr. Salmond: The Minister can wait his turn.

I shall consider an issue on which the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) has changed his mind in recent years, the Trident missile system. The right hon. Gentleman will have noticed that, according to newspapers, doubts are surfacing, even in the Ministry of Defence, about the efficacy of spending £23,000 million over the lifetime of a useless strategic nuclear deterrent. Will the right hon. Gentleman change his mind again on that issue or is he to stay in a cosy conspiracy of lunacy with the Leader of the Opposition and the Prime Minister?

Mr. Ashdown: The hon. Gentleman's example was incorrect. I should like to have a Government and politicians who are prepared to change their mind in the face of events. I think that that would produce a much saner country and a better form of government. We all change our minds; the Prime Minister has changed the policies of his predecessor, as has the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The right hon. Gentleman changed his mind on Trident.

Mr. Ashdown: There is something of a difference between changing one's mind when it needs to be changed and changing one's mind twice in every decade since the war, which is taking changing one's mind to an art form.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan was wrong. My party opposed the building of Trident. We believed that it should not have been undertaken, but that decision has now been made into reality—Trident is there. One cannot pretend that one would not have something which already exists. The question is whether or not this country will have a minimal deterrent. I believe that it needs one, and I have always believed so.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: What about the Liberal conference in 1984?

Mr. Ashdown: That is absolutely wrong. I have always believed that this country needs the protection of a minimal deterrent, which Trident now provides. I wish that it was not there but it is. If that is the only means of delivering a minimal deterrent, we must hang on to it until it is safe to get rid of it.

I believe that this country has to find a way to break out of the long, miserable cycle of decline inflicted upon it by the two major parties. We need a new Government and a new system of government.

Mr. Maples: The right hon. Gentleman has returned to the economy. I wonder if he can square the description he has given of the British economy with the fact that between 1980 and 1990 the British economy grew faster than that of France or Germany. It grew faster than that of any other OECD country except Spain, and investment grew faster here than in any other G7 country except Japan.

Mr. Ashdown: The hon. Gentleman should look at his figures again—do they really refer to 1980? Is he not selectively choosing his figures from 1981—precisely when we were at the bottom of the recession? If not, he is starting from an appallingly low base. He mentioned investment and I shall answer his question. I predict that by the end of this year overall investment in industry as a percentage of gross domestic product will be lower than it was in 1979. Will the hon. Gentleman give me a commitment that that will not be true? He does not. I do not need any further answers. I also predict that unemployment will be massively higher than it was in 1979.

We need a new Government and a new system of government, and the Queen's Speech should have introduced such a proposal. We wanted the Queen's Speech to give us a new direction for our country, and an independent central bank established to run the British economy. I can understand why Conservative and Labour Members do not want that. They want to continue to be able to debauch our national economy to buy votes before an election, and make British people and British industry pay the price later in jobs and lost industry. I believe that an independent central bank will come: the previous Chancellor of the Exchequer argued for it, and I believe that it is necessary as the rock on which to build a decent, strong, anti-inflationary policy.

The Queen's Speech should have portrayed a series of policies that were much tougher on competition, particularly in relation to the utilities. That would almost certainly be necessary in the banking and finance sector as well. The Queen's Speech should have contained a Government programme proposing a decent charter for

small businesses with a tough set of policies to encourage small businesses. It should have mentioned late payment of debts, discriminatory discounts and specific assistance for small businesses that need it at the point of expansion, not when they start up.

The Government should have made a commitment to increase funding in education to the percentage of GDP equivalent to that established by our European partners —about an extra £1·8 billion or £1·9 billion. That money should have been invested in three specific sectors: giving every child in this land the right of access to one year's pre-school education; ensuring that all those aged over 16 have access to decent education and training; and providing, supporting and building up our adult education system to match the needs of an age of high technology.

The Queen's Speech could have contained a commitment to enable British Rail's high speed link to the channel tunnel, with the sort of connections needed to allow industrial developments in the regions. The speech could have included a commitment to allow private services access to the British Rail network and allow British Rail access to private markets to gain the funding that has been so significantly lacking during the past 12 years. The speech could have included the establishment of a long-term energy policy that would begin to tackle the environmental challenges confronting us. The speech could have made it clear that Britain was to be a leader in Europe, not the laggard of Europe.

We heard none of those proposals and no commitment to changing the systems of government—a change which Britain desperately needs. Four years ago the House considered the poll tax, and rammed the legislation through against the dictates of common sense and against the clearly expressed will of the people. The legislation was rammed through on the basis of a minority of votes. The Government who held the minority of votes had a majority of 140 in the House. Unbroken lines of Conservative Members trooped through the Lobby, but now one can scarcely find a supporter for the poll tax outside Finchley and Tewkesbury, which tells us something. The Government are about to make exactly the same mistake again. They are about to push through the ill-thought-out council tax in an even shorter time than that taken for the poll tax. The likelihood is that the Government will make as big a mistake again. The truth is that this country must have a fair voting system that prevents any minority from riding roughshod over the will of the majority, pushing through its ideas, and producing legislation, such as the poll tax, that clearly damages not only our country and its people, but the Government.

We have not only a bad Government but a bad system of government. Far more preferable would be a Gracious Speech that tackled that and introduced fair voting; a freedom of information Act, so that the Government would be unable to retreat behind the iron doors of secrecy —to protect not the nation's secrets but itself; a Bill of Rights to enshrine and protect those liberties of the citizen that ought not to be trodden on by Governments, bureaucracies, or big business; and established Parliaments in Scotland and Wales.

Such a Gracious Speech would mark out a new agenda and direction for our country. As to the Gracious Speech that is before us, it reveals a Government who are trapped by their past and terrified by their future; a Government who are afraid to defend their inheritance but unable to find the courage to reject it. It is time for this failed Government to go, and for Britain's failed system of government to go too.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Clearly a large number of right hon. and hon. Members seek to participate in the debate. Brief speeches will cut the number who will be disappointed.

5.11 pm

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson (New Forest): Having listened to the speech of the leader of the Liberal Democrats, I can only hope that his party will never be in government. It was one of the most confused and confusing speeches I have ever heard in the House. I am left speechless by the right hon. Gentleman's attempt to blame the Government for the current recession, given that, in 1987, when the world faced the biggest economic disaster since 1929, the Liberals, Labour and almost every economist around the world suggested that we should pour money into the hole left by that crash.

Mr. Ashdown: We did not do as the hon. Gentleman suggests. The Labour party may have advocated such a policy, but if the hon. Gentleman will study the record, he will find that my party did not.

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson: That is not my understanding. If the right hon. Gentleman is suggesting that the Liberals advocated in 1987 that we should tighten up on credit, as was done in 1929, I do not believe it.

I regard today's Gracious Speech as one of the most important during the lifetime of this Parliament. The issues before us today are perhaps even more significant than any we have witnessed since this Parliament was elected in 1987. The first page and a half of the Gracious Speech deals with Britain's role overseas: in Europe, the Commonwealth, and—because of this country's great experience in the region—the middle east.

I recall, during my own military service, leaving the port of Haifa on 15 May 1948, at the end of the British mandate in Palestine—which led to the establishment of the state of Israel and to the unhappy conflict that has existed between that country and its neighbours ever since. Those passages in the Gracious Speech that deal with that region are of the greatest possible significance, and the opportunity to solve its difficulties which Madrid provides is unlikely to present itself again.

The first page and a half of the Gracious Speech also makes a renewed commitment to the Commonwealth, and lays great weight on Britain's relationship with our friends in Europe. In the near future—certainly until 10 December, and probably right through to polling day for a general election next year—Britain's role in Europe will be a dominant topic for debate in Parliament.

I have no objection to working more closely with our colleagues in Europe. My family has had a home in France for many years—*[Laughter.]*—and I have a daughter who lives there permanently. To those hon. Members who laugh, I may say that it is rather important to know how the people of other European countries live, rather than simply to attend conferences while staying in big hotels, finding out how other Europeans live only at third hand.

One learns, for example, that France today, far from the glorious economic picture painted by Opposition

[Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson]

Members, is a country racked with problems. Recently, there were major demonstrations by workers in all the major public services in Paris, and by farmers who burned British lamb. They are all desperately concerned about what Europe has done to them.

In the last two years, there has been more change and upheaval in Europe than at any time since the Community was established. The Community of Jean Monnet—the Community of the balanced states—has been totally changed by the emergence of a unified Germany. It is the biggest country in Europe, and has its largest population. Germany's economy is potentially the strongest in Europe, but unification has clearly upset its economic balance and its currency's place as the strongest in Europe. Anyone who attempts to cobble institutions together at a time of such turmoil is likely to find that those institutions will swiftly be overtaken by events.

The events in Yugoslavia are a microcosm of what could happen, albeit many years hence, if we tried to compress the countries of Europe into a single state framework. We would have nothing but trouble in the future.

The right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) spoke of the need for a central European bank, to ensure that we are never again confronted by inflation and that there will always be prosperity throughout Europe. It would be a central bank answerable to no one, not elected by Members of the House, probably dominated by the Bundesbank, and in a position to determine which part of this country—or even the whole of it—is likely to be a recipient in future of grants and aid. To throw away all control of our economy and hand it over to a bunch of faceless civil servants somewhere on the other side of the channel would be ludicrous and dangerous.

The Gracious Speech refers to European monetary co-operation, and quite properly to the exchange rate mechanism, which has worked remarkably well. Critics of the exchange rate mechanism say that it prevents the Government from expanding the economy as swiftly as some might wish, but they seem to forget that, long before we joined the ERM, we had the same problems about protecting sterling against the dollar. Forty per cent. of all our exports, including North sea oil, are paid for in dollars, and we have always needed to protect sterling, and always will.

The exchange rate mechanism merely formalises that protection, and it works extremely well. However, I caution against going for the narrower 2·5 per cent. band in the near future, because of the unusual character of the British economy. Whether one likes it or not, ours is an oil economy—and fluctuating oil prices can affect the value of our currency. Nevertheless, the degree of monetary co-operation represented by the exchange rate mechanism has worked well, and our membership of it is no more of a constraint on the growth of the British economy than was the old need to protect sterling's relationship with the dollar.

As we move towards the single European market next year and Britain's presidency of the Community from 1 July 1992, we must be cautious. The changes in Europe are not complete. The European countries, and probably the whole of the western world, are unlikely to see substantial growth for five years. Until the Germans have been able to resolve their problems with the east, and until the German economy is able once again to play its part in lending money to the rest of the world, there will be a gradual growth slope of up to five years. In that time, it would be folly to become involved in monetary institutions that further limited our ability, within those narrow confines, to take action for ourselves. The need for freedom of action will never be greater than in the next 12 months, and indeed in the next five years. To be forced into the straitjacket of a central bank, or anything that looked like a single currency, would be enormously damaging for Britain and her economy.

Page 1 of the Gracious Speech has remarks about NATO and defence, a subject ably covered by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. Again, the need for freedom of action is desperately important. To be compressed into a European institution dealing with foreign affairs and events would be, as we found over the Gulf, the Falklands Islands and other incidents, to surrender an essential piece of our sovereignty which has proved of value not only to Britain but to our allies around the world.

As Chairman of Ways and Means, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and as one who has led the crusade of reform of the private Bill procedure, you will be proud of, and delighted to find, this commitment in the Gracious Speech:

"A Bill will be introduced to replace private legislation as the means for authorising transport development schemes."

Effectively, that means that, for the first time, the railway system, through British Rail, will have to adopt different procedures if it wishes to make changes in its structure, build new tracks, close lines, or whatever. The Joint Committee on Private Bill Procedure, of which I have the honour to be Chairman, and which sprang directly from your decision, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to have this matter reviewed, came forward with proposals on the matters covered in the Gracious Speech.

Obviously, British Rail's position is unique in that it requires exemption from nuisance and the ability to interrupt public utilities, and a private Bill not only provides that but wraps up separate works programmes into one document. Although I have been sponsoring British Rail legislation for 10 years, I have never felt that to have a Back-Bench Member of Parliament sponsoring a Bill for what is a nationalised industry, but in whatever form it takes will always be a vastly important industry, is the most sensible way forward.

In his report on the Clapham disaster, Sir Anthony Hidden heard that safety legislation needed review. It is not sensible to have railway development in a way totally different from that for motorway development. Therefore, when it comes to the channel tunnel link, to bring that important railway project to Parliament and discuss it in the way that most private Bills are discussed, and to have it sponsored by an individual Back Bencher, would be to take risks with the safety of that important line.

If British Rail today, or a railway company in the future, wants to add significantly to its already considerable system, or wants to take decisions that are of importance to those who use the system, it should go to the Department of Transport, set out its proposals, receive a draft order and, where there are bones of contention or problems in the system that it wishes to build, have proper local public inquiries. The private Bill procedure is not adequate, although I can see the advantages.

In welcoming this proposal and the Bill that we hope will be introduced this Session, I emphasise that it will be essential to ensure that, when inquiries are to take place, there is no undue waiting time for the appointment of inspectors. If there are such delays, there will be a hold-up in railway construction at a time when it seems to be increasing.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Will my hon. Friend go a little further in respect of the role of railways? Does he agree that the improvement of the railway infrastructure should not be paid for only out of the profitability of British Rail but that, inevitably, it is part of the responsibility of British Government—including the House—to ensure an adequate railway system? Therefore, if the Government need to assist in the improvement of the infrastructure, the House should ensure that such assistance is provided.

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson: My hon. Friend is a persuasive and clever debater. If he is trying to persuade me to suggest that the Government should pay for the channel link, that is ground on which I would not wish to trespass.

I agree that the railway system will inevitably be the responsibility of the Department of Transport, and to that extent we have to recognise that British Rail is receiving more investment than it has ever received before, and that is a good thing. However, I am concerned to ensure that, when we use that investment to build a new railway system, we do so through schemes that the Government have thoroughly vetted, and that they have not been introduced at the whim of a Back-Bench Member and subjected to the vagaries of the private Bill procedure. Schemes should be given full approval by the Department, with proper inquiries in those areas where people feel aggrieved.

I have nothing against the private Bill procedure. No one would wish to see it taken away but, sadly, it has sometimes been used as an excuse for wrapping up in one document several proposals which, if taken separately, might have suffered a different fate.

I am delighted with the whole of the Gracious Speech. Britain's position in the world and in Europe are well spelt out. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was crystal clear about what will happen in Maastricht, and that was, with great respect, quite unlike what the Leader of the Opposition said. I look forward to this Session as the end of a first-class Parliament which will go out on a high note.

5.28 pm

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): In 1988, I made an alternative Queen's Speech for women. Last year, I updated it and had to report a worsening of the situation of many women. Today, I listened eagerly for measures specifically angled towards women. After all, here are a Government on the verge of an election and women form the majority of the electorate. This is a Prime Minister who, just this week, spoke of his commitment to the advancement of women, yet not only has he still no women in his Cabinet, but there is not a single mention of women in the Queen's Speech, nor any measures directed specifically at helping them.

In fairness, I must admit that there is little of anything in this extraordinarily empty Queen's Speech. For a Government presumably setting out their shop window for an election, this is feeble. If I were window shopping, I would recognise an establishment on the verge of collapse.

The Government promise to improve the economy. In my constituency, unemployment increased by a quarter in the past year. It is 18·5 per cent. male and 13·1 per cent. overall, despite the twistings and turnings that we all recognise in the reckoning of the figures. This is a record of increasing misery.

Eighty five constituencies are in an even worse position than Preston. The highest unemployment is to be found in Liverpool, Riverside. It is 27·5 per cent. overall and 37·7 per cent. male. If it is thought that that is because the north-west is especially unfortunate, let it be recognised that 10 of the 25 per cent. worst constituencies in terms of unemployment are in London.

The unemployment figures for women are even more disguised than general unemployment figures. That is because women are frequently not entitled to benefits and, therefore, are not included in the figures. Many women suffer from a forced reduction in their hours. They are part-time workers and their hours are reduced against their will. They are not unemployed, but they are certainly underemployed. They are employed for fewer hours than they would wish and they earn much less money than they would wish.

I know through my union, the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers, that we are now meeting the phenomenon of zerohours contracts. This means that employers make no commitment to employ people for any particular length of time in any particular week. The employee has to sign a contract in which he accepts that lack of commitment, which means that he or she remains at the employer's will and pleasure. The employee is not counted as unemployed and is not entitled to unemployment benefit, even if she receives no wages in a certain week. It is no wonder that female unemployment, on paper, is less than male unemployment.

For families, the unemployment of both men and women is deplorable. There are repercussions, of course. In 1980, the homes of 3,500 owner-occupiers were repossessed because of mortgage arrears. In the first half of 1991 there have been nearly 34,000 repossessions. About a quarter of a million owner-occupiers are more than two months in arrears. I am sure that the misery that lies behind these figures is not recognised by Conservative Members. For ordinary people, however, they represent despair.

The plight of those who are having difficulty in paying their mortgages has been deliberately worsened by the Conservative party. In 1986, the changes made to social security legislation meant that owner-occupiers on income support have to pay half their mortgage interest for the first 16 weeks of receipt of that support. That change was extremely bad for many people. It was brought about by the party that talks about a property-owning democracy. That is another illustration of its well-known hypocrisy.

Housing problems cover more than repossessions or arrears of mortgage payments. Homelessness is rocketing. Recently I dealt with a woman constituent who has a three-year-old child and is now pregnant with twins. She is living, if it can be called that, in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. The number of people in bed-and-breakfast accommodation has been shooting up since 1982, despite the fact that the Tory party manifesto of 1983 stated:

[Mrs. Audrey Wise]

"Our goal is to make Britain the best-housed nation in Europe."

Instead, the Government have presided over a reduction in public investment in housing by 70 per cent. since 1979. In 1986, the Audit Commission—not an arm of the Labour party—called for higher spending on the improvement and repair of council housing. That is prevented directly by the Conservative Government.

On 27 March 1990, the hon. Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer), then Minister for Housing and Planning, said on behalf of the Government:

"Our main aim is to reduce the use of bed and breakfast by councils."

Preston council did not have to use bed-and-breakfast accommodation when that statement was made, but it has to do so now. The Housing Corporation, in its latest report, describes housing in Preston as follows:

"Preston's housing problems have intensified in recent years, following a period of rapid increases in house prices and increasing pressure on demand on the rented sector at all levels of security of tenure. Homelessness has now reached crisis proportions, with the local authority stock continuing to diminish and a continuing reduction in the number of net relet vacancies. The Council's own hostel accommodation is fully occupied, flats in multi-storey blocks continue to be shared"—

not just occupied but shared, by people with children—

"by homeless families and increasing reliance is being placed on bed and breakfast accommodation."

I know that Preston council has fought against doing any of those things. It has tried desperately to avoid doing so. With the attitude of the Conservative party to council housing, it is no wonder that the council is failing to meet the needs, and that my constituents are in agony.

Last year I referred to the agony of women who cannot provide their children with a home. That agony has intensified this year and has spread to far more people. It must be noted, however, that there is not a mention of housing in the Queen's Speech. The Conservative party does not care about housing and forecasts no steps for housing.

In June, the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo), said:

"Getting people out of unsatisfactory temporary accommodation has been one of the Government's top priorities since 1989."

Bearing in mind the Government's record when dealing with one of their priorities, I shudder to think of what happens to objectives that are merely regarded by them as desirable. The underlying reason for the problem is a shortage of housing and a shortage of resources to repair and improve existing housing.

In 1980 local authority housebuilding produced 41,500 new dwellings; there were only 8,700 new dwellings built in 1990. It is no wonder that there is a shortage. Should the Minister claim that that building is being replaced by housing association building, I can tell him that association new building in 1990 increased by fewer than 2,000 properties as compared with 1980.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): My hon. Friend is dealing with a most important subject. So far as I know, not one Conservative Member over the past 10 or 12 years has protested to the Government that council dwellings have not been built. Does my hon. Friend agree that the situation is even worse than she has described because a substantial amount of local authority housing has been sold off? The best units—houses, not high-rise flats—have been sold. They have not been replaced, and that has been a deliberate act of Conservative policy.

Mrs. Wise: My hon. Friend is right. Perusal of the Housing Corporation's report shows that it has referred to that issue many times. Not only are no houses being built, but others are being taken from the stock of houses available for rent and are, therefore, not available to the people in the greatest need.

Of course, such problems extend to the private housing stock in many areas. In Preston more than 38 per cent. of private houses were built before 1919. Six thousand one hundred are unfit for habitation and more than 14,000 are in need of renovation. Resources need to be allocated for the necessary improvement of private housing stock as well as council housing stock, but the Government's main contribution seems to have been to interpose a neighbourhood renewal assessment system which has made the process of providing help with renovation of the private housing stock and of dealing with unfit houses grind to a halt. The Government have introduced procedures that sound nice, but offers no resources with which to carry them out. Those procedures are merely another hurdle over which local authorities must jump, but they fail to do so.

There is not a word about housing in the Queen's Speech unless we are to assume that the Government are relying on the sentence,

"other measures will be laid before you",

for the many social measures that are omitted.

I read the Queen's Speech to try to understand what lies behind the few promises of legislation which it contains. The Government intend to introduce legislation to reinforce the regulation of private utilities. I wonder whether that will include regulation of the inflated salaries that the chairmen of the privatised companies are now paying themselves. The Government intend to introduce legislation to deal with education, but there is no sign that such a Bill would deal with nursery education or that it would contain measures to improve school buildings or the funding of schools in constituencies such as mine. However, there is every suggestion that a Bill dealing with education will, like its forerunners, be more a reflection of Tory dogma than a means of meeting the needs of children in my constituency.

The Queen's Speech states that the Government will make available information about the performance of individual schools. Will they make equally available information about the problems faced by individual schools, or about the wonderful work being done by them, including the school in Preston attended by my grandchildren? There children become bilingual. The school has to cope with different languages and people from different cultures and does so in a way that enriches the background of the children, but it gets precious little help from the Government.

The Government intend to introduce a Bill to revise the health and safety arrangements of offshore installations. That is overdue and I welcome such a Bill, but what about more inspectors for health and safety? What about making it easier for people such as shop workers who suffer from repetitive strain injury to have that recognised and to obtain adequate compensation?

The Government intend

"to replace private legislation as the means for authorising transport development schemes."

That might be useful in a technical sense for the procedures of the House, but why is there to be no legislation for more, better and cheaper public transport? That alone would be of enormous help to women who find it difficult to get about cheaply and safely.

I am deeply disappointed with the Queen's Speech, but not surprised. Its tone is epitomised by a couple of sentences on page three which state that the Government "will maintain firm control of public spending with the aim of keeping its share of national income on a downward trend over time."

The next sentence states:

"My Government attach the highest priority to improving public services."

The Government intend to improve public services while spending less and less on them—that demands not a competent Government, but members of the Magic Circle. So far, I have seen no sign that the Prime Minister or his colleagues have the competence or the dexterity—to use a word that was used earlier in the debate—to accomplish that miracle. It is impossible to improve public services while reducing costs, and citizens charters will prove to be empty words, just as this is an empty Queen's Speech.

5.45 pm

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I hope that the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) will forgive me if I do not make such a wide-ranging speech as she did. We share a great love of animals, but she was not able to mention them and they are not mentioned in the Queen's Speech. I shall restrict myself to one or two topics in the interests of the many hon. Members who wish to participate in the debate.

In moving the Loyal Address, my right hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker) spoke of "the faithful city", which is how Worcester has always been known. I was born there, and I could have invited my right hon. Friend to say a little more about it. The street leading to the cathedral is called Silver street because the local people there threw down silver and the Roundheads got off their horses to pick it up. Their doing so enabled the Cavaliers and the King's men to escape to safety after the battle of Worcester. That is why that fine city bears that name.

I pay tribute to the amusing and witty way in which my right hon. Friend moved the Loyal Address and to the excellent speech of my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken). I was especially delighted to hear him speak of the advance of people through the equality of opportunity in education. During the 1987 general election, when my right hon. Friend came to my constituency, we walked along two or three streets where, as a boy of 14 or 15, he had delivered newspapers. He was not born with a silver spoon in his mouth—his mother was a widow and he delivered papers.

One or two of the people on whom we called remembered my right hon. Friend. The first person he canvassed in Worcester was my grandmother, who lived well into her 90s. I am sorry that he is not here to hear me say that he is an example of someone who has achieved much from humble beginnings and I warmly commend him. He achieved much through the equality of opportunity in education, as he explained, and I shall say a few words about education.

The Gracious Speech states:

"Action will be taken to improve quality and choice in education."

They are good words, and they will be well backed up. It continues:

"Legislation will be introduced to reform funding of further education and sixth form colleges and to reform higher education in England and Wales, and to make information available about the performance of individual schools."

When I started to teach in 1957, one of my colleagues said that a parent was coming to see him that day, and he asked what he should say to him. Everyone else said, "What has it got to do with him? You don't need to talk to parents." That was the regrettable but widespread attitude in a great profession. Happily, things are changing, as change they must. The Gracious Speech will lead to more and vital changes.

I wish to pick up one point made by the hon. Member for Preston, because I also hope that attention will be paid to the conditions of buildings. Emergency measures had to be taken in my constituency to repair leaking roofs on four school buildings. It was an emergency: if that had not been done children would have been sent home and their schooling interrupted. Emergency shoring up has been necessary in another school.

Those buildings have not suddenly experienced those problems. The problems existed under successive Governments and local authorities of different political complexions over 50, 60 and 70 years. That makes some campaigns, particularly those of members of the Labour party, spurious, because those buildings have needed attention for many years. I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning is in the Chamber because he can confirm that school buildings have not received the attention that they have deserved for many years.

The Queen's Speech promises reform of further education and, in particular, of adult education. For some years, I have been the chairman of the all-party adult education committee. The hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) is our excellent secretary. It is right to use the vehicle of adult education to set up courses to allow people to improve their qualifications and so apply for better jobs and perform their existing jobs more efficiently. In that regard, I am thinking of computer courses and courses in car maintenance, book-keeping and secretarial studies, as well as English language and foreign language courses. Those vocational courses clearly lead people to greater success in their professions.

However, I do not believe that vocational courses are more important than non-vocational courses. The two types of courses should be considered equally in adult education and it would be wrong for all resources to be devoted to vocational courses while non-vocational courses are starved of funds. Happily the Government have amended their original view expressed in the White Paper and now consider vocational and non-vocational studies on an equal basis.

I have held senior posts in enormous schools in London. There were 2,200 pupils in my last school. However, I also found time to lecture in adult education for 12 years. Courses in flower arranging, painting, dance and physical education in all its aspects, including sports and body development and control, are valid for those who want to take those courses. At the height of their success, the education committee of the London county council and subsequently the Inner London education

[Mr. Harry Greenway]

authority—I worked for both those bodies—provided 2,000 different adult education courses, and they were all very successful.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): Should not the fees charged for non-vocational courses be such as to allow them to be open to people on the lowest incomes?

Mr. Greenway: Yes, I agree with the hon. Gentleman. Adult education must be accessible to people on all income levels. I hope that all hon. Members accept that adult education is an amazing vehicle through which people can have more fulfilled lives in respect both of leisure and of their professional careers. Adult education is cheap. I have worked in adult education for 12 years and I am proud, like the education spokesman for the Social and Liberal Democrats and, I think, the Leader of the Opposition, to be a vice-president of the Workers Educational Association. I hope that the Government will consider the potential of adult education in a new way and will do all they can to devote funds to it.

The Queen's Speech also states that information is to be "available about the performance of individual schools." Information about truancy rates will be available to parents. There will also be tables showing examination successes between schools. Somehow, schools must serve and respond to parental choices. However, I am wary of placing excessive pressure on children and teachers where there are behavioural difficulties or deprivation. In those circumstances, teachers do not have a chance of achieving the level of examination success that might be achieved in more favourable teaching conditions.

Where children are well motivated, well supported at home and well funded, they will be easier to teach, especially if the buildings are good, than pupils who struggle to get to school and whose parents are feckless and short of money. I know of a school not far from this place where there are many highly deprived children, but they work well. I do not want to let schools off: they should compete in terms of truancy or examination tables. However, everyone concerned must understand the difficulties that some schools face.

A school prospectus is vital. At the moment, parents find many school prospectuses dull and unexciting. Schools should also hold meetings for prospective parents. Many schools do not welcome the parents of prospective pupils or influence decisions about which school parents should choose for their children. Everything should be done to increase choice in respect of schools.

We should also do more to pay good classroom teachers. Everyone in the profession is aware that some people can be absent from teaching posts and not be missed. In some respects, we are better off without them. However, as a result of my 23 years in teaching, I know that people like that remain in post and nothing is done about it. They are paid the same as people who can teach brilliantly.

There must be a way of discovering why some people teach so well while others fail the children.

Mr. Frank Cook: Is the hon. Gentleman prepared to apply the same active principles to hon. Members?

Mr. Greenway: Well——

Mr. Cook: Yes or no?

Mr. Greenway: I am sure that my colleagues and Opposition Members are highly conscientious people. They have nothing to fear. However, I do not want to be diverted from an issue that is very important to this nation's future. Somehow, children must achieve more from education. More children should gain success in examinations and gain the skills to survive difficulties in life. More children should enter higher education. That can be achieved through an improved teaching profession.

Teachers must be able to evaluate their own performances more openly. Their performance should also be evaluated more closely by their heads of department, heads of school, and inspectors. Good teachers should be paid differently from those who do not teach well. We would then begin to reward the wonderful people who do not want to take on the responsibility of deputy headship and so on, who remain in the classroom and do a wonderful job, but who are currently paid the same as people who are slack, late every day, off early, and so on. I hope that something will be achieved by the Bill.

5.59 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I associate myself and my party with remarks by several hon. Members about Alick Buchanan-Smith. He was a remarkable Member of Parliament. All hon. Members will miss him across the broad range of his activities.

I agree with the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) that, if this debate is to be the effective start of the general election campaign, it is a very poor beginning. Indeed, if this is the shape of things to come in the general election campaign, the hon. and learned Member for Colchester, North (Sir A. Buck) will not be the only person to have difficulty staying awake over the coming weeks and months.

However, I disagree with the right hon. Member for Yeovil that this poor start is due to general misbehaviour in the House. I should have thought that it was due to the two rather bad speeches by the Leader of the Opposition and by the Prime Minister. There may be a reason for that. It has been argued that, as the Labour and Tory parties come closer together in policy and ideology, the standard of debate suffers because the ideology goes and only the personalities remain. I thought that the quality of debate at the start of this Session was very much reduced.

Mr. Frank Cook: The hon. Gentleman should show the House how it should be done.

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Gentleman will have to wait and see.

The Sunday Times could not be called a house journal of the Conservative party in Scotland, but it certainly has the inside track. Last Sunday, it speculated on whether the Tory party had "run out of steam". It accurately forecast the contents of the Queen's Speech. It was a fag-end speech for a fag-end Parliament. The Tory party in Scotland has run out of both steam and ideas. It has even run out of legislation. We have one single, solitary Scottish Bill in this parliamentary Session, because the Conservative party no longer has enough Members north of the border even to man Scottish Committees. Legislation is constricted by the Government's inability to get enough hon. Members to turn up and man the Committees.

Even the few measures that have some relevance to Scotland leave a bitter taste in the mouth. The Bill on

higher and further education contains a proposal which will be widely welcomed—a funding council and an extension of the university system. However, parachuted into that legislation will be a further ideological attack on the social fabric of the Scottish education system and the compulsory publication of league tables of primary-tested pupils. I should have thought that, having encountered massive parental opposition to such tests in Scotland over the past year, the Government would have learnt that primary testing is unwanted in Scotland, and decided against moving towards the opting out of Scottish primary schools.

The abolition of the poll tax is probably even more widely welcomed in Scotland than it is in the rest of the United Kingdom. However, it will not go unnoticed north of the border that not only was the poll tax introduced in Scotland a year early but that it was specific Scottish legislation. Scotland was used as a guinea pig for the introduction of the poll tax.

However, when it comes to the abolition of the poll tax, there is no separate Scottish legislation or separate Scottish scrutiny, despite the different structure of local government finance and organisation north of the border. If we were a guinea pig in the introduction of the poll tax, we are an afterthought in its abolition. Apart from anything else, given the various idiosyncracies, nonsense and blunders that were discovered in the poll tax legislation, I should have thought that the Government would welcome effective scrutiny of a new, untried and probably defective council tax system.

The legislation for safety offshore contains provisions that my party will certainly support. The implementation of the Cullen recommendations commands general respect and approval throughout the House. However, although I have not yet seen the detail of the legislation, I doubt whether it will extend to protecting offshore workers against victimisation or guaranteeing their proper rights of representation in trade union affairs.

I hope that the level of debate in the coming general election in Scotland will be somewhat higher than in the rest of the country. That is because clear political choices will be on offer to the Scottish people. There will be choices on the Scottish economy, social services, defence, and Scotland's future within the European Community.

Earlier this week the Royal Bank of Scotland published its authoritative oil index showing a 14 per cent. rise in output, more than 2 million barrels a day, for the first time in several months—perhaps on the way to a new peak in output of 3 million barrels a day of oil and gas equivalent by the end of this century. A basic choice is opening up for Scotland as that new oil and gas boom becomes a reality. With £40,000 million of revenue forecast for the next decade, will that enormous revenue from the North sea fund and bankroll right-wing Governments in London, or will it be invested in the future of the Scottish economy?

At a press conference during the Kincardine and Deeside by-election, I was asked why, in Norway, 60 to 70 per cent. of the orders generated by each oilfield found their way into the Norwegian economy, while the equivalent percentage in Scotland is less than 30 per cent. There is a simple answer. At present in Scotland, we see the active destruction of a steel industry which, over the next decade, should supply millions of tonnes of steel to the North sea market. However, that industry is in the process of being eliminated by British Steel, with the active connivance of the Government. If we destroy the industrial fabric which services and supplies that market opportunity, it is hardly surprising that the Scottish economy stands to lose yet again from the second great oil and gas boom.

For Scotland's energy resources, the matter goes much further than that. Over the past year, the Energy Select Committee closely investigated the real costs of the nuclear industry. The hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) was interested to make a comparison with the costs of the coal industry, and I was interested to make a comparison with the cost of combined cycle gas generation. The best estimate at which we could arrive for the real cost of nuclear power was about 6p a unit of electricity, which is three times the cost of combined cycle gas generation. However, the Scottish economy faces the ridiculous position of being over-invested in nuclear technology while the great opportunity from massive condensate gasfields in own waters will go a-begging or, more accurately, will be subsidised and piped south to Teesside, again being offest, against petroleum revenue tax where it will then be used to undercut the Scottish industrial sector.

Those are the hard and clear political choices that will be on offer to the Scottish people in the general election. However, there will also be clear choices on social services and on where expenditure should go as between defence and vital services. The right hon. Member for Yeovil has some difficulty in answering a clear question about his party's position on the Trident missile system. All three London-based parties will have that same difficulty in the general election.

Last Sunday's edition of *Scotland on Sunday* carried on its front page the story that there were severe doubts at senior level within the Ministry of Defence about the cost and effectiveness of the unwanted, dangerous and totally useless strategic nuclear deterrent with its lifetime cost of at least £23,000 million—perhaps more—and about the strains that that would place on the rest of the defence budget.

Let us nail the argument and the excuse that is used by both the Liberal Democrats and the Labour party about their new-found support for the Trident nuclear system. They argue that the money has been spent anyway. That might be true of some elements of the capital cost. The most recent estimate is that about £6 billion has been committed, estimated and contracted for. However, the lifetime cost of the Trident system has been estimated at at least £23,000 million, of which, therefore, less than one third has already been committed. How can any party—especially the Labour party—which refuses to give a precise funding commitment to the national health service live with itself when it is prepared to give a precise funding commitment for the amount of money it will pour into the Trident missile system in the next 10 to 15 years?

I notice that one of the many hon. Members representing the Strathclyde region is now sitting on the Opposition Front Bench. He will be aware of the number of crumbling schools in Strathclyde, so perhaps he would like to comment on the calculation that the Scottish share of the savings from cancelling the Trident missile system could build 12,000 new houses, 16 new hospitals and 177 new schools—schools which I am sure his constituents would welcome.

Where on earth are the 512 warheads of the Trident system to be pointed? They have a range of 6,000 miles and were designed to penetrate the defences around Moscow.

[Mr. Salmond]

Are we really going to threaten Boris Yeltsin and the Russian federation with that useless military plaything for which we have no further strategic use and which will cripple not only the defence budget, but also the social services budget for the next 10 or 15 years unless we call an end now to the madness and obscenity? At the coming election, there will be a clear political choice in Scotland between bombs and beds, and bombs and bairns.

I welcome the positive reference in the Queen's Speech:

"The United Kingdom will continue to develop our good relations with the Soviet Union and its republics, and to encourage their integration into the world economy; and will work to help Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania re-establish themselves in the international community."

I also welcomed the Prime Minister's speech in Paris just a few weeks ago in which he said that, during the coming decade, about 30 countries—new states, emerging democracies—would apply for and get a place within the European Community. Although the Prime Minister also said that no one could gainsay that process of democracy and its progress throughout Europe, like the leaders of the other London parties, he will have to explain why self-determination and democracy are good things across the continent of Europe, but cannot be applied to the Scottish people. I do not believe that Scotland will accept the second-class status of being a regional periphery in the Community when the first-class status of membership is available to us.

There is a clear choice. We can either be a regional backwater and allow Scotland's resources to be misused and wasted, or we can start to rebuild the Scottish economy, fund Scottish social services, and ensure that our country once again plays a full and responsible role in the international community. I have great confidence that, if this debate marks the onset of the general election campaign, its conclusion will be that the people will make a decisive political choice in favour of that future for Scotland.

6.14 pm

Mr. David Knox (Staffordshire, Moorlands): I should like to join in the congratulations that have been paid to my right hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker) and to my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken) who moved and seconded the Loyal Address.

It is now quite a long time since I first met my right hon. Friend the Member for Worcester when I went along to canvass for him during the 1961 by-election in the Worcester constituency. Happily, I did not do him any harm and he was returned with a good majority. Since then, he has established himself as one of the outstanding parliamentarians of his generation. He has undoubtedly been one of the most successful departmental Ministers during the period that I have been a Member of the House. He has served at the Departments of the Environment, Trade and Industry and Energy, at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and, more recently, at the Welsh Office. Unfortunately, my right hon. Friend is leaving the House at the next general election. He will be greatly missed by hon. Members of all parties.

Unfortunately, the next months will be dominated by the forthcoming general election—indeed, we have seen some evidence of that this afternoon—and I am afraid that the British people will become fed up with politics and politicians before polling day. Although no one knows exactly when the election will take place, we do know that the Session has a maximum of eight months to run. It is therefore surprising that the Gracious Speech contains a remarkably full legislative programme, most of which I warmly welcome.

Of the measures to be introduced, the council tax legislation is far and away the most important and the most welcome for negative as well as positive reasons. The Bill that will introduce the council tax is welcome for the negative reason that it will result in the removal of the poll tax from the statute book. That measure was fatally flawed from the start because it was a flat-rate tax and was consequently unfair. It violated the fundamental principle of sound taxation that a tax should bear some relation to ability to pay.

However, the council tax should be welcomed for positive reasons also. First, it takes into consideration ability to pay. Generally speaking, better-off people live in bigger houses and, under the council tax, the occupants of bigger houses will pay more than those who live in smaller houses. The discount of 25 per cent. for single adult households recognises the position of those living on their own, more than two thirds of whom are over 60. Moreover, there will be only one bill per household and no expensive register to maintain despite what the leader of the Opposition said earlier. All in all, therefore, the council tax will be fairer and easier and cheaper to administer than either the poll tax or the rates and I warmly welcome its introduction. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment is worthy of the warmest congratulations for burying the poll tax and devising what is undoubtedly a better system of raising local government revenue than any previous system.

I also warmly welcome the Government's commitment in the Gracious Speech to the national health service—not that that commitment should be in any doubt. On the basis of any objective assessment of the Government's performance during the past twelve and a half years, they have shown a very strong commitment to the national health service. By any standard, whether judged on the real-terms increase in expenditure, on the increase in the number of patients treated, on the increase in the number of nurses and doctors employed or on the shortening of waiting lists, the national health service is in a much better state and gives a much better service now than it did in May 1979. Of course, it is not perfect. From time to time things go wrong, particularly in such a large organisation as the national health service, employing as it does probably more people than any other organisation in Europe, But the deficiencies and weaknesses that occur do not excuse the disgraceful and deplorable campaign which is being run by the Labour party.

Labour's campaign is based on falsehoods and distortions which are causing worry to some of the most vulnerable people in our society. I have always believed that the Labour party is an honourable and caring party, although sometimes it is misguided. I hope that it will have second thoughts, at least about certain aspects of its campaign.

One of the main charges that the Opposition make about the health service is that it is underfunded. I am not sure what that means but if it means that more could be spent on the NHS, that is a statement of the obvious. It has

always and always will be true, and not only about the national health service, it is true about everything, for the simple reason that resources are limited and always will be.

Mr. Winnick: The hon. Gentleman makes points which will be replied to later in the debate from the Labour Back and Front Benches. Is he aware that a major credit company has sent out a leaflet telling peple that they should take various measures to safeguard themselves? It says:

"You probably find your whole way of life affected while you wait and wait to go into hospital. You might suffer irritation or embarrassment from a painful or unsightly condition. You may even be forced to take time off work."

That is from not the Labour party but a major credit company. It urges people to go private because it is aware of the long time that people have to wait for NHS treatment.

Mr. Knox: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman should quote a major credit company as gospel on an issue such as this. I should have thought that in most cases he would denounce such an organisation. Indeed, the opinion of one body does not matter very much. In any case, I think that I am right in saying that there was a bigger movement to the private health sector in 1979 when his friends were in office than has taken place at any other time.

I was talking about the limitation of resources. It is as well to remind the House that the Royal Commission on the national health service concluded that we could spend the entire gross domestic product on health and there would still be unsatisfied demand for health care. However, the real world is about determining priorities. The percentage of the GDP devoted to the national health service provides as good a measure as any of the priority which a Government give to health.

In an answer to a written parliamentary question which I received from my hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Mr. Dorrell), the Under-Secretary of State for Health, on 22 October I was told that total Government expenditure on health as a proportion of the gross domestic product was 4·70 per cent. in 1974 and 4·77 per cent. in 1979. By 1990 it had risen to 5·22 per cent. The anticipated level for this year is 5·7 per cent.

In the debate on the national health service in the House on 21 October the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) said:

"Over the lifetime of the Parliament, we shall seek to restore the underfunding . . . We shall do it next time because we did it last time."—[*Official Report*, 21 October 1991; Vol. 196, col. 673.]

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister quoted that this afternoon. But the figures show an increase in the proportion of GDP devoted to the NHS of only 0·07 per cent. when the last Labour Government were in power, compared with an increase of 0·5 per cent. of GDP between 1979 and 1990, and an anticipated further increase of 0·5 per cent. this year. That makes a total increase of about 1 per cent. under this Government.

The figures show clearly that the present Conservative Government have given higher priority to national health service spending than did their Labour predecessors. They also show that the Government have given higher priority to reducing underfunding in the national health service than did Labour. So we know what Labour did the last time. The hon. Member for Livingston has warned us that Labour will do the same again. Therefore, the NHS can expect little or nothing from a future Labour Government.

Despite the Government's reasonably good record on health spending, I personally believe that we should spend a higher proportion of our GDP on the NHS. Therefore, I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury is being generous to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health in this year's public spending round. While I accept that throwing money at problems does not necessarily solve them, it can help. If anyone doubts that, perhaps I could remind them of the £140 per person thrown at poll tax payers in the Budget this year.

Earlier this week I attended a dinner to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the vote in this House on 28 October 1971 in favour of the principle of British membership of the European Community. My passionate belief in the unity of Europe made that vote the high point of my membership of the House. Since 1971 progress on the Community has been disappointingly slow, although the establishment of the European monetary system and the Single European Act were important and significant advances.

During the past 20 years Britain's attitude to the Community has left a great deal to be desired. Too often we have opted out of negotiations about new developments in the European Community, only to have to accept at a later date decisions in which we played no part and which do not particularly suit us. Therefore, I am pleased that Britain is playing a full part in the negotiations in the intergovernmental conferences on political union and economic and monetary union.

Greater political co-operation in the Community is essential if our influence is to be felt in the world. It is becoming increasingly obvious that if the countries of the Community speak with one voice in the world they will exert more influence than if they speak with separate voices. For example, does anyone seriously believe that the Prime Minister's safe haven plan for the Kurds would have been a starter if it had been a purely British rather than a European Community initiative?

Greater economic and monetary union are also essential if Britain and her European Community partners are to ensure that they gain full advantage from the single market, which will be completed in 14 months. Despite the Government's hesitations, I am convinced that a single currency in the European Community is in the interests of Britain, in exactly the same way that a single United Kingdom currency has been in the interests of the member countries of the United Kingdom and that a single United States currency has been in the interests of the states of the USA.

Surely no one seriously suggests that California, which has a population not greatly different in size from that of Britain, would be as prosperous if it and the other American states had separate currencies, with all the obstacles that that would create for the flow of trade and other economic activity. Why should things be any different in the European Community? A single currency must be in the interests of the people of the Community, and the sooner we have it the better.

The draft treaty on economic and monetary union which was published on Monday offers to member countries the possibility of opting out of the single currency. That has been hailed as a triumph for British

[Mr. Knox]

diplomacy. But opting out of a single currency is not an option that Britain should seek to adopt. Why of the Twelve should we appear to be the only country to need that option, even if only in reserve? Opting out would be for the second rate and I do not believe that Britain is second rate, although we are perhaps somewhat lacking in self-confidence.

I should like to make two, final, brief points about the intergovernmental conferences. First, I hope that my right hon. Friends will not allow themselves to be influenced in the negotiations by scare stories about conceding sovereignty. A great deal of the substance of our supposed sovereignty has already passed from this country for reasons beyond our control. Only the form of sovereignty remains with us. The only way in which we can retrieve the substance of that sovereignty is by pooling the form with our European Community partners. United we can exert far more sovereignty than the sum total of what we can exert separately.

Secondly, there is much criticism of the democratic deficit in the European Community. I have a great deal of sympathy with that criticism. If we want to do something about the democratic deficit, we must show a greater willingness to give increased powers to the one body that can make the Community more democratic—the European Parliament. After all, it is elected by universal suffrage. Because of our long experience of democracy in this country, I have always hoped that we would play an important part in the democratisation of the Community. I hope that we can now give a lead to the Community in that respect.

6.30 pm

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Mr. Knox). Although I found some of his arguments persuasive, I do not intend to pursue them.

We have all read with great interest the proposals in the Gracious Speech. The right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), the leader of the Liberal Democratic party, made his customary argument for fixed-term Parliaments. Whatever the merits of the argument, by common consent this Government are now living on borrowed time. We had 12 years of Thatcherism, which was supposed to have cured all evils. On the contrary, in a recent book Mr. Christopher Johnson, a well-known and respected economic commentator and a Treasury adviser during some of the Thatcher years, points out that her reign achieved little. He asserts that the country

"is still suffering from the ills she set out to cure."

The right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) constantly lectured the nation about the dangers of living beyond its means, but her Government presided over the biggest spending boom in British history. In the mid-1980s people were bombarded with literature from banks, building societies and business firms imploring them to borrow and lay out money far beyond their means. The consequence of all that mismanagement is the recession and all the hardship suffered by British people, particularly in the past 18 months. Yet the Gracious Speech refers to pursuing "firm financial policies". It seems to be a case of closing the stable door after the horse has bolted.

Our public services have been shamefully run down and the blame attributed to our local authorities. There has been a marked widening of the gap between rich and poor. The introduction of the poll tax was a disaster of the first order and its successor—"the new council tax" referred to in the Gracious Speech—is likely to be equally unjust.

In the Gracious Speech the Government say:

"Action will be taken to improve quality and choice in education."

That action is vitally needed because the morale of our teachers is at an all-time low. Students are being denied state benefits during vacations and many of them, invariably from working-class homes, are quitting their courses.

The Gracious Speech also refers to improving

"the working of the economy."

Again, that is long overdue. Bankruptcies are at a record level. In the first nine months of this year more than 33,500 businesses collapsed. Every working day 200 firms fail. As Chancellor of the Exchequer, the present Prime Minister held interest rates at their highest ever for the longest ever, placing a crushing burden on British business. Home repossessions are running at a record 100,000 a year, with all the anguish and hardship that they cause.

In the Gracious Speech the Government say that they will

"develop policies to enhance the nation's health."

Yet our national health service, once the pride of the nation, is now ill equipped and underfunded, besides suffering from creeping privatisation under the guise of reform. No gimmicky patients charter can paper over the cracks.

The greatest scourge of all is the ever-escalating rise in the unemployment figures. In the Gracious Speech the Government say that they will

"maintain the conditions necessary for sustained growth."

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has told us that unemployment is a price worth paying—we heard that straight from the horses's mouth, so to speak—but unemployment is not a thing; it is made up of life upon life and person upon person whose existence is cramped and crushed by the inability to earn money and have the self-respect of working. Unemployment has risen nationwide for the 18th consecutive month and has now reached a peak of well over 2·4 million. The cost of unemployment to the Exchequer is reckoned to be £8,900 for every benefit claimant.

The cost in social and human terms is even greater. All manner of deprivation is associated with unemployment. Research has consistently shown that unemployment and poverty are linked to ill-health. The escalating crime rate is also clearly associated. Likewise, unemployment can be closely identified with the escalating divorce rates, child abuse and child battering. Yet the same Government who have created this heavy unemployment claim a commitment to family life and talk about the sanctity of children's rights. They could have fooled me.

My constituency has good communications. On the eastern seaboard it is linked to the motorway network both to the south-east and to the midlands. Yet unemployment in the Newport travel-to-work area now stands at 11·7 per cent. In my constituency 27 people compete for each vacancy. Ministers constantly lecture us about high wages being a major factor in the rise in unemployment, yet Wales, which is invariably top of the league for the number of jobless, is correspondingly

bottom of the table for wages. The real cause of our problems is that as a nation we are no longer making things. The former Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), once told us that a pound earned in the service sector was as good as a pound earned in manufacturing. Yet the strength of the two major industrial powers, Germany and Japan, has been built on the success of their manufacturing industry.

By contrast, in Britain 342,000 jobs have been lost in manufacturing since August 1991. Unless action is now taken to rebuild British manufacturing, we are doomed to a further bout of inflation and a third recession. The loss of manufacturing capacity in the early 1980s played a major part in the overheating of the economy at the end of the decade.

The motor industry provides one example. It is a vital sector of the economy, yet according to a recent publication by the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders the Government's fiscal policy is putting the whole future of the industry at risk. The vehicle market has suffered its worst decline for a decade. Car sales for the first eight months of this year were down by 22 per cent. The recession was aggravated by the Chancellor's punitive Budget. The 10 per cent. special car tax and the recent increase in VAT combined to add more than 27 per cent. to the price of a new car.

We in Wales have a vital stake in the motor industry. Our steel industry is closely linked to it and we have major component manufacturers—Ford Engines at Bridgend, Lucas Girling at Cwmbran and the new Bosch alternator plant in the vale of Glamorgan.

In his recent book, the former Secretary of State for Wales, the right hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker), pointed out that had it not been for the intervention of the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), we should have had the Toyota motor assembly plant in Newport. Instead, it was diverted to Derby, where there are more Tory marginal seats. How cynical can one get? I am sorry that the right hon. Member for Worcester did not mention the former Prime Minister's intervention this afternoon. The people of Wales are not likely to forget it and all Tory candidates in Wales should be reminded of it during the forthcoming general election.

The present Prime Minister held important offices in the Thatcher Administration and many punitive measures can be directly attributed to him, especially in his capacity as Chief Secretary to the Treasury. The freezing of child benefit for four years and the abolition of benefit for 16 and 17-year-olds are but two examples. I have already referred to the punitive interest rates for which he was responsible which did so much damage to the British economy.

The Thatcher years were a disaster for Britain. We are back where we started and people have paid with their homes, their jobs and their businesses. Now it is the principal task of the chairman of the Conservative party to try to pretend that those things never happened. He has a difficult task. The Prime Minister claims to be a modest man. After 12 years of Conservative Government, all that I can say is that he has a lot to be modest about.

6.45 pm

Mr. David Martin (Portsmouth, South): The first day of a new Session of Parliament is always interesting and has a particular flavour, even though the old Session had been consigned to its vault only a few days earlier. It is almost a feeling of renewal as we confront a new Queen's Speech. Generally, people start off being nicer to each other—that applies not only to Members on the other side of the House but to Members on this side. That is a very pleasant experience for us. The lion sits down with the lamb. It is glad confident morning again. Then we get to the afternoon, the speeches begin and the old ways quickly come back.

With reference to the economy, it has been a painful business pulling ourselves out of the difficulties into which we ran—or rather, walked—in 1987-88. Since then, two factors have been strongly in our favour. The first is the Government's firm resolution against inflation. That has meant increased unemployment—unfortunately, that is the cost of inflation and of any effective method of eradicating inflation. We all know from our constituency experience how distressing it is for people directly affected and for those who fear that they might be affected.

In Portsmouth now, as in the early 1980s, unemployment has been, and still is, rising. Fortunately, the Government have produced policies to improve the employability of individuals through training, retraining and the more efficient operation of jobcentres, job clubs and executive job clubs. All that is important, and it is being carried out efficiently in Portsmouth.

The Government know, as do the recent converts among Opposition Members to much Government thinking, that in the end it is the strength of the private sector that counts. Businesses, large and small, expanding and employing people, will create the jobs to put the unemployed back to work. That was the experience in the mid-1980s and it will be so again in the 1990s, provided that we can keep Conservative Governments, with their ideas for improving the public sector. The necessary conditions are lower public spending in relation to gross domestic product, as envisaged in the Gracious Speech, low taxation and lack of bureaucratic interference. The jobs will surely follow if we pursue those policies.

The second factor favouring swifter progress out of the recession has been the negligible number of strikes and the small amount of other industrial inaction. Strikes and so-called industrial action—in fact, it was inaction—dogged the Governments of the 1970s and slowed the recovery of the 1980s until a new culture, based on sensible new laws, took a proper hold.

It is an immense advance to be able to pull an economy from recession into growth without all the hassle of incomes policies, pay pauses, pay freezes and all the other paraphernalia which now—thank goodness—seem like ancient history. It is important that people should bear that strongly in mind, especially those who will vote for the first time in the general election. Such people do not remember—indeed, they never knew—what it was like to wonder almost daily, especially in winter, whether the ordinary citizen would be held to ransom in one aspect of life or another.

Would the lights turn on? Would the heating be gone? Would the trains or the buses be running? Would the post arrive? Would petrol be available without having to queue

[Mr. David Martin]

and wish that one had been kinder to the local petrol station manager over the years, so that he would give one a gallon or two although well back in the queue?

All those fears and insecurities have virtually gone. However, I still recall them, because even now I still use candles from the boxes I had stored during those difficult years. That dates me almost as much as remembering when Paul Anka was top of the hit parade with "Diana", or Brigitte Bardot first leapt into the air advertising Air France.

We all have memories of those far-off days of union warfare against the public. I remember with nostalgia the encouragement to share a bath, if not a bed. That was a moment in history when patriotism and passion could be unequivocally combined. It was not only Queen Victoria who was encouraged to "do it for England".

The Labour leader is anxious to jettison any inconvenient ballast in the face of storm clouds—the storm clouds of a general election. However, under a Labour Government there is no doubt that militant unionism would be back. I do not pretend for one moment that the majority of the Labour party wants such a result. It would not happen on day one of a new Labour Government, but, after those first days of sweetness and light and brotherly love, the laws of the past 10 years against union militancy —laws that have been painfully and courageously erected —would be dismantled. Worse still, those laws would not be enforced.

Under such a Labour Government, we would have a repeat of the images that appeared on the television screens in the late 1970s, which I remember well. Then, apparently, impotent Labour Ministers would virtually throw up their hands while asking what they could do in the face of the grave difficulties that the public were experiencing. We do not need any reminding that those experiences led to the election of a Conservative Government in 1979, who have remained in power ever since.

When the election comes, the electorate will seek a pledge from the Labour party—it will face a serious challenge. Many people will want to know how a Labour Government would deal with the pay-off to the unions, because the unions would claim that they had helped the Labour party considerably to get back into government. The answer to that question will influence much of the voting at the general election.

The citizens charter is a good example of the way in which times have changed—it is a monument to the new climate of the 1990s. The transformed state of industrial relations and the major reforms undertaken to our public utilities and services form the essential background to the charter. The proposals in that charter would have been met with a horse laugh and sheer incredulity in the 1960s and 1970s. No one would have believed that one could produce such improvements, given the size of the then unions and the massive public sector.

Over many years, the Government have returned much of the public sector to the private sector—where it should have been in the first place. I expect that those changes will remain even though the Labour party has promised that some services will be renationalised. However, the cost of returning such services to the public sector would be so great that I do not believe that a Labour Government would choose that action should they ever have the chance. Any such attempts would be totally impracticable and Labour Back Benchers would soon discover that their Chancellor would say "No, no, no" to any such fanciful schemes.

People no longer believe that the citizens charter is impractical, and it does not cause a hollow laugh. Instead, people ask whether it goes far enough. I hope that it will go further when experience shows what success can be achieved by concentrating seriously on improving public services. We must, as far as possible, achieve the same standard of service in the public sector as we expect when we walk into a shop operated in the private sector. That shopkeeper is interested in our business, because it is his livelihood and he must make a profit to keep it. We must transfer that discipline to the public sector.

Of course, many people employed in the public sector work as hard as they can and have all the right attitudes. We must make that practice the norm, just as it is in the best businesses in the private sector.

The Government face the challenge to introduce a system of local government taxation that proves fair and acceptable. In common with the community charge, the crucial test of the council tax will be the amount that people are expected to pay. That should be the bottom line of any reform. The words of Macaulay always hang over Ministers when they attempt to introduce a new tax—they were there when the Government attempted to reform local government tax through the community charge. He said:

> "Unjust and absurd taxation to which people are accustomed is often borne far more willingly than the most reasonable impost which is new."

I remember that that tendency dogged any new tax that was proposed by previous Labour Governments. I remember SET—selective employment tax—which came and went rather quickly. I also thought of those words many times during the community charge saga.

We must get the amount right, and it must be calculated on as fair a basis as possible. No one likes paying taxes, whether they are local or central. However, the amounts must be right and people must be made aware that their contribution is made in accordance with their ability to pay. The system must be perceived to be fair: then support for it will follow.

The Opposition claim that the council tax is a new rating system, but that is a hollow claim. It is difficult to identify the type of property tax that would be introduced by the Labour party. I should be interested to learn how the Labour party distinguishes what it proposes from what the Government are proposing. I wish good luck to those hon. Friends responsible for the legislation.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert Key): Does my hon. Friend acknowledge that there is another partner in the enterprise —those who spend all the money raised by local authorities as well as the enormous grants by which taxpayers subsidise them? It is important that local authorities recognise that they have a responsibility for the new tax. It is their responsibility to maintain spending at a reasonable level, and it should not grow anything like as fast and by as much as it has in the past few years.

Mr. Martin: That is at the root of what happened during the first year of the community charge. Local councils pushed up their expenditure to such an extent that

the gap that had to be met by the community charge was greater than that that had to be met by the rates. If that matter had been addressed with greater effect, the problems with the amounts charged would not have arisen.

Under the new system, there must be an obligation on local councils to ensure that their expenditure is kept within reasonable limits and takes account not only of the local taxpayer but of the national taxpayer who has to meet so much of the local bill.

I also welcome the commitment to establish a review of local government structure in England. Every time we have such a review, it is claimed that the result will lead to cheaper and better local government, which is closer to the people. However, we often find that it is difficult to put such reforms into effect. In 1974, the reforms that were introduced met with disapproval from many people from the start. I accept that any change meets with some disapproval, but the changes made in that era are still met with widespread disapproval.

I am pleased that those changes are now to be reconsidered, and I hope that that will lead to Portsmouth's independence from Hampshire county council. That would be the best result for Portsmouth, in common with other major cities. Those cities should return to their former county borough status so that they are perceived to be closer to their local people and are able to make the decisions that relate to them. I have absolutely no doubt that the people of Portsmouth will make their views well known to Ministers during the review. I want to make it absolutely clear that this is where Portsmouth stands on the matter.

The Queen's Speech also refers to the regeneration of our cities, a crucial aspect of which is the continuing concentration on improved housing in Portsmouth and other great cities. I agree with the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) about the importance of this subject, but I do not agree with her solutions. On several occasions during my four and a half years here I have discussed this matter. It is not the shortage of homes in which people can live satisfactorily that is at the root of the problem. We have more than enough homes in the public and private sectors: the problem is the mismatch between the number of places in which people can decently live and their availability to those who need them.

We do not have this trouble with the supply and demand of food and clothing—the other two basics—but we do have it with shelter. The crucial difference in the case of shelter has been the virtual eradication of private rented accommodation. If, since 1945, there had been Clothing Acts to discourage or suppress Marks and Spencer, C and A and so on, to tell them what prices to charge and which customers to keep; if there had been Food Acts to shackle and control the operations of Sainsbury, Tesco, Asda and the rest, the hon. Member for Preston would have bitterly complained that the Government were not doing enough about queues for council food or council clothing. Of course councils would not be able to cope in such circumstances; nor should they be expected to cope with the demand for shelter.

Bed-and-breakfast accommodation is not the solution for families; it is short-term emergency accommodation only. In the 1990s it must be discontinued.

Thus far, everyone agrees, but at this point agreement between the two sides of the House breaks down. Never in my lifetime have Governments or councils coped satisfactorily with the queues for council housing—not even when tower blocks and flat-roofed maisonettes replaced prefabs. Many people were reluctant to leave their prefabs; much of what replaced them was built in the same sort of jerry way. In the 1960s and 1970s, the accent was on numbers. Flimsy construction did not matter: nor did the destruction of communities. People had to be given state-of-the-art homes—that was the solution to everything.

Unfortunately, this was not the solution. Such accommodation now requires a great deal of expenditure on rebuilding, refurbishment and even demolition. Tower blocks were a well intended attempt to sort out the queues for housing, but they failed in that attempt.

I remind the House that the programme "Cathy Come Home" was made a generation ago, not when my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley was Prime Minister. Years of Labour government followed it. It is difficult to take advice on housing from the Opposition, given their record while in government.

We cannot sort out the problem merely by injecting more and more local and taxpayers' money. The Government have rightly begun to expect councils to adopt an enabling role in the provision of social housing. We may not be able to do anything more about the Rent Acts yet, but we tried in the most recent housing legislation to free lettings under those Acts. That will have an effect, as will some other initiatives that I intend to mention.

The enabling role of local authorities is crucial. It puts aside the idea that councils alone must provide housing. Instead, they must work with whatever means are to hand—housing associations or the private rented sector. Councils should be able to winkle out housing for people who need it. If homes are under-used or empty, they should make it possible to occupy them. If this attitude is adopted—it already is by forward-looking councils—we shall get to the bottom of the problem.

I welcome three initiatives, the first of which is the pilot schemes encouraging private owners to let homes through housing associations as managing agents. That is a good start; if we cannot repeal the Rent Acts so as to free housing, like food and clothing, we can at least use housing associations as managing agents to give people the confidence that they can let their houses for a guaranteed period and for a reasonable rate of return, knowing that they will be able to get back their homes at the end of a fixed term. I hope that the scheme will be successful, and will spread throughout the country as soon as possible. I read the other day that the first tenant to take up accommodation under such a scheme is pleased with it.

The second initiative offers encouragement to let empty flats over shops. Twenty-five million pounds has been made available, and local authorities can bid for it to develop schemes to this end. Housing associations would run the scheme. In Portsmouth, there are many empty properties, over shops and in private housing—indeed, most housing there is private. Many people would use some of their accommodation for letting if only they were constructively allowed to do so. This is a good scheme.

The housing investment programme is to be distributed on the criteria of how efficiently councils have managed their housing stock and of how well they have executed their enabling powers. That is a great improvement. It is important to know how well councils have carried out their responsibilities under the legislation.

[Mr. Martin]

The housing problem desperately needs maximum co-operation from all the political parties. It is no good re-fighting the old battles—as the hon. Member for Preston did—over the sale of council houses. In any case, I understand that that is now Labour party policy. The sale of council flats should also be more encouraged.

Official Labour party policy will soon catch up with what we Conservatives do, which is why I strongly urge the Government to take their courage in both hands to mobilise the private sector in an effort to provide more rented housing.

There is much to be done in the 1990s, and I have no doubt that the Prime Minister is the man to lead the Government during that time. Much of the world is already moving in the direction marked out by my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley; our example has been adopted by many formerly left-wing countries. Even Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen have concluded as much.

We are flattered by the Opposition's adoption of so many of our policies, but when it comes to the election, people will be able to distinguish the real thing from the imitation which has been concocted from an abandonment of principles in an attempt to fool enough people for one election. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is welcome to go the whole five years if he wants to, and I have no doubt that, when he presses the button, the Government will be re-elected for another term.

7.9 pm

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): I listened with great interest to the speeches of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. Naturally enough, I listened specifically for references to one of the greatest problems that has been affecting this Parliament for a considerable time. I heard no reference to it. Perhaps it was the din or the fact that people are becoming excited as we approach not only the beginning of a new Parliament but the end of a new Parliament. I still hope that, at some time during the debate on the Queen's Speech, I will hear a reference to an issue that has resulted in more than 3,500 dead people and the expenditure of £2 billion a year, caused enormous suffering and disruption, blighted the legal system of this country, and brought the Government before the bar of the European Court on numerous occasions and caused them to derogate from it. I could go on ad infinitum.

On that basis, one might hope that there would have been a little reference to that problem in those major speeches. Perhaps the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition in their wisdom decided that certain issues transcend the party haggling that goes on across this Floor and that some issues are too serious to be dealt with in a contribution to the debate on the Queen's Speech. If so, I do them a substantial injustice. If not, I hope that my scepticism does not turn into cynicism too soon.

The hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin), who spoke so well, referred to the beginning of a new Parliament. It is a new Session of Parliament but I prefer to see it as the beginning of the end of this Parliament. In many ways it is the end of an era of what is and will be known as Thatcherism. I shall not comment on that. It could well be the end of a period when one-party government was the norm. It may be the beginning of the end of that too. It is certainly the end of an era when everything in political terms looked cast in concrete and permanency. However, when we consider what is happening throughout the world, we see that that is not the case. Echoes are reaching us from Madrid, and the whole world hopes that that ancient problem will be tackled and solved. We have seen what has happened in Germany and Russia and the advances that have taken place in South Africa. We have even seen changes in Vietnam's approach. Yet, in the words of Winston Churchill:

"The dreary steeples of Fermanagh and Tyrone still are haggling about their ancient quarrel".

We can smile when we consider the matter in those terms.

The only question that I wish to pose tonight is whether the political parties involved—that means all of us, including the Government, the Opposition, my party, the Unionist parties, the Liberal and Social Democrats, the Scottish Nationalists, Plaid Cymru and everyone who enters the Chamber, as well as the parties that sit in Dublin—have the will to create a political solution to a fundamental political problem. That is the essence of the Northern Irish problem as it affects us as legislators. It is not good enough for Prime Ministers and Leaders of the Opposition to ignore a fundamental issue that has faced us for 21 years. We must realise that that is the key question. If politics and the political process mean anything to us, it is the solving of political problems. If we do not do that, we are not facing up to our responsibilities, we are not in a position to pontificate to anyone else, and we are shirking what we have been elected to do. We are shirking our roles of government if we are in Government, opposition if we are in Opposition and spokesmen if we are in minority parties.

Are the Government or the Opposition content to let that problem simmer away on the back burner? Is Parliament content to allow the problem to seep over unresolved into a new century, or will the last anachronism of Europe finally be solved in a positive, creative way by those of us responsible for solving it? That is our challenge.

Mr. Frank Cook: I count the hon. Gentleman as a friend. He knows of my attempts to try to understand the so-called "Irish issue". Is my hon. Friend—if I may use that term—sure that a solution put forward in this House would be accepted in Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic?

Mr. Mallon: I thank the hon. Member for that legitimate and serious question. This House has a role to play because Northern Ireland exists under the Government. The House, individual hon. Members and political parties have a role to play, as have the political parties in the Republic of Ireland and the Government of the Republic of Ireland, who have a central role. However, our role is more central, even on the most banal basis—the £2 billion of the Government's money that goes into that bottomless abyss year after year. Soldiers from this country stand at look-out posts and are shot. For what? People from this country are suffering the embarrassment of it all and that is why the primary responsibility lies here and should never be shirked.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there should be a Select Committee of this House devoted to the affairs of Northern Ireland?

Mr. Mallon: If the hon. Gentleman asks me whether I agree that the Irish issue should be pushed upstairs and taken off the Floor of the House, I certainly do not. The matter must be resolved on the Floor of the House and within this forum. I see why many hon. Members on both sides of the House would want it to be pushed upstairs out of sight and out of mind. That would be a substantial problem for everyone concerned with the north of Ireland. If the hon. Gentleman says that there is a device whereby legislation could be scrutinised more efficiently, I would look at that.

Mr. Winnick: Does my hon. Friend agree that the British-Irish parliamentary body, on which we both have the honour to serve, at least provides a forum where British and Irish parliamentarians can meet twice a year? Does he also agree that, although the violence of the provisional IRA and others who claim with no legitimacy to speak for the Irish people as a whole, is sickening, it is equally disgusting, disgraceful and sickening to see those who claim to be loyal to the Unionist cause killing, tit for tat, for no reason other than that people happen to be Catholic?

Mr. Mallon: The inter-parliamentary body has been successful. Last week there was a successful visit by members of one of those committees to Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. It did not sit in the hallowed tombs of Stormont or Leinster House, but went out to the border areas, saw the problems and listened to those involved. It was a remarkable education for all of us, including me, who has lived there for many years.

The hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) knows my views on violence from whatever source. Let those involved in violence—who plan it, carry it out or are in any way responsible for it—realise the damage that they are doing to people living in the district. They damage not only the unfortunate victims and their families, and those touched in an immediate way by the violence, but the entire community. Such violence saps hope and resilience out of a community, and induces despair. As the rest of Europe and the world progresses, are we to be left in a quagmire of despair at the end of another parliamentary Session, another era and another century? Is it too much to hope, ask or even start demanding that those who exercise authority in respect of the problem—those sitting in Government, whether here or in the Republic of Ireland —start to solve that problem? We should at least be able to start anew with some element of hope.

There are no excuses left for me or anyone in my position, for Government or for Opposition. Some people try to use the escape hatch of saying that the problem is a religious one, but it is not, although there are substantial religious overtones. It is not a socio-economic problem, although poverty exacerbates it. It is not an ethnic problem, although differences of identity are involved. It is simply and solely a political problem which politicians, political parties and Governments must set about solving through the political process. If we do not do that, we are abdicating responsibility and refusing to fulfil our primary role—to tackle and solve problems of a substantial nature. If we do not begin to address the problem, we shall be doing irreparable damage to our political profession, which I greatly respect. We shall be debasing and demeaning it, and allowing people involved in violence, thuggery and gangsterism to usurp the role of elected representatives.

The question I pose is the one that I asked at the beginning of my speech: do those in government and opposition have the courage to set about creating a new beginning to bring about peace, political stability, and an end to the tensions between Ireland and Britain, and can they bring the beginnings of hope for my constituents and the people in the north of Ireland? We shall answer that question; we shall not ignore it when it crops up. When the time is right to speak about it we shall do so. The time was right for the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition to do so today, but they did not. Out of sight is not out of mind; the problem will not go away, but must be solved. It is our job to do so.

7.25 pm

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): I shall not follow the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) who spoke about Ireland, because I am not qualified to do so, except to say that Ireland recently gave us the best rugby match in the world cup. Many years ago I spent several happy hours playing rugby against and with the London Irish and other Irish teams of both Catholics and Protestants. We played and fought hard, and it is sad to reflect that the plethora of political parties to which the hon. Member referred seems unable to produce the good will, fellowship and spirit that prevailed in those days.

I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker) who so skilfully moved the Loyal Address. He and I have been friends for many years; we were Young Conservatives together—it seems like almost 100 years ago—and since then we have remained friends. I have increasingly admired his remarkable ability. In my parliamentary experience, I do not think that there is anybody with such quick political acumen. As one who served as a junior Minister in his Department many years ago, I know of no one as good at creating a team spirit among colleagues. He will be missed from the Chamber and I shall miss him personally.

I shall confine my remarks to one aspect of the Queen's Speech, the citizens charter, which is important. Historically we were brought up to believe that the customer was always right. During the war there were queues of people docilely waiting while rations were doled out. If we add to that the natural British subservience and our reluctance to complain, we realise the bleak position of the time, which to some extent continues. We then experienced post-war austerity under gloomy Sir Stafford Cripps, with ever increasing demands for higher standards. We sometimes responded to those demands with excessively bureaucratic consumerism; quangos were set up, the sole effect of which was not so much to help the citizen but to stifle industry, particularly small industry.

I am sorry to say to Opposition Members that since the war we have been cursed with the wretched socialist philosophy that work is for the benefit of employees, not consumers, and employees come first, while customers come second or last. The return of free enterprise and healthy competition has changed all that. However, I must make the criticism that in recent years, despite some improvement, we have faced another dangerous new

[Sir Anthony Grant]

philosophy in the business world, that what one can get away with is justified. I condemn that philosophy. It has become fashionable to skate just within the law.

I spent much of my working life in the City of London and was brought up to believe that my word was my bond, which was the traditional philosophy. I am bound to say that if someone in the City today were to say that his word was his bond, one would be well advised to take his bond. It is not just one side of our industrial affairs that must be rectified. Nationalised industries and so-called state enterprises are still the most ghastly and still give the worst service.

When dealing with staff at any British Rail terminal booking office, one would think that they did not want to sell a ticket, so reluctant are they. I think that the standard of service given by British Rail staff at any terminal would be bettered by that given by the Prison Officers Association in somewhere like Brixton prison. I know that one receives better service at Littlehey prison in my constituency than at any British Rail terminal.

Reference has been made to the national health service. In many ways the service within the NHS has been deplorable. Opposition Members should take note that the service was particularly appalling in 1979 when they were in office. In my constituency we will never forget the time when, due to action taken by the Confederation of Health Service Employees at the famous Addenbrookes hospital, consultants' records were seized, appointments and operations were cancelled and wards had to be closed. We should not listen for one moment to criticism from the Opposition on standards in the NHS which have improved dramatically over the years but which still leave a great deal to be desired. That is not true of the clinical treatment of patients, which is superb. At Papworth and Addenbrookes hospital in my constituency patients receive fine, top-class treatment from surgeons, physicians and experts—better than anywhere else in the world. People come from all over the world to receive the treatment, but the service falls down in its administrative and ancillary sectors.

The way in which NHS patients are sometimes treated is unreasonable. I cite the example of a member of my own family. A little while ago, I had occasion to visit an elderly relative who was dying in hospital. It was not in my constituency, but it was a good hospital, and I have no criticisms of the treatment that she received. However, when I asked my relative whether there was anything she needed, she pointed out that the light bulb above her bed was broken. She had asked a nurse about it, but could not get anything done. When I spoke to the nurse, she told me that she could not get a light bulb from the caretaker, and the ward sister told me that she had also met with no success. I told her that I would go and see the caretaker for a light bulb, and would even fit it myself. The sister was not sure whether he would release a light bulb to me, but I said that I would try.

Off I went into some dungeon, where I found some cloth-capped oik, who was filling in his football coupon. With great difficulty, I managed to persuade him to give me a light bulb and to fit one for another patient. That kind of poor service is disgraceful and intolerable when one is dealing with elderly people. It is the kind of poor service that lets the NHS down. It is not the fault of the people at the top, surgeons, or nurses, but of staff further down the ladder who need shaking up. That is why the citizens charter is vital. It is a relevant and most necessary concept for the 1990s. It would be wonderful if it were the prelude to that long-forgotten quality known as good manners.

If the citizens charter is to be effective, it must have powerful teeth. We must be careful that it does not provide another excuse for yet more litigation. When that legislation comes before the House, we must ensure that it is tightly drawn, because we would not want an endless series of court cases to arise from it.

The charter should not only deal with contractual obligations, and serve merely as an extension of the Sale of Goods Act 1979, but protect the citizen's other fundamental rights and provide remedies in tort as well as in contract. One of the greatest curses affecting society today is that of noise, which increasingly makes life intolerable for many. I refer, for example, to the amplification of electronic so-called music, and the consequences of the remorseless growth of the internal combustion engine. The noise problem is growing worse and worse and is physically affecting many people, and is something that the citizens charter should address.

Likewise—and here I declare an interest as president of the Guild of Experienced Motorists—we must protect the individual's right to stay alive and uninjured on our roads and motorways, and particularly on the M25 and on the M11 in my constituency. As I have told Ministers straight out before, the smug comparison of figures with other European countries is of no comfort to the bereaved or to the permanently injured.

The concept of the citizens charter is vital and ought to be pursued with all vigour. It is a concept that stems from the enthusiasm of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, whom I beg to continue pressing his Ministers hard to implement it. The citizens charter will make a great and overdue contribution to the quality of life of many if it is vigorously put into effect.

Today's Queen's Speech was the first that my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) has heard as Prime Minister. As others of my right hon. and hon. Friends said, it will undoubtedly be the first of many. I am immensely proud to have him as a fellow Cambridgeshire Member of Parliament. In the short time that he has been at No. 10 Downing street, he has transformed many of our affairs for the better. He is very much a man of the 1990s and beyond, and deserves the wholehearted support of not only the House but the nation as a whole.

7.33 pm

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) seems to have doubts about the good work that could be carried out by a Select Committee. There is little enough time to devote to debates about Northern Ireland on the Floor of the House, and perhaps the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh is labouring under a misunderstanding. If such a Select Committee came into being, the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh, like the rest of us, would be able to call and to question Ministers to find out what is going on. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman, as much as any right hon. or hon. Member, would welcome such an opportunity.

Today, we heard the last Gracious Speech before the general election and there were clear signs in the House this afternoon that the election campaign is now well and truly under way after several false starts earlier this year. It will be a long campaign, lasting for up to eight months according to the Prime Minister.

Every right hon. and hon. Member will have an interest in particular legislation mentioned in the Gracious Speech and Members of Parliament representing Ulster constituencies naturally take a special interest in the commitment to defeat terrorism in Northern Ireland and to deal with prison disorder. I wonder whether the latter Bill will be confined to Great Britain or will be extended to the whole of the United Kingdom.

Right hon. and hon. Members will also hold different views on the order of priority and importance of the proposed legislation. However, given that the Prime Minister will be taking part in the Maastricht conference later this year, no one should be in any doubt about which of the decisions to be taken during the lifetime of this Session will be of the greatest import, and have the biggest consequences for right hon. and hon. Members, Parliament, and the people of this country for many years ahead.

The Gracious Speech referred to the Government's pursuit, within the framework of the exchange rate mechanism, of

"firm financial policies designed to reduce inflation further and maintain the conditions necessary for sustained growth."

We should not need the straitjacket of the ERM to achieve that aim, because it should be a basic requirement of any elected Government. I listened with interest to the Prime Minister's comments on that aspect and to his remark that the country needs sound money. What is any Government elected for, if not to provide sound money? Inflation is simply the theft of people's work and savings. The Prime Minister said that he wants to retain our national identity and that, in his opinion—presumably he was speaking for his Cabinet and party as well—a single European currency could be a recipe for disaster unless certain conditions are satisfied.

The question before us is far more fundamental. It is one that has engaged the attention of Parliament for centuries; that of control and supply. It is the question of the control of the nation's wealth and economy. It took Parliament a very long time to wrest that control from the Crown and we forget at our peril the battles that were fought in that respect by our spiritual forerunners in this place.

It is no secret that I do not love the concept of a European superstate. I never have done and I have found no reason, since first entering the House 18 years ago, to change my mind. If we do not control our own money supply and the other factors that influence our national economy, someone else will. I never was too happy about someone else being in charge of my household budget. I prefer it to remain within the control of my wife and myself and to abide by the good biblical teaching on that particular question.

We will surrender at our peril control over our own economy and the value of our currency. That control should remain within the House. Only if we retain control of these things will we retain our national identity. Without control of the nation's finances, we will rapidly find that we shall be dictated to by someone else, not only on whether a railway will be built but on every facet of the decisions that the House takes.

If hon. Members doubt what I say, I suggest that they take a few days off, go across to Northern Ireland and look at the political situation in the Province and the way in which it is run. They will then understand what political powerlessness is and how corrosive that is in a community. The House should learn from what it has inflicted on that Province. If hon. Members have not taken the time to do that, unlike the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant), it is time that they improved their education.

It is impossible to sign up in principle to a united European superstate and then escape the consequences; because those consequences are inevitable, there is no escape. The decision is whether we want to submerge ourselves within that state and submit to the rule of others. As we are grossly outnumbered, it would be to the rule of others.

There are those who will say to me, as they will say on many occasions in the next few weeks and months, "What about the fact that we simply cannot survive on our own?" That is the greatest insult that can be offered to the nation and its people. The folk who say that have not considered the economic miracle of Germany and the even greater economic miracle of Japan, the colossus that bestrides the world. There is no good reason why this nation cannot do as well as they have done, other than the mismanagement of our affairs from which we have suffered for so many years. The nation has tremendous natural and human resources and if they are properly directed, applied and motivated, they will give the results that we have seen in those two nations.

The other evening, I listened to a Conservative Member of Parliament speaking on television—I cannot remember who it was. He said that there were 15 or 20 Conservatives who were totally against Europe and who would always be of that mind, and that about the same number were totally committted to Europe. In other words, about 30 or 40 people in the Conservative party were committted either for or against and had closed minds, but the rest of the party was somewhere in the middle. I ask those in the middle whether, when the vote comes and they consider the issues, they will follow their conscience or be driven, by the Whips, into the Lobby that they should not be in.

Only the Liberal Democrats seem to have no divisions in their ranks. They decided long ago that they cannot manage the country—if they had not, they would not be taking the attitude that they are now taking. All the other parties know that they have divisions in their ranks. The Conservative party cracks are perhaps more apparent than the Labour party ones. I say to the country at large—although, as most of the gentlemen of the press have departed, I doubt that many will read my words—that Labour Members who are present know of the divisions beneath the thin coat of paper that has been laid over their European policy. I pray God that all those divisions will surface in a solemn and cohesive manner across the House and I will then again have hope for my country and its future.

7.44 pm

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clwyd, North-West): I add to the tributes to my right hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker) whose elegant and delightful speech captivated the House. For 30 years, my right hon. Friend has represented a Conservative tradition that I have always tried to follow. I had the pleasure of serving under him when he was Secretary of State for Wales and seeing how well he was able to apply in practice those Conservative traditions. I have with me a copy of his excellent book, price £16·99, published by Bloomsbury. I get no commission for this puff, but in the light of the interesting speech that we have just heard from the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross), I should like to quote from the book. It concerns Europe, which will be the subject of my speech.

Speaking of my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), the former Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend says, quite categorically:

"She got it wrong on Europe. This was partly because of her patriotic feelings and her reluctance to give up sovereignty. Yet sovereignty is no longer that relevant. The world is so interlinked. We give up sovereignty on defence to belong to NATO and on trade to be part of the European Community. It is to our advantage.

The prospect of European monetary union and a single currency has upset some Tory MPs. It should not do so. My children will see a united Europe and a European currency. It is only the timing which is in doubt. What has been done will lead inevitably to greater conformity in Europe's economic performance, on inflation, wage levels, investment. Once that is achieved a single currency and union will be easier to agree."

This is the last time that I shall be speaking in the debate on the Address. I made my maiden speech in the same debate very nearly 27 years ago, and I spoke then, as I shall speak now, about Britain's relations with Europe. I have never before quoted myself, but perhaps I can break my rule for this one last time. I said:

"I had the privilege of working closely"

with the then right hon. Member for Stechford, now Lord Jenkins of Hillhead, and with the then right hon. Member for Gloucester, now Lord Diamond, on what I called

"the great enterprise with which the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for Bexley (Mr. Heath) will always be associated . . . In that great enterprise there were political ideals . . . the vision of nations living together in a new and better way."—[*Official Report*, 10 November 1964; Vol. 701, c. 890-91.]

Many things have changed in 27 years. Britain is now a member of the European Community, but there are still people who complain that they were never told that there was a political dimension to our membership—what utter rot! What nonsense to talk about there having been no debate on these issues. No issue has been more thoroughly and exhaustively debated in our political life. It has not been a very good debate, and that is because all too many of the opponents of Europe, who recently took to calling themselves the Bruges group until that collapsed in public ridicule and who now call themselves Euro-sceptics, insist on reducing every debate to an argument for or against membership when that question was settled a long time ago.

I know that those people are now talking about the need to enlarge the Community rather than to strengthen it, but no one believes that that is what they really want. Are they suggesting, for example, that free movement of labour should swiftly extend to all the countries of eastern Europe, or that east European textiles or foodstuffs should have unregulated access to our markets without any protection for our producers? Of course they are not.

These people call themselves pro-European, but what kind of Europe do they want? Do they want a free trade area? Quite apart from the fact that they are the first to complain about the flood of imports from the European Community, how can they maintain that a free trade area can work properly without rules governing free trade and competition and institutions—the Commission if need be—to enforce and adapt those rules? Furthermore—this is what matters more to me—what possible contribution to greater security could be made to an increasingly balkanised continent by loose co-operation between fully sovereign states, each jealously clinging to its right of veto and to the right, in the last resort, to invade or bomb its neighbours if they become sufficiently annoying?

The so-called European sceptics are not European at all. They want to weaken the European Community and, if possible, to destroy it. That is the policy that Harold Macmillan allowed Reggie Maudling to toy with in 1960, and a hideous failure it was. Harold Macmillan was quick enough to draw the conclusion that we could not beat them, so we had better join them as soon as we could. It is just the same today. To imagine that we British can stop the other 11 member states from going ahead with the steady—it is somewhat erratic—progress towards monetary, economic and eventually political union is the most foolish sort of daydreaming. It was brilliantly described by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence at Blackpool earlier this month, when he spoke of somebody living in a world of his own in which he had great influence.

Of course we can opt out of the process of integration. Of course we can refuse to take part in the agreement on a single currency. We can settle for the second rank if we want to. Personally, I will fight against it as long as I have political breath in my body. What we cannot do, and it is downright dishonest for any politician to pretend that we can, is to stop the other 11 from going ahead without us, and to blather on about using our veto.

Any fool can see that the other 11 could sign a new treaty among themselves, leaving us out. The personal charm of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the diplomatic skills of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary have seemingly averted that for the time being, although in practice there are already two ranks in the European Commuity—for the exchange rate mechanism and for the abolition of frontier controls—and in both cases, I am sorry to say, we are already in the second rank.

Shall we never learn? I thought that we had finished with that sort of nonsense when my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister pledged that we would play our part in the centre of Europe. That is where we must be. It is far more important to uphold Britain's long-term vital interests in Europe than to buy off a potential revolt by the irreconcilable anti-Europeans in the Conservative party.

There is indeed talk of right hon. and hon. Friends who might be ready to put their anti-European convictions before their party loyalties and to vote against any move towards European monetary union. I do not for one moment question their absolute right to do so, although I feel entitled to say that, for the most part, they are the ones who most stridently proclaim their party loyalty.

I must make it clear that there are quite as many of my hon. Friends who came into the Conservative party because it was—I believe that it still is—the party of

Europe. We are as entitled to put our European convictions first as are the so-called Euro-sceptics. Moreover, unlike the anti-Europeans, who have nowhere else to go, our views are consistent with what has become, I am glad to say, a consensus that stretches right across the parties in the Chamber.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Mr. Knox), I attended the dinner earlier this week to mark the 20th anniversary of the vote on Second Reading of what was then the European Communities Bill. In that vote, 69 Labour Members, including the then chairman of the Parliamentary Labour party, defied a three-line Whip to vote for the Conservative proposal of membership of the European Community.

I came into politics and joined the Conservative party because I wanted my country to take its proper place in Europe, and because I took the Conservative party to be the party of Europe, as it has been since 1962. Although I have been deselected by my constituency party because of the minor role which I played in the events that brought my right hon. Friend the present Prime Minister to office, I have pledged myself to work as hard as I can for a Conservative victory, both nationally and in my constituency. However, if some people on the right of the Conservative party are to start threatening to vote against the Government if they go too far down the road towards European unity, I must tell them that there are those at the other end of the party who feel equally strongly, and that we are prepared, if need be, to go equally far in support of our convictions. What is more, we know that it is we who are in the main stream of both British and European politics, and that the future belongs to us and to Europe.

7.56 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): I wish to associate myself with the remarks that have been made about our late colleagues, Alick Buchanan-Smith, Richard Holt and my dear friend George Buckley. They all brought their individual personalities to the House, and most certainly they all left their mark. They will certainly be missed.

A section of the Gracious Speech says that the Government

"continue to prepare for the privatisation of the British Railways Board and the British Coal Corporation."

The Government have been doing that since 1984. We have seen a rapid decline in the coal industry. The industry has been savaged without any thought for the social consequences. In 1986, in a report on the coal industry, the Select Committee on Energy referred to the dangers. It warned that the rundown was too rapid and that insufficient thought had been given to the social consequences. Since then, those consequences have been extremely severe. In 1986, it was the men over 50 years of age who were mainly affected. They were made redundant, and few of them have worked again.

In the period since 1984, miners' homes that were formerly owned by British Coal have been sold off to private property speculators. In Castleford, there is an estate of about 240 houses, 48 per cent. of which are empty. The policy of the property owner has been not to occupy the houses when they have become empty, because he purchased them for the price of the land. Hardly any repairs have been undertaken and miners have to live in squalid conditions.

Miners and their widows are being pestered by British Coal to sell off their concessionary fuel entitlements for a small sum. There are miners who spent their working lives in the coal industry who are suffering from emphysema, a dreaded disease which is extremely disabling. Many of these men are unable to put coal on the fire. They can hardly lift a cup to their lips. They have been told clearly by British Coal that, if the local authority were able to move them out of their houses into houses where they would not have to handle solid fuel, they would face the loss of their concessionary fuel entitlement. That is what has been happening. Those have been the social consequences during the period to which I have referred.

Consultants at Pontefract general infirmary have made statements to the effect that some of the unfortunate people to whom I have referred are receiving substandard treatment because of insufficient finances to enable doctors to provide the treatment that is needed.

The Select Committee on Energy reported in July. I shall quote a passage that serves to highlight the position now:

"The main conclusion of this part of our Report is that a long-term view needs to be taken of the value of having a substantial indigenous coal industry offering secure supplies at stable prices, and of coal's place among other fuels in providing for the country's long-term energy needs . . . The market may in the event be effective in reflecting some of the long-term considerations, but we do not believe it can be relied on to do so, and if the generators take decisions which turn out to have unfortunate long-term consequences, it is the nation as a whole (and electricity consumers in particular) who will pay the price, rather than the generators themselves . . . Above all, if a significant proportion of the UK's coal reserves were abandoned, which we hope will not happen, resulting in a major reduction of long-term energy security, the Government should understand that the country will see this not as a commercial decision, but a largely irreversible decision of historical significance for the UK."

We are now facing that situation. I am sure that we have all heard of the recent Rothschild report which suggests that, if British Coal is to be privatised—as suggested in the Queen's Speech—it will have to be run down to 14 pits mining about 30 million tonnes of coal. In that case, we shall finish up with about 12,000 miners. It will mean that we shall be able to meet only half of the country's demand for coal. It would be crazy for a Government to sterilise millions, or billions, of tonnes of coal—a natural energy resource which the nation will need in the medium and long term—merely for short-term commercial considerations.

Such circumstances have been brought about by the policies of National Power and PowerGen, which are hell bent on importing as much as they can which is why they have taken 80 per cent. control of the subsidiary company of the Associated British Ports to extend the ports at Immingham. We shall have to pay high prices for imported coal once we can no longer meet our own demand. That makes no sense.

The average age of the young men working in the pits is 33. Many of them have been encouraged to go to other coal mines when their mines have closed. The Selby coalfield is supposed to be the jewel of the coal industry. If the Rothschild report is correct and if the coal industry is privatised, some of the pits at Selby—the jewel in the crown where, over the past 10 to 15 years, billions of pounds have been spent—will close.

The young men were promised a secure future and they have mortgaged themselves to buy lovely homes to which they are entitled. They are now worried sick because they

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can see a time coming in the not too distant future when their jobs will be taken from them and they will not be able to meet the mortgage payments. At the same time, we are taking decisions to sterilise our natural source of energy.

What else has happened in the mining industry? The young men who left school at 16 had an automatic avenue into the coal industry, but that is no longer the case. Like the rest of the country, we have suffered severely from unemployment—there has been mass unemployment among the 16 to 24-year-olds. These young men see no hope. In the town of Pontefract where I live, we have one pit left—there were eight pits in the area in 1984. The major pit now left is one that, according to the Rothschild report, will close.

Since 1984, the Government have not given one penny of assistance by way of grants. There was some hope of financial assistance in the form of the European RECHAR programme. However, we now discover that the Government are also blocking that avenue. The Government may say that they are not blocking it. We do not concede that the money should come to the Government, even though it comes from the European regional fund for mining communities, and that the Government should decide where to distribute it. But Commissioner Millan says that it is the Community's duty to decide where there is real need in the mining communities.

Therefore, the mining areas are more or less piggy in the middle. If the money comes from the RECHAR programme in Europe to the Government, what guarantee to the mining communities such as mine have that the money will find its way to where it was intended to go? The Government's track record in such circumstances does not fill us with confidence, because we have received nothing yet.

Wec have recently received what I hope will not be a fatal blow. A few months ago, I was delighted when British Coal decided to site its freight depot for the north in my constituency and in that of my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien). However, we found that, for some reason, the Secretary of State has called in the planning application. That means that there will be at least a long delay, and the probable threat of the developers losing interest. That freight depot could be the saviour of our area. We have been told that it could eventually generate 10,000 jobs, and it would go a long way to replace the 20,000 or so jobs lost in the mining industry.

I am confident that the mining industry will never be privatised, because I do not believe that the Government will win the next election. Should they win—God forbid —how could any responsible Government decide to make the nation rely for its energy needs on foreign competition? If the Government privatised the mining industry, they would have to run it down in accordance with the Rothschild report. The report states that the industry would have to be run down to such an extent because it would not otherwise be saleable, just as the nuclear element was not saleable in the electricity privatisation.

If the Government are hell bent on privatising the industry—and the Rothschild report states that they would have to reduce it to 14 pits—they will have to take a major decision. I hope that, even at this late stage, they will seriously consider forgetting the privatisation of the mining industry. Such a privatisation would create dangerous conditions, which I experienced in my younger days.

In recent years, the mining industry has rightly made repeated attempts to get its prices down and during the past five years it has done a hell of a good job in increasing tonnage and so on. If the mining industry finds that it cannot reduce costs any further and if the Government continue to close down the industry, we shall—God forbid —see a breakdown of law and order in these communities. None of us would condone mischief, vandalism or theft, but what would we do if we were teenagers with no jobs, no money and no light at the end of the tunnel which might be a job? What would we do if all we had to do was to get up in the morning and join our pals on the street corner? There is an age-old saying that the devil makes work for idle hands to do. I do not know what I would do if I was a 16-year-old youth in those circumstances. There was a 27 per cent. increase in crime in West Yorkshire last year, but there are 200 fewer policemen on the beat because the authority's budget is controlled by the Department of the Environment and not by the Home Office as it should be.

The signs are clear. If we do not do something for our mining communities, they face a bleak future. If this Tory Government are returned to office—and that is doubtful —I hope that they will seriously reconsider and not privatise the coal industry.

8.11 pm

Sir Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead): It is more than 30 years since I first spoke in a debate on the Loyal Address. I pay tribute to the speeches made by the proposer and the seconder of the motion and I also pay tribute to our colleagues Alick Buchanan-Smith, Richard Holt and George Buckley who we wish were with us. The tributes that have been paid to them by hon. Members on both sides of the House show how much we feel about them.

The Queen's Speech can be divided into several portions. The first part is related to the individual and promotes freedom of individual choice. Parents will have control over which schools their children attend and there is a promise that education will be improved. Patients will also have new rights and there will be a citizens charter. The Queen's Speech also deals with defence and the European Community. It looks ahead from the 20th century into the future.

Our defence commitments are so great that the proposed reforms will leave us with inadequate forces to deal with NATO, about which agreements have been made, in addition to our other obligations around the world. Unlike other countries, we have many such obligations. We do not know what might happen. Could we possibly mount another expedition as we did to the Falklands? Could we deal with another Gulf war with such slender defences? I cannot endorse such reductions in our forces. They are too great and too soon in an uncertain world.

The world has already changed. Gorbachev came to prominence in a few months, but things could change. Indeed, the whole edifice might collapse, although of course we hope that it will not.

In the Queen's Speech, I welcome the co-operation with the Soviet Union, so long as it behaves itself. It has its own problems with the Ukraine and other satellite countries.

One lesson that must be learnt is that we, as a nation, must retain our Trident defence. We must maintain it not necessarily against the Soviets or Russia, but against countries such as Israel which have or are developing their own nuclear capability. I also welcome the reference in the Queen's Speech that we will continue our policies in respect of Iraq.

Any arms reductions must take account of our possible —not our actual—requirements. In that respect, it is necessary for us to retain our Trident nuclear capability. I do not want now to consider the reductions in the Army as that will be for another debate. However, I am sad that the reductions will affect the tremendous spirit of our services and in particular the Territorial Army.

I also welcome the reference in the Queen's Speech to the

"Association Agreements with Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia"

and to the recognition of the Baltic states. Incidentally, we have never broken off contacts with Lithuania, and they retained their ambassador here. When those countries are free, perhaps they will look to the European Community and join some kind of association. We might then have a very large trading community. However, I must warn the House that immigration might be a problem if that occurs. We are a small island and there is a limit to the number of people who we can absorb. We already have difficulties with asylum seekers and I am glad that the Government intend to tackle that problem. However, the problem could be much greater and we must consider it on a European scale.

What kind of Europe do we want? Do we want to lose all our sovereignty? Do we want the ecu straight away? Do we want European economic and monetary union? I do not believe that we want those things. I have been pro-Europe for 25 years. However, there is a danger of going too far. I have every faith in my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. I am certain that he will ensure that nothing is given away at the meeting in December. This Parliament must control its own affairs. It should not be told what to do by Brussels—by the Commission—instead of by an elected Parliament, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made clear for the first time today.

Why should we be controlled by the Commission? We want to remain a sovereign Parliament and work as such in Europe. We do not particularly want a common European currency. However, there will be difficulties and nothing definite might happen for 10 or 15 years or before we are fully integrated. It is a choice which this House alone can make in line with the Government's recommendations. I am certain that all hon. Members would exercise their unique talents and knowledge to achieve a settlement on proposals laid before us by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

There may be dangers, but there is also tremendous potential. This coming together of nations offers the best opportunity to preserve peace in the world. Nations which were previously potential enemies are now with us. There will be a conglomeration of nations most of which, instead of being anti-Europe, will be part of the European family and will recognise the advantages of democracy and the creation of wealth.

I now refer to health. It is the patient who matters. Hospitals must have the freedom to run themselves. I am against enormous expenditure on district, regional or area health authorities, all with vast offices and computers. I should like to think that most of the money is being spent on patients and on hospitals. I am old-fashioned—I am sure that I will be challenged on this—but I would like to see hospitals run by matrons. When hospitals were run by matrons they were a jolly sight more efficient. We know that we need more money—there is no question about that. The Government have given more money and I am certain that they will continue to do so in future.

I will not compare the present Government with the previous Labour Government—it is no good doing that. We must consider what the patient is getting. We must see where the mistakes and the hold-ups are. We must consider transferring patients from one area to another. Those are the things that matter to patients. Instead of saying that they have another two years to wait, we should look for another hospital where there is a bed and a surgeon who can satisfactorily perform the necessary operation. Those are the ways in which to cut waiting lists. The Government intend to make hospitals more independent.

I now refer to the waste of talent and the unattractive wages that are paid to some ancillary staff. We must consider how best we can serve the patient, reduce waiting lists, and make time spent in hospital more pleasant. Many people do not agree with me, but I do not see why a patient who is awaiting a serious operation should not go to another health authority. People now spend a shorter time in hospital after an operation. Surely it would be better for people to be separated from their families for three days rather than suffer the inconvenience and unpleasantness of a chronic disease or ailment.

The implementation of the citizens charter is a great step forward in respect of the citizen's right of redress against the state without having to approach Parliament. That is an inherent right which has at last been grasped by our Prime Minister and I am sure that he will continue to do so. Many cases come to hon. Members that never should come to them. Our constituents write to government authorities but receive useless replies or no replies at all. The citizens charter will enable people to get a proper service from agents who are paid by the Government, anyway, so there is no reason why they should not be civil to their customers. A direct approach under the charter will help.

We look for freedom of opportunity and freedom of choice, whether it be in respect of schools, health, education or whatever. I was very impressed by the amount of money that the Government will spend on further education. Further education is vital for the future of our nation. New technologies can be learnt only through higher education.

In the months before the general election, let us hope that these words can be inscribed in the Tory party and in the nation: that a person has freedom and the right to choose how he is treated, how his children are treated and how he himself can preserve his wealth and position in society.

8.24 pm

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): On such occasions I normally refer to defence and foreign affairs, but I shall not be tempted down that road, although the hon. Member for Windsor and Maidenhead (Sir A. Glyn) will find that I refer to the national health service. I associate myself with the tributes that have been paid to the recently

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departed hon. Members, George Buckley and Alick Buchanan-Smith, each of whom was gracious in his manner and good in his humour. Their work rate and conscientious application to duty would serve as a role model for any hon. Member.

I must make particular reference to Richard Holt. Richard Holt was not only a fairly close neighbour in constituency terms, but he entered the House on the same day as I did. I later found out that he had gone to the same school. Richard, as we all know, was strong-minded, single-minded and independent-minded, but we would expect that of a product of a Jesuit school—it would be strange if that were not the case. Richard Holt is already missed because, as has happened when I have spoken in previous debates on the Queen's Speech, he would be intervening and contradicting something that I said. I am certain that, somewhere or other, he is smiling a wry smile because I am confessing that he is missed. Rest well, Richard, and other departed colleagues, such as Eric Heffer.

Hon. Members will have seen me getting slightly agitated during the Prime Minister's speech. I should explain why. I was somewhat aggrieved because of his bland references to Europe. He was simultaneously trying to say everything and nothing. I could not help comparing that attitude with his disparaging references to issues such as the national minimum wage and the potential benefits of the social charter. My dissatisfaction stems from the fact that, time and again, we and British industry are told about a level playing field—the common base from which we are all supposed to benefit. Her Majesty's Government fail on two counts to deliver their promises in relation to that level playing field. They deny support for the national minimum wage, despite the fact that many of our EEC partners recognise a national minimum wage, in much the same way as they allow the British work force to lose out on holiday, pension and other entitlements, compared with standards in our EEC partner countries.

British industry suffers from the Government's dilatory standards in creating a level playing field when compared with other industrialised countries throughout the EEC. For example, I refer to the current Davy bid for the refurbishment of the Roukela steel plant in India, where there is a need for aid and trade provision and for export credit guarantees to match two German bids which, incidentally, I am led to believe are considerably higher than ours. Our ATP support and export credit guarantee needs are being studiously ignored by both Departments responsible for them. There is a real danger that British industry, especially the steel industry, is being put gravely at risk by the Government's reluctance to render it the same type of aid, on the same scale and at the same time, as that which is rendered to German industry by the German Government.

We should not be surprised by such a failure to deliver a promise because every Government paper that has been published by this regime should have carried a Government truth warning. Without exception, they are deliberately misleading. The hon. Member for Windsor and Maidenhead referred to defence, which provides an ample illustration of my point. Let us consider the very title of "Options for Change". There may well be "change", but although the word "options" suggests alternatives, the Government have studiously ignored the pleas from every quarter to consider any alternatives. The paper on the health service, which has the encouraging title "Working for Patients", actually reveals a set of proposals that would do anything but work for patients.

I do not want to knock the national health service because I have every reason to be grateful to it. At 6.15 am today my wife and I were the proud grandparents of five grandchildren—Lyanne, Jemma, Vanessa, Claire and Megan. We also have an adoptive granddaughter, called Charlotte, courtesy of a son-in-law who joined our family not long ago. I can now tell the House with some pleasure that at 6.17 am today my eldest daughter delivered a grandson——

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): Get out the cigars then.

Mr. Cook: That may well come, but not in the Chamber. Later, I hope.

I am very grateful to the staff concerned because I understand that the overnight delivery was somewhat arduous and that the staff were as patient, hardworking and diligent as ever, as they were to me 12 months ago when they took a substantial cancer from my body and put me back together again over a long period. They were magnificent to me and, at the same time, to another daughter who was in a different hospital having gall bladder surgery. I am sure that magnificence among health service staff not only has been and is, but will continue to be the norm. That is the way in which they have been trained and how they apply themselves to their task.

I make no complaints about the staff, but as I lay awake at night in Westminster hospital, I saw staff who were sorely distressed and in tears because of redundancies that were being made, wards that were being closed, beds that were being removed and because elective surgery that had been cancelled in October would not be carried out until April. That was happening in a teaching hospital where trainee doctors who were supposed to gain experience of surgery, albeit at arm's length, could not get that experience for another six months.

That is the sort of criticism that my right hon. and hon. Friends and I are making about what is happening in our national health service. When we talk about underfunding, we are talking not about the size of the budgets, but about where the money is spent and how it is used. There is a big difference between parties on this. I appeal to those thinking Conservative Members—I know that there are some—to try to understand exactly what we are saying.

Two important things have happened in the politics of the health service in the past few months and neither can be of any comfort to the Government. First, opinion poll after opinion poll has demonstrated that people do not trust the Conservative party with the national health service. Secondly, as a result of that public perception, it has become clear that the Government are rapidly becoming hysterical because they have been found out. Both the Prime Minister and his predecessor have said, and continue to maintain, that the national health service is safe in their hands. However, the people who are about to vote in the by-elections this week, and especially the people of Langbaurgh, are clear in their minds that that is not true. The underfunding of the past 12 years has caused severe problems generally, and even more severe local problems in South Tees. More than one in three acute hospital beds has been cut since 1979. In the South Tees

area last year nearly 4,000 people were left in pain when their non-emergency operations were cancelled. More than 4,000 people are still waiting for hospital treatment.

The Government say that there simply is not enough money, but they have spent literally hundreds of millions of pounds on their opt-out experiment and on employing those individuals who might be prepared to try to put their plans into effect. Not a penny of that money has been spent on doctors or nurses. All the money has been spent on accountants and computers that have been brought in to commercialise the system. The Government have tried to turn hospitals into supermarkets, doctors into accountants, and nurses into some kind of super-efficient and almost bilocated skivvies.

Having been discovered doing that, the Government have now become hysterical because people believe that they will privatise the health service. The Government's hysteria has been caused because they have been rumbled. Having been rumbled, they realise that they are now lumbered with that public perception—and not only in the three coming by-elections, but in the general election. With their customary common sense, the British people have made up their minds based on what they have already seen of the Government's actions. I must advise Conservative Members that what the Labour party is saying about health is not what the Labour party is telling the people, but what the people are telling the Labour party. If the Government choose to ignore that, it will be to their own cost at the next election.

In 1979, everyone had the right to a free eye test, but the Government have changed that—they now charge people. This spring, the Association of Optometrists calculated that only 40 per cent. of the public qualified for a free eye test. That means that 60 per cent. of the population do not get a service that is free at the point of delivery. In my book, that is privatisation. The association has also calculated that 2·7 million people have not had a test because they cannot afford the average cost of £12. A mathematical calculation reveals that 4,500 electors in Langbaurgh have not had an eye test because they cannot afford it. The association also estimates that the eyesight of 5,500 people will deteriorate because they cannot get an eye test. That means that just over 1,000 people will be affected in Langbaurgh. In my book, that is privatisation.

On 16 October, the Secretary of State for Health claimed in his statement to the House that each application to opt out of the local health service had been "the subject of a full public consultation."—[*Official Report*, 16 October 1991; Vol. 196, c. 311.]

That consultation was more of a public relations exercise. The Conservative party's attitude to the public is different from that of most people in Langbaurgh. I can testify to that from experience canvassing on the doorsteps.

Last July, the opinion pollsters, MORI, revealed that three quarters of the people of Cleveland wanted a real vote on whether their hospitals and ambulance service would opt out of the NHS. There is little chance of them getting it. Not surprisingly, the Government have so far refused to give the people the right to vote on keeping their local health service in one piece. We all know why. They know that they would lose. However, the by-election on 7 November will provide an opportunity for the people of Langbaurgh at least within Cleveland to have a say. Those of us who have campaigned in the constituency know that the people's view is clear and will be made clear a week today.

People want to keep their local hospitals and ambulance service within the local health service. The by-election will be a referendum on whether the local hospitals and the local ambulance service should opt out of the local national health service. Unlike his counterpart in Kincardine and Deeside, the Conservative candidate, who is from Gateshead, supports the opt-out proposals. Labour supports the local campaign to keep our local health service in one piece.

In the past few days, following the development of hysteria on the health service, the Conservative campaign in Langbaurgh has become increasingly frantic. The Conservatives claim that Langbaurgh is in the middle of an economic recovery. That is surprising news to all of us. They seem to think that the economy depends on abstractions such as confidence. The Labour candidate, whom I look forward to greeting next week as the next Langbaurgh Member of Parliament, works in industry. Along with other local people in Langbaurgh, he knows that the real economy is about the bread and butter issues of jobs, full employment and investment.

If the Conservative candidate thinks that recovery has started, he should take a trip to the jobcentre in Guisborough. There are no signs of recovery there, I am afraid. Indeed, most of the 183 jobs on display are outside the constituency. Almost a quarter of them—43—offer wages which are lower than the £3·40 per hour that the Prime Minister described so disparagingly earlier today. That would be the minimum wage under Labour's policy for a national minimum wage. A further 63 job adverts —or 34 per cent.—do not give a wage range. They say that pay is negotiable or on a commission-only basis. What have we sunk to?

One job advert was for a trainee butcher in Saltburn to be paid at £1·50 an hour. Another advert was for a driver at £1·77 an hour. Another was for a security guard at £2 an hour. But one of the conditions of employment was that that employee supply his own dog. I suppose that eventually we shall have steel workers supplying their own steel furnaces. Those are the jobs on offer to the 5,000 unemployed people in Langbaurgh.

Each person who is unemployed costs the nation dear. Apart from the cost of unemployment benefit, there is the loss to the nation of the tax which that person would pay to the state. Across Langbaurgh constituency unemployment is wasting over £44 million. From Loftus and Brotton through Guisborough and Middlesbrough, unemployment in every area costs millions of pounds. The Conservative party claims that an economic recovery is under way in that region. If it believes that, perhaps it can tell the constituency when it expects unemployment to fall below the 5,000 currently on the register and when the Government will stop squandering money through their unemployment policy.

The Gracious Speech is a fairly barren document. I wish to give one reason for saying that. In the summer of this year I took my wife to Germany to visit my son who is in the British forces stationed in Hameln. We went from Hull to Europoort by ferry. As we approached the port in the morning we had breakfast at a table with an elderly couple who were clearly Dutch. Being the friendly soul that I am, I happened to ask them whether they enjoyed their holiday in the United Kingdom. The gentleman was clearly

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suspicious of this Brit. He immediately said to me in an aggressive tone, "We are Dutch." I said, "Yes, I can see that clearly," and left it at that. His wife was somewhat abashed by his aggression. She said that they had been not on holiday but to visit their son who was working in Britain. I asked whether he was well and she said yes and that he was happy and settled and things were going well.

The Dutch lady said to me, "Isn't England a poor country?" I said, "What do you mean by poor?" She said, "Everything is for sale. Wherever you look, this, that and the other is for sale. Why do Englishmen want to sell their country?" I was stumped for an answer. While I was stumped, the old gentleman who had been so aggressive jumped in and said, "And there are holes in the road everywhere. Don't the English know how to repair their roads any more?"

It is never my practice to flaunt my position in public. Those hon. Members who see me walking around during the recess will see that I look more like a dustman than a Member of Parliament.

Mr. Dixon: You wear your badge though!

Mr. Cook: At the moment, yes. My usual reluctance was reinforced on that occasion because I should have been doubly embarrassed to admit to the Dutch travellers that I was a Member of Parliament. My point is that I see nothing in the Gracious Speech to enable me to counter the opinions expressed by our European partners who are still proud to know us but bemused that we have a Britain which in their eyes is no longer as great as it was.

8.46 pm

Mr. William Powell (Corby): I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) on becoming a grandfather again. I thank him for his most generous tribute to our former colleague Richard Holt, who will be remembered by hon. Members on both sides of the House with considerable affection. The hon. Member for Stockton, North said that, when he had only been going two minutes, Richard Holt was already on his feet challenging him. That is the most authentic memory that many of us have of Richard Holt.

How things have changed, both at home and abroad, during the year since the last Queen's Speech. It was almost exactly a year ago that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) resigned, with momentous consequences for the politics of our country. As is well known, I was one of those who felt that adjustments and changes were needed to the Conservative party and to the policies which were being pursued by the Government. I welcome the changes that have been made since then and the leadership which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has given the country. They are reflected, of course, in the contents of the Queen's Speech which we are now discussing.

I wholeheartedly welcome and endorse the proposals contained in the Gracious Speech, with only one minor caveat. One matter which I should like to have seen included would almost certainly have merited parliamentary discussion before the inevitable dissolution of this Parliament, which will make this a short Session.

For some time we have been promised legislation to reform the laws on friendly societies. Such legislation has been through detailed preparation including the publication of draft clauses. Such a Bill could have passed through Parliament with considerable agreement among hon. Members on both sides of this House and another place. I hope that my right hon. Friends will consider finding time for such legislation when they penetrate the meaning of that wonderful phrase, "Further measures will be laid before you." There is absolutely no doubt that the legislation that governs friendly societies is long overdue for reform.

Many generous and warm tributes have been paid to my right hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker) for not only his speech but the massive contribution that he has made to this Parliament and our country during the last generation. I wish to pick up one matter from his speech—that of dyslexia. As the parent of a daughter who has had to struggle and cope with dyslexia, I have perhaps more personal knowledge of the difficulties that it causes than many hon. Members.

Earlier, my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Education and Science, was in the Chamber and I know that he takes a personal interest in the subject. I hope that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, who is on the Treasury Bench, will ask the Department of Education and Science to take a much more robust attitude with certain local education authorities, probably the majority, about the provision of a statement of special needs for children with dyslexia in our public state system, as many provide a monstrously inadequate one. I know from constituency experience that the Northamptonshire education authority does not provide a satisfactory statement of special needs for such children, but it is by no means the only local authority of which that could be said.

The House heard the gibberish of the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) about the Labour party's position on the current intergovernmental conferences on future developments in the European Community. It was impossible for anybody to make head or tail of what he was saying. Certainly it is being put around that the Labour party is enthusiastic about participating in further developments that will tie EC countries more closely together. All those who are repeating headlines handed out in press releases are not looking at the small print, which needs to be examined much more closely.

Before and after the Maastricht summit, it will become plain in our debates on the changes that will take place in Europe that there is an enormous split between the Leader of the Opposition, whom we can expect to take a pro-European line, and the dozens and dozens of Labour Back-Bench Members who will take a very different line. That different and hostile line towards the EC will come not merely from the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore). Nor will it be confined to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). One Labour Member after another will pour scorn on any effort to draw Europe closer together in the manner in which it is being discussed.

When we consider the Labour party's attitude towards a common currency, let us bear in mind that it lays down two fundamental conditions before supporting economic and monetary union. The first is that there shall be a central bank that is under "democratic control". What the Leader of the Opposition means by that is fundamentally different from what the German Chancellor and others in

Germany mean by it. They certainly do not want the right hon. Gentleman's fingerprints on any central bank, because they know perfectly well that its work will be completely undermined. The right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) spoke the truth when he said that, although the Labour party says that it is in favour of these things, it is clear from the small print that it is not.

The second condition is a massive increase in the amount of regional and social aid funds coming to the United Kingdom. Let us all remember that the Community is financed by Germany and Great Britain, and that although France is a modest contributor, all the other countries are net gainers. Not one other Community country is prepared to accept the Labour party's proposals for massive increases in regional and social funds to Great Britain. After all, it can be only at the expense of Greece, Portugal, Spain or Italy. None of those countries will agree to it. Alternatively, such an increase could be bought at the price of a massive increase in public expenditure in this country, to be paid for by higher taxes, given over to Brussels and then handed back to us after a dividend has been deducted on the way. It is about time that everybody in this House and elsewhere woke up to the fraud that is contained in the figleaf devised by the Leader of the Opposition in relation to economic and monetary union.

We have listened to much discussion on the national health service and there will be more. The hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) said that the Labour party was listening to the people. At present, it is building up expectations that cannot possibly be fulfilled. Every Labour Member knows that that is the case—it is clear beyond peradventure. Although it is useful to point to what happened between 1974 and 1979, many of our people cannot recall that period and, of course, the Labour party relies on that. The other night I tried to work out what happened and I could make out only one or two things. It is a mist to me.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Not to me.

Mr. Powell: It may not be to my hon. Friend, who has a very much better memory than I have.

France today, which has the equivalent of a Labour Government, shows what is happening to its health provision. Within the past fortnight, the socialist Government of France has teargassed nurses in Paris. To those who say that a British Labour Government would not do the same, I say let us remember the unburied dead and the chaos to which the NHS was reduced by the end of 1978.

Nurses being teargassed on the streets of France is bad enough, but there is worse. One of the minor but important changes that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made as soon as he became First Lord of the Treasury was to reverse Government policy and to pay compensation to haemophiliacs who had inadvertently been given by the NHS blood contaminated with AIDS. Last week three doctors in France were charged with a serious criminal offence: they had knowingly supplied blood contaminated with AIDS to haemophiliac patients. We were past that stage years ago. The doctors said that it was done to save money in the health service in France, under instructions, essentially, from the Government.

An enormous amount of humbug is talked about these matters. Expectations that cannot possibly be fulfilled are being built up. It is about time that my right hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench and all the people in the media who are gathered to pack the Press Gallery this evening woke up to the fact that France today shows us what the inevitable consequences of a British Labour Government would be. In particular, according to the Leader of the Opposition, who appears to accept the disciplines of the European monetary system, a Labour Government would pursue more or less the same policies as those pursued by the socialist Government of France today.

I welcome the commitment to NATO in the Gracious Speech. NATO must remain the fundamental cornerstone of our defence, as it has been throughout the previous generation. However, in our enthusiasm for NATO we must bear it in mind that things are beginning to change in Europe. France does not share our enthusiasm for NATO, because the French cannot stand the American involvement in Europe. Just over a year ago, the then French Minister of Defence, Mr. Chevenement, used to breathe fire and brimstone against the Americans, and say that French participation in the military side of NATO was impossible because of American involvement in Europe.

Until recently the Germans took a robust attitude towards the French on NATO, but there are clear signs that, although many people in Germany—Mr. Kohl, for example, and many among the Christian Democrats and the Christian Social Union—remain sound, that is not the universal view in German politics. There are signs that the German nation as a whole may not be as keen on NATO as it used to be. It is foreseeable that, as these trends develop, we may be asked to remove the remaining part of the Army of the Rhine from German territory in a year or two or three.

We must be alert to the fact that changes are taking place in western Europe, just as they have taken place in central and eastern Europe, and we must do what we can through active diplomacy to ensure that the worst does not happen, that the French vision of the defence of Europe does not prevail. A United States withdrawal from Europe would be the fastest way to ensure the return of instability and of rivalry between European nations. Twice this century, the Americans have had to rescue Europe from itself. We must never forget that; no country in Europe should be allowed to forget it.

I welcome the emphasis on education in the Queen's Speech. My right hon. Friend the Member for Worcester was right to say that education is fundamental to our domestic policy. I am delighted that, since my right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) became Secretary of State for Education—I see that my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt) is here, too—there have been substantial efforts to improve the quality of the state education system.

The changes are long term. We shall not see the full benefit of them for a generation, or perhaps longer. We must be patient and see the reforms through. They are of fundamental importance. We all know that too many of the 50 per cent. of children in our state system who are average—not those with special needs or those who can take advantage of our superb higher education facilities—are failing. The information in the reports in last Sunday's edition of *The Sunday Times* is based on a sample three times the size of the opinion poll samples on which so many of us plot the chances for the future. If that

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research is anything like accurate, the first testing of 7-year-olds shows a serious failure among those children to be able to answer straightforward questions.

I know from my constituency and my county how serious is the crisis in the public education system. Let us not forget, either, the often overlooked fact that, during the past decade, 70 per cent. of children have been educated under the auspices of local authorities controlled by the Labour party or by the Liberals and the Labour party. Labour-controlled education authorities have been responsible for the direction of resources and so on for the education of the overwhelming majority of children. The Labour party cannot escape its involvement in local education authorities, in rural as well as urban areas, over the past decade. That fact must be emphasised more to our people.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: I am listening carefully to my hon. Friend's excellent speech. Will he emphasise what the Government have done to encourage liaison between industry and education? Clearly, the closer the contacts and involvement between education, whether in the private or the maintained sector, and industry and commerce, the better for the country and the more meaningful young people's careers will be in due course.

Mr. Powell: I could not agree more. My hon. Friend leads me on to my next point.

Seventeen city technology colleges have been set up to provide a new style of education with a new curriculum. I am fortunate enough to have one in my constituency. It is an outstanding institution. I am not one of those who believes that CTCs should be confined to a few—far from it. On the basis of the experiment with the initial 17 CTCs, we must build upon the experience gained, so that CTCs are established across the country. That will involve a massive investment of public funds in public education. As soon as it is expedient, I hope that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Government will give the green light for such CTCs. That is the direction in which we should go.

Comprehensive education is an experiment which, by and large, has failed. In the late 1990s and in the early part of the next century, it will be no good trying to make a success of a form of social experimentation that does not work. The new type of school will be based on the CTC model. It is important that we should learn the lessons from that CTC experiment and move ahead as quickly as we can.

During the summer, we witnessed events in Yugoslavia that besmirched the reputation of our continent. I have watched and admired the way in which Croatia has suffered and bled as a result of a dispute that it is virtually impossible for anyone in Yugoslavia to explain to the rest of the world. That dispute must end, and we in western Europe must use our strongest diplomatic efforts to put an end to what has become a disgrace to our continent.

Throughout my years in the House, I have taken great interest in the piracy of computer software. Fortunately, the law has been strengthened and there have been many criminal prosecutions and civil actions to tighten up on the huge amount of theft of other people's property. We need to ensure that software is audited each year, in common with company accounts. That is already beginning to happen, but the software audit which is best practice must become usual practice everywhere. When it has, the Companies Acts will need to be changed so that it is as much a matter of the law to have a software audit as it is to have account audits now.

A year ago, my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) was rightly drawing attention to the huge crimes committed by Mr. Saddam Hussein of Iraq. Whether he should be tried in some international tribunal was discussed by my right hon. Friend and others. Unfortunately, this country has not taken a lead role in the United Nations in establishing an international tribunal of criminal jurisdiction. There is a great amount of ignorance in our universities and elsewhere about the huge progress that has been made in sorting out many of the problems involved in establishing such a tribunal. The United Nations is now beginning to function in something like the way in which its founding fathers intended a generation ago.

I should like the British Government to take the lead in trying to establish, if only on a regional basis to start, an international court of criminal jurisdiction. I commend to the House and to the country the enormous amount of work that has been done on this by Professor Cherif Bassiouni of De Paul university, Chicago. He is the draftsman of the draft United Nations convention on this matter. We could proceed quickly if the political will existed. I should like to see more of such political will from the Government.

As the House would expect, I welcome the channel tunnel link line that has been selected—running through the Thames crossing and east of London. I want to offer another idea for public debate. We all want freight to travel from the regions, from the midlands, the north-west, the north-east and from Scotland, to the channel tunnel. The construction of urban railways, like the construction of urban roads, is the most expensive form of railway building. Houses must often be acquired and pulled down. Tunnelling is immensely expensive.

So should we not also think of bypassing London with a line running from Rugby—connecting into the west midlands, the north-west and the Glasgow routes—across the country to Peterborough—connecting with the Yorkshire and Edinburgh routes—to Stansted airport—thereby integrating, as the French do, airport and rail transport—and then straight down to the channel tunnel? Then, instead of coming into London, freight from the constituency of Macclesfield, say, would not have to pass through all the marshalling yards but could leave Manchester, go to Rugby and Peterborough, underneath Stansted airport and straight down to the channel tunnel. We need to get away from the overwhelming concentration of transport on London.

I have spoken for too long, and I know that some of my hon. Friends still want to speak. I warmly commend the Gracious Speech to the House.

9.11 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): The hon. Member for Corby (Mr. Powell) would not expect me to agree with much of what he said. I profoundly disagreed with virtually everthing that he said about the domestic scene. Nevertheless, I agreed with one or two of his remarks towards the end. I wholly agreed with his opinion about the tragedy of Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia offers a lesson for

some other countries—notably the Soviet Union as it disintegrates. Unless steps are taken to prevent this sort of tragedy from occurring there, such events could take place.

I am absolutely certain that no British troops should be involved in any attempted peace-keeping exercise in Yugoslavia, even though I understand that it has been tentatively suggested in certain quarters.

I also agree that there should be international machinery to bring notorious war criminals to justice. We know that that was done successfully at Nuremburg after the last war and I see no reason why notorious mass murderers such as the one who unfortunately continues to rule in Iraq should not be brought to justice. I hope that he will be.

The hon. Member for Corby began by saying that much has changed in the past year. It certainly has. On the occasion of the last Queen's Speech the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) was Prime Minister, cheered on loudly by Conservative Members. One month later, following an old-style, Soviet-type coup, she was gone—and now she is hardly mentioned by the same Members.

We know that if the political climate were different, we would be in an election campaign now, or it would already have taken place. The only reason why there has been no election and why this Parliament, unlike the last few, is going to last five years is that the Prime Minister lacks the confidence—understandably—that he will win it. In the words of the right hon. Member for Finchley, he is somewhat frit about going to the country. He did not go when he was appointed Prime Minister. He did not go in June. He is certainly not going to go in November. He will hold on as long as possible, although there are not many months left before he has to hold an election.

In the meantime, there seems once again to be some bullying of the BBC, if not directly by the Government, at least by Conservative central office and the chairman of the Conservative party. All kinds of pressures have been brought to bear on the corporation. Anyone who knows anything about the BBC knows that the senior executives of that organisation are not all enthusiastic Labour voters. I do not know the voting intentions of the most senior people in the BBC, but I should be surprised if there was a Labour majority. That is understandable because of their background, income and expectations. However, the biggest cheer at Conservative party conferences is when there is an outlandish attack on the BBC. One Tory delegate—if that is the right word—described it as the "Bolshevik Broadcasting Corporation", which raised a tremendously enthusiastic cheer.

Mr. Alistair Burt (Bury, North) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Winnick: The hon. Gentleman nods his head in agreement. Such bullying should not be allowed and the BBC should understand that the Labour party will monitor the position extremely carefully to see whether such bullying and intimidation has any effect.

Reference is made in the Queen's Speech to improving "the effectiveness of the health and social services". It is not surprising that, despite all the speeches that we have heard from the Tory Benches and on other occasions, Ministers cannot persuade the country that the national health service is safe in the Government's hands. They have strenuously denied that they intend to privatise any part of the NHS and some of my hon. Friends have already referred to that today. The Government pride themselves though on privatisation. The Queen's Speech says that, if the Government continue in office, they will continue to prepare for the privatisation of the railways and the coal board.

However, the Government are sharp and hesitant about the national health service and deny that they plan to privatise it. If it is right to privatise and if the Government take so much pride in what they have done in the past 12 years, why are they so reluctant—as they claim—to privatise the national health service? The national health service has not been privatised outright—we have never said that it would be—purely because of electoral fears. There is no other reason. Does anyone imagine that someone with the political philosophies of the right hon. Member for Finchley believes in the concept of a national health service? It goes against the grain for many Tories, especially those with a strong right-wing bias. That may not apply to the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton), who is an enthusiastic defender of the national health service. I hope that I am not harming his reputation——

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: I am not sure whether compliments from the hon. Gentleman will do my reputation any good, but I am none the less grateful for what he said. I am committed to the health service. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the Government have increased the resources to the national health service each year by 3 per cent. above the rate of inflation? Whereas in 1978-79 £7·75 billion was being spent on the health service by a Labour Government, more than £32 billion is currently being spent by a Conservative Government. Whatever the hon. Gentleman may say about the reforms, surely that shows a genuine commitment to the health service.

Mr. Winnick: I do not accept that the Government have a genuine commitment to the health service. Without wishing to harm the hon. Gentleman's reputation, may I say that we admire his stand? I was a Back-Bencher in the late 1960s and I sometimes found it necessary to rebel against my Government. It is not always easy and the Whips do not always appreciate it. But the hon. Gentleman has shown great courage and that should be said on the Floor of the House. However, the hon. Gentleman should consider the eye and dental tests for which fees are now charged. That is totally unnecessary and even dangerous for reasons that have already been given about the number of people who no longer have eye tests. People have been wrongly deterred from doing so by the charges, which should be abolished.

The Government have now increased prescription charges. How can anyone state that the Government are genuinely committed to the national health service when there has been a real increase—taking account of inflation—of 594 per cent. in prescription charges? They were 20p when the Labour Government left office in 1979 and they would be about 46p now if the price had simply risen with inflation.

I have already quoted briefly from the brochure of a credit card company. I do not think that the hon. Member for Macclesfield was present then, and he may be interested. A major credit card company has written to its card holders stating:

"How would you feel if you or a member of your family needed to go into hospital for a hip replacement and your doctor said that you had to wait your turn—a wait that could be months or even years? You would probably find your

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whole life affected while you waited and waited to go into hospital. You might suffer irritation or embarrassment from a painful or unsightly condition. You may even be forced to take time off work."

Clearly, the organisation understands that so many people wait months or years for hip replacements and other operations for which they should not have to wait so long. That is hardly illustrative of a Government concerned about the national health service. While some of the figures given by the hon. Member for Macclesfield may have been correct, the demand is such that more and more needs to be done, and most people would accept that the NHS remains underfunded.

Last Saturday I saw someone who came to my surgery and said that his wife required incontinence pads. We can all understand what happens to a person who unfortunately and sadly loses control of his or her bodily functions—it could happen to any of us. Apparently, the health authority is normally willing to supply up to four free pads daily, but in this case only two were supplied. The rest must be paid for.

When I made inquiries with the Library here I found that the health authority had no legal basis on which to charge in the first place, and I have taken up the matter with the health authority. When an official from the Library telephoned an advice worker involved with the disabled it was discovered that, in order to keep dry, more than 12 pads daily could be needed. Incontinence is an unfortunate condition. It is not a major illness, but if one loses control of bodily functions, why should not the pads be supplied as required? What will the person do with them—hoard them or sell them on the black market? The person who came to see me said that he was provoked into doing so by something that the Secretary of State for Health said. My constituent said that it was one illustration of what was happening on the ground and he thought I might be interested. I was certainly most interested.

There was no mention of unemployment in the Queen's Speech. The number of jobs in manufacturing fell by almost 7 per cent. between January 1990 and July 1991, which amounted to a loss in manufacturing of 348,000 jobs. Yet again, as 10 years ago, the recession has been more severe in the west midlands, the heartland of engineering, than elsewhere. Between the middle of August and the middle of October this year 32,271 jobs nationally were lost. That happened under a Government who were responsible for a previous recession.

In the early 1990s the Government were responsible for the loss of jobs throughout the country and the west midlands was devastated. Ten years later the same is happening. Many of the people—some of whom are my constituents—who were made redundant previously and who were fortunate enough to get new jobs have been made redundant again. People of all age groups who were adversely affected either then or now are in an unfortunate position. In some respects it is worse for those in their fifties or even their late forties who know that the chance of being able to find employment again is remote. People who would normally have another 15 or 16 years in paid employment, be able to earn a living, perhaps make savings and build up some form of pension contribution to supplement their old-age pension will now, having exhausted their 12 months of unemployment benefit, be on income support only. They will have to rely on the smallest of incomes. What do they have to look forward to—the old-age pension in due course? My right hon. and hon. Friends have said time and time again—and to a large extent this philosophy is what the Labour movement was all about from the beginning—that people have a right to be employed, and we should never accept the situation in which someone who wants to work is denied that opportunity. Today, far too many people are denied that opportunity.

I referred to the situation in the west midlands, which affects not only manual workers. That is particularly true of the current recession. I do not suggest for one moment that substantial unemployment is confined to my region, but many non-manual, semi-professional and professional people in the west midlands and elsewhere who never dreamed that they would ever be out of work are now unemployed—in some cases, for a considerable time.

The Government say that the recession is coming to an end and that recovery will take place. Of course, the recession will end—recessions always do. Why should the electorate be grateful to the Government when that happens when, in the course of 12 years, the Government have been responsible for two major recessions? How are the electorate meant to react? Are they supposed to say, "That's remarkable. Thank you very much. We will vote Tory again"?

The Government are desperately holding on and in some respects they remind me of the Tory Government of 1963. I was not a Member of Parliament at that time, but I recall that the then Prime Minister, Sir Alec Douglas-Home—rather like the present Prime Minister—did not want to hold an election until the very last moment. He kept telling the House that the Conservatives would win, but he had little confidence that they would. We all know the outcome.

The present Government are clinging on to office. They have largely lost the confidence of the country and there should have been a general election when the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) became Prime Minister. In any event, a general election should have been held by now. I am certain that whenever a general election is called the Government will, after 13 years in office, lose. I am confident that many people throughout the country who voted Conservative, with enthusiasm or otherwise, and who in many cases gave the Tories the benefit of the doubt—especially in 1983 and 1987—are clear in their minds that they will not vote Tory again. I hope that most of them will vote Labour, although obviously some will support the Liberals. The fact remains that many people have lost confidence in the Tory party—in my view, with every possible justification.

9.27 pm

Mr. Alistair Burt (Bury, North): I will not follow the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) in all his remarks. He ended speaking cheerfully, as other Labour Members have done this afternoon, of the prospects of Labour returning to Government, but deep down inside the hon. Gentleman knows that he is whistling in the dark. He talks hopefully but does not really expect to arrive.

I intended not to say much about the health service but to concentrate on other aspects of the Gracious Speech. However, I am roused to comment about the national health service by the remarks of the hon. Members for

Walsall, North and for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook). There is no bigger deceit in British politics than Labour's claims that it is good for Britain's health and for the NHS. Time and time again, the statistics prove that the health service was more poorly handled by Labour than by anyone else.

Why was it that the new general hospital in my constituency was not built between 1974 and 1979? The answer is that a Labour Government made the country bankrupt. Why was it that for the first time ever spending on the health service in my constituency fell between 1974 and 1979? It was because Labour went broke and could not spend enough money. Why is it that since 1979 the number of patients treated in Bury hospitals and the number of inpatients and outpatients has risen? Why is it that we now have more doctors and nurses, and have not closed a ward because of lack of finance? Why is it that, to my knowledge, no operations have been cancelled in Bury hospitals because of lack of finance? All this is because the Conservative party cares about the NHS and works hard for it.

The Labour party talks more nonsense and deceit, and tells more blatant untruths, about the national health service than about anything else. It does not mind who it scares or frightens, nor does it care what it says so long as it might gather an extra vote. It talks nonsense, and it knows it talks nonsense, but worse than that it talks sanctimonious nonsense. Were there no health service queues when the Labour party was in power? Did nobody ever miss an operation? Where was the hon. Member for Walsall, North when 65 cancer patients were sent home, because of industrial action, in Birmingham in 1979? Which side of the line was he on then? We never hear anything about that in the sanctimonious humbug from the Labour party now. Labour Members should examine their consciences and their past and be more careful.

The truth about the health service is that it is good, but it has problems that need to be solved. Why is it that when anything goes well in the health service, Labour Members say that the staff have done a wonderful job, but when anything goes wrong, they always blame the Government? There are problems in administration. The work of the NHS is patchy and not always as good as it should be. These problems need to be addressed, but nothing serious about how to solve them comes from the Labour party, and we hear nothing about from where the money to live up to its false expectations will come. It is bad news for all concerned.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: As Chairman of the Select Committee on Health, I know that the Committee has undertaken some work into ophthalmic services. The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) spoke about dental and eye test charges. He rightly said that, as hon. Members on both sides of the House will know, I voted against the introduction of charges. However, it is right to support my hon. Friend's argument by pointing out that the evidence to the Select Committee shows that the number of people going for eye tests is returning to the level that it was before the new charges were introduced. That shows that, after the implementation of new charges —after all, the Labour party first introduced charges in the NHS, thereby setting the precedent—there was a period of consumer reaction but the number of people coming forward either for dental treatment or for eye tests is returning to the level that it was before charges were imposed.

Mr. Burt: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that so clear. His commitment to the NHS is not questioned by any Labour Member, just as the commitment of every Conservative Member should not be. My hon. Friend may agree that numbers took such a dip because people were frightened by the Labour party talking about charges. Everybody assumed that they would have to pay because the Labour party never spoke about exemptions.

I wonder how many illnesses the Labour party has been responsible for, given the propaganda that it produces. That propaganda is nothing new. In 1979, the Labour party circulated leaflets claiming that the Conservative party would introduce charges for seeing a doctor and staying in hospital. That was not true, and it did not happen. In 1983, it claimed that the Conservative party proposed to cease funding the NHS from taxation. In 1987, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) claimed that the Conservatives would carry out the privatisation of Britain's hospitals. All these claims were untrue—the Labour party scares on health, and continues to do so, but does not back up its claim.

The hon. Member for Walsall, North claimed that waiting lists and queues drive people into private health schemes, and are thus part of the move to privatisation. That is the Labour party's weasel way of getting out of what it said about privatisation. I wonder whether he knows that the biggest boost to private health came not during the Conservative Government but at the tail end of the Labour Government. The events of 1978-79 sent more people into private health schemes than anything else.

Mr. Winnick: We have other accusations apart from those about the Conservative Government's behaviour and the charges that they have introduced—charges that, as the hon. Gentleman knows, have not been defended by all his colleagues. He may have voted for them but many Conservative Members honourably voted against them. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that at the Conservative party conference the Selsdon group produced a pamphlet in which it was suggested that the national health service should be privatised? It stated that there should be a sort of framework for the very needy and that otherwise people should pay. Apparently no press conference was held because that was considered inappropriate so near to an election. The production of the pamphlet demonstrates that changes have taken place under the Government to which we are opposed and that there are many Conservative Members and others, such as the members of the Selsdon group and other right wingers, who believe that the NHS should be privatised. There is no such pressure group within the Labour movement.

Mr. Burt: The hon. Gentleman must not charge me with association with the loony right any more than I would say to him, "What about the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist)? Where do you stand on what he says?" Members of our parties are entitled to their views. I hold no brief for the loony right in my party, as most of my right hon. and hon. Friends know. I do not know which brief the hon. Gentleman holds within his party for the various sectors of the political spectrum that his colleagues occupy. We all have colleagues who put

[Mr. Burt]

forward ideas for which the rest of us would not give house room. I have not been submitting anything that has come from a pressure group. I have presented the facts on what the Labour party did to the NHS when the Labour Government had charge of it. The facts are distasteful. The Labour Government ran the NHS poorly and an incoming Labour Government would do that again. We have had enough nonsense about the NHS from Labour Members.

I enjoyed hearing much of what is contained in the Gracious Speech. It has a confident tone of a Government who are progressing and building on the changes that have taken place within the past decade while retaining the base of economic reality, which is the major difference between the Government and the Opposition. In addition, the Government are introducing a more rounded set of policies in the context of society and the community that are better than those that we have seen over the past few years.

I have many reasons to welcome certain parts of the Gracious Speech but I shall concentrate on two. The first is the citizens charter. One of the most striking features of the past decade is that a Conservative Government sought to dismantle barriers in our society that had been in place for too long. It is we, uncluttered and free of the grip of public sector trade union leadership, who have sought to change the worst aspects of post-war Britain, which have caused so much damage and decline.

Such damage and decline are not always measurable in terms of lack of output, productivity or performance, but the consequences can be seen throughout our society, often in ways that cannot be measured. These range from the could-not-care-less attitude that is taken by those who should know better, to the unreasonable demands of those who have forgotten the virtues of patience and courtesy. The citizens charter is part of our progress to a society without barriers. There is much in the charter which sets out the responsibility of those in public and formerly public authorities and the rights of citizens—consumers—to obtain service from them.

The balance of power in our society has too often been with providers of public services, and protection for citizens has not been as great as it should have been. The citizens charter should not become something that puts the boot on the other foot for reasons of vengeance. It is not to become a whingers' charter. It is right to set out clearly the responsibilities of those who provide services, and it is equally right to remind us all that we have our own obligations and duties as citizens in our society. We have no right to demand the unreasonable, nor to pressurise and treat unbearably those who seek to provide a service for us.

The Government have spoken before of the concept of active citizenship. In spelling out the responsibilities of public authorities, the citizen needs to be aware of his or her duties. For example, it is no use requiring hard-pressed health authorities, which through the NHS have created a record second to none for care and devotion, to set targets and maximum waiting times for operations if citizens do not do all that they can to look after their own health. We all have sympathy with those who are made ill through no fault of their own, but too many illnesses in our society contain elements that are preventable. If we expect services to play fair with us, we must play fair with them.

The same applies in education. The concept of the active parent has been expanded through the work of the Education Reform Act 1988, but it can be taken further. We can require schools to open up details of their performance, but must back up schools and teachers who resent bitterly parents who take no interest in their children, throw them into school at the age of four or five, prop them in front of the television at night and then expect teachers to do all the work and to take all the criticism if the child fails to perform to the best of its ability. A good society requires the partnership of those who request and those who provide, and it is that type of society that we should seek.

In helping to build such a society I should not wish the citizens charter to be seen merely as an opportunity to criticise those in the public services. The public services contain a wealth of talent and expertise which is at the service of the general community. In the past it has too often been the case that the citizen's frustration in dealing with the public service—owing to the absence of such a charter—has built the wrong attitude between the two. The right type of charter can break that down and establish the correct relationship for the benefit of those who provide and for those who use the services.

The American poet Robert Frost said "Good fences make good neighbours." In his direct way he expressed the belief that what some might regard as a barrier between people was the basis of a relationship of trust, understanding and friendship which enhanced their lives. So should it be with the citizens charter. When dealing with the public service it is important for the public to recognise that they also have a role to play and that their attitude——

Mr. John Lee (Pendle): My hon. Friend will know that I represent a constituency which has perhaps the highest percentage of people employed in manufacturing industry. About 55 per cent. of employment in my constituency is in manufacturing and, as my hon. Friend knows, I am committed to the private sector and to business, as he is. Does he agree that many of us were perhaps embarrassed during the years of our Administration at some of the excessive attacks on those who work in the public sector and at the implication that those who work in that sector were interested only in working the shortest possible hours or in their inflation-proof pensions? However, throughout the north west and Lancashire and in my hon. Friend's constituency of Bury and in Pendle there are many hundreds—or thousands—of people who work in the public sector who give genuine service and who try to help members of the public in so many ways. The citizens charter is a two-way arrangement and a two-way relationship. We must acknowledge the contribution of those who work in the public sector as much as we justifiably defend and build up the rights of those who will be defended by the charter.

Mr. Burt: My hon. Friend has waited long and patiently to make that point which I appreciate. He is right—something seemed to go wrong between the Conservative Government and the public service during the past decade. We know that there were problems to be put right and we perhaps made the error of grouping people together, a charge which should never be levelled at politicians. If we get something wrong, we should acknowledge it. Sometimes things have not been right in

the public sector and changes must be made, but if we conveyed the impression that the public sector was somehow second class it was the wrong impression. I hope that we can now deal with that problem and ensure that that is not the belief.

Hon. Members who visit the public service in all its guises in our constituencies know the work that it does and we value and appreciate it. I agree with my hon. Friend that the charter should form the basis of a better relationship, one which recognises the public sector's work and which protects those who work in it. Those who work in it must be protected from the unpleasantness, abuse and —worst of all—the downright violence to which they are subjected by some members of the population. People who work in the public sector also have rights. I hope that the charter will acknowledge that fact, and that the Government will work to build a better relationship.

The second issue to which I wish to draw the House's attention is that part of the Queen's Speech relating to Europe. The past 45 years are but a tiny proportion of Europe's history but what has been achieved is, I believe, remarkable. The House should never forget the reasons for the origin of the European Community and why there is a different perspective on integration in continental Europe and in these islands. The experiences of occupied and war-torn continental Europe in the first and second world wars were fundamentally different from those in this country. However, our shared experiences easily enabled us to understand why the French and Germans especially wished to create an order in Europe which would prevent their children warring with each other ever again. That is a vision to which I wholeheartedly subscribe. I believe in a Europe in which, unlike generations before them, my children will not have to don uniforms to fight other Europeans and begin the conflagration of another world war. If that goal is to be achieved, I am prepared to put up with a great deal.

Seen in that context, the European Community has done an extraordinary job. It has created a modern day situation in which our young people, as they travel the continent, do not entertain the notion that they might be at war with their continental neighbours. Designed to prevent such an evil, the Community has been a success. However, how do we progress from here?

The key to European development is long-term, patient progress. It is unnecessary to force the pace too quickly within presidential cycles or to limit our options. Politically that would be inept because our political backgrounds are simply too diverse. Nations need time to alter their structures and prepare their people for great constitutional change. The suggestion that such changes might be imposed or driven in some way by people outside their boundaries only makes the process more difficult.

Historically, that pressure is inept. Europe is living proof that national hot-headedness lies always just below the surface in our different races. We cannot view the changes in eastern Europe or the day-to-day events in Yugoslavia without recognising that fact. Those who fail to understand the dangers of a European superstructure reawakening latent nationalistic feeling ignore the most basic and awful lesson of history that Europe has ever taught.

That historical lesson is many-sided. It is just as important to recognise that, while attempts to suppress national identities are doomed to failure, those who have come together in a larger unit voluntarily and for reasons of peaceful co-existence and harmony tend to do better than those who separate. The desire for unification in many European states in the 19th century after the chaos of civil strife of their previous existences proves that point. Accordingly, the best way to proceed is to have some sense of historical patience and allow some time to be taken over the major decisions that we face.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made that clear the other day when he said that there was no blueprint for Europe's future and that the decisions would ultimately be taken by what he called his children. I am old enough to be one of the children to whom my right hon. Friend referred. Perhaps hon. Members of my generation and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) will take the decisions. We will be guided by the wisdom and experience of hon. Members of slightly earlier generations.

We have time. We should not be pressed to take decisions in Europe too quickly. When we consider the 2,000 years of strife that Europe has experienced and the 45 years of harmony, it is clear that there are many good things to aim at.

There is more to today's debate than simply an analysis of the Queen's Speech. This debate must be the prime opportunity prior to a general election for the Leader of the Opposition to put aside all doubts about himself, his party and his policies. That opportunity has been comprehensively missed.

This debate was a chance for the Leader of the Opposition to deal with the charges that Conservative Members make about tax and spend; the lack of an anti-inflationary policy and the folly of a minimum wage and its dramatic impact on jobs identified by union leaders and economic experts alike and the incredible gap between Labour's promises to spend and a lack of commitment about where to find the finances. All those chances were lost.

There is a spirit hovering over the Opposition Benches tonight to which reference has not yet been made. That is the spirit of Thomas Digges, a former Member of this place. It was revealed in today's *Daily Telegraph* that he invented the astronomical telescope 30 years before Galileo, but the discovery was kept quiet for security reasons and we have all been under a misapprehension ever since. That so-called Digges doctrine is alive and well on the Opposition Benches—*[Interruption.]* Indeed, one would need an astronomical telescope tonight to discover any life on the Opposition Benches apart from the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes), who is in his customary position on the Opposition Front Bench.

We have been under a misapprehension about Labour's key policies for many years. The truth has been hidden from us. Of course, the Labour party has been in favour of Europe all the time. The manifesto commitment in 1983 to pull out, the views of the Leader of the Opposition and the 13 shadow Cabinet members who voted against the Single European Act in 1986 were all just a smoke screen.

Of course, the Labour party's commitment to personal choice and opportunity is a matter of long-term and deeply held belief. Therefore, Labour Members' votes against the sale of council houses, the open enrolment policy in schools, and their support of the abolition of grant-maintained schools and city technology colleges, the assisted places scheme and their belief in the return of secondary picketing, with its denial of choice and opportunity to work, have all been part of the Digges

[Mr. Burt]

smoke screen—"Get your policy, hide it from people, and, 30 years later, say that it was your idea all the time." The Digges doctrine will not hold water at the next election.

The debate on the Gracious Speech has been very good and hon. Members have enjoyed the day, but we are very interested in what the next Gracious Speech will say. I venture to suggest that the debate will be equally good and equally interesting. It will come from the Conservative Benches, and it will come from my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major).

9.50 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): When Her Majesty delivered the Gracious Speech this morning, I wondered for a moment whether she would tell us when the next general election would be. She could have told us with certainty that the next general election will be held during the first half of next year. However, on a serious note, never having before served in a Parliament that has gone into a fifth year, I believe that the continual speculation in certain quarters about the timing of the election is extremely damaging for the recovery of the economy. I never thought that I would say that I was open to persuasion on fixed-term Parliaments, but that is very much my case now. For parliamentarians to be subjected to weekly or monthly opinion polls is, to say the least, boring. To have continual jibes from the Opposition, taunting us that we are scared to have a general election, is childish and will lead the general public to become more disillusioned with politicians and politics than they are already. Perhaps in Parliaments to come we may seriously consider having fixed terms.

I have always been against the televising of our proceedings and I am still very much of that view today. However, I am glad that the behaviour of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and that of the Leader of the Opposition were seen. It enabled the general public clearly to see the contrast between the leaders of the two main parties. We saw the Prime Minister clearly set forth a positive set of policies around which the country can rally. We saw the Leader of the Opposition make one of the most damning, destructive and negative speeches that I have ever heard. When it came to a point of policy—my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer intervened—the Leader of the Opposition was totally floored. He could not answer. Of course, as we saw later, the Opposition are devoid of any policies.

I praise the details of the Gracious Speech. Conservative Members have always had clear views on our defence policies. The Opposition parties have also had clear views on our defence. However, in the two Parliaments in which I have served, the Opposition have seemed to change their views or change the goal posts. They were in favour of unilateral disarmament. They were always lecturing us that we were over-armed. They were always urging us to reduce our forces. They were always telling us that there was no nuclear threat and that we should respond accordingly. Of course, once we saw the change in the eastern bloc, once the overall threat was rather diminished, once we had our policy review and we announced changes, what did the Opposition do? As ever over the past few months, if they see an electoral opportunity, they jump on the bandwagon and say that we are reducing our arms too quickly.

My constituency contains GEC Avionics and Marconi is nearby, in Chelmsford. We have always recognised that it is not easy for such companies to diversify their activities. Nor is it easy, if one suddenly has to reduce one's work force by 500, to stand outside the factory and say, "Well, lads, you are just going to have to find other jobs because the country does not need as many arms as it used to." The Conservative party has always said that that is a problem, but the Opposition have simply said, "We do not need as many arms as we used to." The Opposition's hypocrisy over the current defence review has been absolutely appalling. Conservative Members have always had a consistent defence policy, but the Opposition have not.

I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt) mentioned the citizens charter. It is a splendid document that should receive all-party support. My goodness—it contains what the Opposition parties have always asked for. Whatever the problem, we can fix it. All Opposition Members should be rallying round to support our citizens charter. As the Prime Minister said, the citizens charter offers the citizen nothing less than a revolution in the way in which public services are delivered. It will be the most comprehensive quality initiative ever launched. New and tougher standards of service will be set. We will introduce a wide range of mechanisms to ensure that those standards are met to the citizens' satisfaction. It should also point the way to a new pride and purpose for those who work in the public services. All those are sensible things and should unite us. As ever, however, the Opposition appear churlish.

I also support the words in the Gracious Speech about improving education. I am delighted that standards of education in Basildon have improved in each of the eight years that I have represented the constituency. I am proud to be the father of five children. My two eldest children attend a local state primary school. They can read well, they behave reasonably well and they have mastered the basics of arithmetic. Not only are standards of education improving in Basildon, but we also have the first grant-maintained school in Essex, which has been an enormous success.

I am also delighted that the Gracious Speech referred to British Rail. Basildon has the worst rail service in the country, the Fenchurch Street line. Three weeks ago I publicly made a journey on that line. British Rail's representatives did not even turn up to meet me and the Basildon commuter group. When the engine rolled in, it was pulling eight carriages, of which two were locked. Only about one fifth of the people on the platform managed to get on to the train. When we arrived at Fenchurch Street, a British Rail official rushed up to me to apologise for this delay. I was given a card giving 10 excuses for the fact that the train was 20 minutes late. I am delighted to tell the House that on 12 November Sir Bob Reid will be travelling on the 8.34 am train, together with the Basildon commuter group and Essex Members of Parliament.

I conclude with Europe. My hon. Friends and I would like some honesty from the Opposition——

Mr. Burt: They are not here.

Mr. Amess: No, there are not many Opposition Members in the Chamber, but we should like some honesty from them about where they stand in relation to Europe. The Liberal Democrats have a firm policy. They are prepared to support a federal Europe and to sell out British interests and British sovereignty. They make no secret of that. But where does the Labour party stand on Europe? We just do not know.

When the general election is called the media will give equal coverage during the three-week campaign to the three political parties——

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Four parties.

Mr. Amess: Four political parties. Then the general public will listen carefully to the policies which the various parties enunciate. I have no doubt that the public will endorse the Government and that the Conservative party will lead us into the year 2000.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) asked about the Labour party's policy on Europe. Look at the time that he asks that question. The debate finishes at 10 o'clock. How the hell does he expect a response from me? If he is here tomorrow, I may have the opportunity to tell him.

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

Dounreay

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

10 pm

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): As I rise to speak to the House on this important matter, I am conscious that it is a complex and difficult subject. It is a farce—indeed, it is tragic—that a matter of such grave concern to the people of Scotland should be raised in an Adjournment debate when time is limited. The matter needs a great deal of exploration. It seems ludicrous that Scottish Back-Benchers do not even have the facility of a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs to which we could summon Ministers and ask them in detail about the problems that we face.

I wish to place on record my party's stance and my personal stance on the reprocessing of nuclear material at Dounreay. It is our long-held view that foreign spent nuclear fuel should not be sent to Dounreay for storage, let alone for reprocessing, because it breaches what is for us a fundamental principle: that the responsibility for the disposal of spent nuclear fuel should lie with the reactor operators. If the appropriate storage facilities do not exist, that is a problem which should and can be addressed by the reactor operators themselves. The Scottish National party has made its view perfectly clear on many occasions and I reiterate that view this evening: radioactive material, whether it be spent nuclear fuel or waste, should be stored above ground, on site, where it can be subject to close inspection.

There is grave public concern in Scotland about the possibility of our country being used as the world's nuclear dustbin. The Minister may think that that is a strong expression, but I use it carefully. The matter was first drawn to our attention as far back as 1974 when the nuclear industry inspectorate's chief inspector said this about the consequences of developing reprocessing in the United Kingdom:

> "The price for Britain of building lucrative business world-wide in nuclear fuel services could be that it becomes the dumping place for the world's nuclear waste."

So as far back as 1974 it was spelt out by the industry itself. At that stage the inspector did not mention spent nuclear fuel. Events prove that, in the context of reprocessing spent nuclear fuel, his prediction is being realised.

In Scotland during the past year we have witnessed the distasteful spectacle of Dounreay scouring the planet and touting for business as the nuclear prostitute of the world, seeking to sign as many contracts as possible to dispose of other countries' spent nuclear fuel while the clock ticks away towards the 1994 deadline set by the Government when funding for the 250 MW prototype fast reactor will cease.

Dounreay has been attempting to fill a gap in the international market which has appeared since the United States energy department decided in 1989 to ban the import of research reactor fuel pending an environmental assessment. It has been Dounreay's proud boast that it is the only civilian site in the western world which can reprocess the highly enriched uranium fuel used by 50 reactors in 22 countries. According to press reports, Dounreay is attempting to build up its foreign business to £25 million. In that context, what has been particularly difficult for all of us in Scotland to deal with has been the

[Mrs. Margaret Ewing]

Government's secrecy. What have the Government done and said? As usual, they have been willing to sub-contract these important decisions to the nuclear industry and to stand back, like Pontius Pilate, and say, "This has nothing to do with us." Recently, from a series of parliamentary questions that I tabled to the Secretary of State for Scotland, it became clear that since his appointment he had not even bothered to contact the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority to discuss the storage and reprocessing of spent fuel at Dounreay. That is a gross dereliction of duty. Perhaps he has been too busy writing letters to his colleagues in the Cabinet—a matter to which I shall return later.

There has been a conspiracy of silence between the nuclear industry and the Government on providing information about the contracts that Dounreay has signed and about the discussions and negotiations that have taken place or are taking place with foreign reactors. Not only radioactive plutonium has a half-life; so does the information on these contracts, which leaks so slowly from Scottish Office canisters. Elected Members of Parliament, councillors and others interested have been dependent, like the general public, on press reports and the monitoring activities of groups such as the Scottish Campaign to Resist the Atomic Menace, Greenpeace and the Northern European Information Group. I pay tribute to them tonight for the work that they have undertaken in an attempt to keep us aware of what is happening out there.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): I realise that this is a short debate and that I cannot possibly ask the hon. Lady all the questions that I should like to ask. Has she asked the Atomic Energy Authority about these contracts? When I have done so, I have had no difficulty whatever in obtaining full and frank information at all times. The allegation that there has been undue secrecy seems untrue.

Mrs. Ewing: The hon. Gentleman, who has a special interest in this matter, must be aware that the first information on the Iraqi contract came through a leaked letter and not directly from UKAEA. Although Members of Parliament are constantly in contact with that organisation, we do not have the opportunity to explore the matter in detail or to discuss openly what is taking place. We are learning now about contracts because information has been leaked.

It was confirmed in September 1990 that Dounreay had secured its first new contract for reprocessing with the Physikalisch Technische Bundesanstalt research reactor in Braunschweig to reprocess 39 spent fuel rods. So far 20 of them have been sent to Dounreay, with a further consignment due.

We are told that Dounreay has held preliminary discussions with the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation about reprocessing spent fuel from the High Flux Australian reactor. However, any commercial negotiations would require Australian Government approval. In February 1991, ANSTO confirmed that talks had not progressed beyond the preliminary stage. With the United States removed, at least temporarily, from the reprocessing marketplace, the possibility of the 450 spent fuel elements coming to Scotland should not and cannot be dismissed. It was announced in 1985 that the 450 were destined for the United States, but they have fallen victim to the moratorium operating in the USA.

The past record shows that a consignment of 40 spent fuel elements from a research reactor in Bombay arrived at Dounreay in February 1991. The flask arrived at Felixstowe and then travelled by road to Dounreay. Traces of radioactive contamination were found on the flask when it was being washed after arrival. The UKAEA insisted that that contamination was not caused by a leak. That has aroused a great deal of fear and was referred to in a recent Health and Safety Executive report.

Unlike most of the other research reactors from which Dounreay is hoping to attract business, the Indian reactor bought its fuel from Dounreay initially. The contract was signed in 1964. Neither the enriched uranium extracted during reprocessing nor the waste will be returned to India.

It has also been suggested that Dounreay is on the brink of signing contracts with reactors in Canada. Dounreay has been involved in discussions with Atomic Energy Canada Ltd. about the possibility of reprocessing spent fuel rods from AECL's NRX, NRU and Slowpoke-2 research reactors, five more Slowpoke-2s from universities and colleges—from Toronto, Montreal, Halifax, Edmonton and Kingston—and yet another Slowpoke-2 at the Saskatchewan research council in Saskatoon. All of these reactors use highly enriched uranium, unlike Canada's production reactors. Greenpeace estimates that fresh fuel can be turned into a nuclear weapon in only seven days, and that spent fuel can be converted for use in as little as one month. Dounreay has apparently given AECL a quotation and AECL is now considering it.

"Return to sender" clauses are constantly cited by the Government to try to allay fears. The clauses, which were introduced under the 1974-79 Labour Government, were no doubt designed to reassure people that the dangers would be minimised, as the spent nuclear fuel would be returned to the country of origin. But what certainty is there?

The contract which was signed between NUKEM in Alzenau in Germany and the UKAEA concerning the storage of this question. One hundred and fifty storage places have been reserved for NUKEM at Dounreay, and article 3.5 of the agreement states:

> "If NUKEM decide not to reprocess, all the fuel in storage at Dounreay shall be removed from the UK by the 30 September 1996".

However, if NUKEM decides that it wants the fuel to be reprocessed, article 18.4 provides that:

> "This waste, conditioned for transport and subsequent storage will be removed from the UK not later than 25 years after reprocessing and be returned to the FRG".

In other words, Dounreay has agreed to store the spent fuel from research reactors for four years. If the client decides that it does not want the fuel reprocessed it must be removed from Dounreay within six years. If the reprocessing goes ahead, waste, conditioned for transport and subsequent storage, will be removed from the United Kingdom not later than 25 years after reprocessing. This is not a question of, "Here today, reprocessed tonight and gone tomorrow".

Research institutes seem to have found at least a temporary solution to their problems. The main motivation in signing reprocessing contracts will simply be

to offload spent nuclear fuel on to someone else. No wonder that the whole process has been referred to as short or medium-term dumping.

There is also the question of what will happen to the nuclear waste if the client country does not have the facilities to accept it when Dounreay is ready to return it.

Dounreay has claimed, and no doubt the Minister will concur, that there is to be no increase in the level of reprocessing. Dounreay has in the past reprocessed just over 250 spent fuel rods annually, and a maximum of 758 in any one year. If Dounreay intends to use the MTR plant up to its maximum capacity of 900 spent fuel rods per year, discharges will inevitably increase.

As there is such a high incidence of leukaemia clusters around Dounreay and Sellafield, we should be trying to reduce, not increase, the level of reprocessing. No satisfactory response has been made to that research.

I now turn to the question of transport, one of the aspects which most worry the people of Scotland. Experience suggests that spent fuel will arrive on non purpose-built ships at ports in the south of England and then travel by road to Dounreay.

The International Atomic Energy Agency requires flasks used for transporting spent fuel to be designed to survive the impact of a 9-m fall—equivalent to an impact of 30 mph—and to survive being engulfed by fire for 30 minutes at a temperature of 800 deg. C and immersion at a depth of 200 m for one hour. Freight trains often exceed 30 mph and trains pass over viaducts and bridges considerably more than 9 m high—sometimes as high as 42 m.

Where will the waste come from? I want to deal in particular with the Iraqi waste controversy. On 6 October the Scottish *Sunday Mail* revealed in an excellent piece of investigative journalism that, in a draft letter to the Secretary of State for Energy, the Secretary of State for Scotland had made it clear that he would not object to fuel from an Iraqi nuclear reactor, damaged during the Gulf war, being sent to Dounreay for reprocessing. In his letter he stated:

"Such a development will cause me no little difficulty—especially from the SNP! . . . if you and Douglas Hurd judge that the UK's overall interests will be best served . . . then I would not want to stand in the way of UKAEA's involvement."

I believe that the Government would have kept the matter secret for much longer if the draft letter had not been leaked.

Against that background, what assurances can the Minister give that contracts are not being pursued with other east European countries such as Bulgaria and the Ukraine to take in spent fuel and nuclear waste—given that the Iraqi contract was shrouded in secrecy for four months? Can he state categorically that no such contracts are being considered, particularly in the light of the decision by the Ukrainian Parliament to shut down Chernobyl as soon as possible?

I do not believe that Scotland can or should avoid its international obligations, but I object to the fact that we are apparently being singled out as the one country that will be the nuclear laundry for everyone else.

I believe that the genuine fears that exist in my part of Scotland and throughout Scotland are justified. I hope that the Government will clarify their stance and reassure the people of Scotland that we are not to be the nuclear dustbin of the world.

10.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): I am grateful for the opportunity to put the record straight on this matter. The first thing I want to make clear is that the description of the debate on the Order Paper—"Reprocessing of Nuclear Waste at Dounreay"—contains an inaccuracy. The United Kingdom does not reprocess nuclear waste; we do not even import nuclear waste. British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. at Sellafield and the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority at Dounreay reprocess nuclear fuel, not nuclear waste. The hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) should have learnt that by now.

Reprocessing is a necessary first step towards recycling nuclear fuel. It also ensures that the waste that is ultimately disposed of is in a good form for long-term storage.

Secondly, the hon. Lady made great play of the possible contract between Dounreay and Iraq. She alleged that the preparations for that contract took place in an atmosphere of secrecy. Nothing could be further from the truth. In a telling intervention, the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), in whose constituency Dounreay lies, pointed out that he has never had any difficulty in obtaining relevant and accurate information from the operator.

I should also point out that, as far back as July, the IAEA—the International Atomic Energy Agency—in Vienna made public the potential involvement of United Kingdom facilities. That was reported in British newspapers on 11 July. If that is a cover up, it is a pretty inefficient one. I invite the hon. Lady to read the newspapers even if she has not asked the operator about plans for the use of its facilities.

I should like to take this opportunity to emphasise that the work on the Iraqi material is being done for the United Nations and the IAEA. The material that may come to the country from Iraq is highly enriched uranium. If suitably processed in Iraq, that material could have been used to make nuclear warheads. It is therefore essential that, in accordance with Security Council resolution 687, it is removed from Iraq and made safe. That is why the IAEA approached France and the United Kingdom asking for assistance in removing the material and making it safe in specialised facilities.

This will involve reprocessing of the material to separate out the impurities and then diluting the uranium to a suitable specification for civil use. The reason why facilities at Dounreay were offered is that the fuel is of a specialist type which the Dounreay plant can process. So we have not offered to solve an Iraqi waste problem. We have offered to play a part in an international effort to neutralise Iraq's potential nuclear weapons capability.

I have some difficulty understanding the hon. Lady's objections to this policy. What does she think should be done with the material in Iraq? Does she believe that it should be left in that country? We believe it right that, as a member of the coalition that defeated Iraq in the Gulf war, the United Kingdom should stand ready to do what is necessary to guarantee the peace.

Mrs. Ewing: Does the Minister understand that France, one of the countries that originally supplied the nuclear material to Iraq, has recognised its moral responsibility for dealing with this problem, but that the Soviet Union,

[Mrs. Ewing]

which was also responsible for it, has refused to accept its responsibility? Will he exercise influence on the Soviet Union to accept its moral responsibility?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: It is likely that the Soviet Union will process some of the Iraqi material, but it does not have the technical competence to deal with the irradiated, enriched uranium; so it is entirely appropriate that France and this country should provide our technical facilities, which are internationally regarded, to do the necessary work.

As for the more general question of overseas reprocessing at Dounreay, I emphasise again that spent nuclear fuel has been reprocessed there for more than 30 years—safely and without any adverse effects on the environment. Dounreay has built up an enviable international reputation as a centre of excellence for this work. It is a great disservice to the dedicated Scottish work force at Dounreay to try to tarnish their reputation by spreading alarmist claims with misinformation.

I am determined that the highest and most stringent safety requirements should be adhered to, and the regulatory bodies must be satisfied that any work done at Dounreay is carried out to the highest standards.

About 1,700 people work at Dounreay. Their livelihoods are important and it is entirely right that their expertise, built up over many years, should be made available to reprocess nuclear fuel when appropriate.

Of course we hope that Dounreay will diversify and look for work outside nuclear tasks, especially in the area of alternative and renewable energies; but we all know that the fast reactor programme will cease in 1994 and I do not think it right that, as a matter of policy, the hon. Lady should seek to shut off the work going on there to reprocess nuclear fuel.

The hon. Lady represents a nationalist party, which seems to preclude the idea of taking on an international responsibility for nuclear matters. Moreover, if she were to enforce a purely nationalist policy in respect of nuclear matters in Scotland, that could have consequences that she would regret—because the quantity of Scottish fuel reprocessed at Sellafield is vastly greater than the amount of overseas fuel brought to Dounreay.

The hon. Lady also knows that the search for a long-term repository for the storage of nuclear waste is continuing but the work has been suspended in Caithness. It is, therefore, highly likely that waste arising from Scottish reactors will eventually be disposed of in England. According to the hon. Lady's argument, Scotland would not benefit from a nationalist solution to the problems of nuclear waste disposal. Indeed, the Scottish nuclear industry would be left with a considerably greater radioactive waste management task if all cross-border movement of spent nuclear waste were halted, as she appears to want. Plants in England provide substantial net spent fuel reprocessing and radioactive waste management for Scotland.

There is no question of Scotland becoming a dump for overseas nuclear waste. The Atomic Energy Authority's current reprocessing contracts for overseas spent fuel contain return-of-waste options and we fully intend that those will be exercised and wastes returned. Reprocessing of overseas spent fuel is a proper and appropriate business for Dounreay. The most stringent standards are applied to safety, transport and environmental protection.

Mr. Maclennan: Will the Minister confirm that, notwithstanding what the hon. Lady has said about the cluster of leukaemia in the vicinity of Thurso, all the scientific studies that have been done fail to prove any connection with work being done at Dounreay? Whatever the explanation for that—clusters of leukaemia occur in many places far removed from nuclear sites—no scientific connection has been demonstrated and scaremongering about Dounreay is deeply damaging and much to be deplored.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I respect that intervention from the hon. Gentleman, who is the local Member of Parliament for Dounreay. He is entirely right because there is no proven link between leukaemia clusters and nuclear installations. Indeed, leukaemia clusters occur in areas that are far removed from nuclear installations. They also occur in New Zealand, which has no nuclear installations. The subject deserves further study but it is wrong to draw premature conclusions and to scare people unnecessarily before a proven link has been established.

We are committed to the highest safety and environmental standards and put great store by the contractual arrangements in place for the return of wastes.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Does the Minister accept that the vast majority of people in Scotland recognise and understand international obligations, and that the whole problem of the Iraqi contract arose from a feeling that something was being put through behind the scenes? Does he agree that, rather than arguing about what should be done at Dounreay, where a great deal of expertise is available, we should argue for open government; and that, in that respect, a lesson can be learnt for the future?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am happy to repeat the Government's view that openness is a friend of the nuclear industry and everyone has everything to gain by open discussion and understanding of the complex issues involved. There was no intention to be secretive about the Iraqi contract and there is no cover up. The information was available in the summer and, as the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland said, it is his experience as a local Member of Parliament that the nuclear industry is much more open than has been alleged by the hon. Member for Moray.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 1 November 1991

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BILLS PRESENTED

ASYLUM

Mr. Secretary Baker, supported by Mr. Secretary Heseltine, Mr. Secretary Newton, Mr. Secretary Brooke, Mr. Secretary Hunt, Mr. Secretary Lang and Mr. Peter Lloyd, presented a Bill to make provision about persons who claim asylum in the United Kingdom and to extend the provisions of the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987 to transit passengers: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time and to be printed [Bill 1.]

COAL INDUSTRY

Mr. Secretary Wakeham, supported by Mr. Secretary Howard, Mr. Secretary Hunt, Mr. Secretary Lilley, Mr. Secretary Lang, Mr. David Mellor, Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory and Mr. Colin Moynihan, presented a Bill to make provision for extending the duration of, and increasing the limit on, grants under section 3 of the Coal Industry Act 1987 and to repeal the Coal Mines Regulation Act 1908: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time and to be printed [Bill 2.]

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE

Mr. Secretary Heseltine, supported by The Prime Minister, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Newton, Mr. Secretary Hunt, Mr. Secretary Lang, Mr. Michael Portillo and Mr. Robert Key, presented a Bill to provide for certain local authorities to levy and collect a new tax, to be called council tax; to abolish community charges; to make further provision with respect to local government finance (including provision with respect to certain grants by local authorities); and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time and to be printed [Bill 3.]

WELSH DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

Mr. Secretary Hunt, supported by Mr. Secretary Heseltine, Mr. Secretary Lilley, Mr. David Mellor, Sir Wyn Roberts and Mr. Nicholas Bennett, presented under Standing Order No. 48 (Procedure upon Bills whose main object is to create a charge upon the public revenue) a Bill to increase the financial limit in section 18(3) of the Welsh Development Agency Act 1975: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time and to be printed [Bill 4.]

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question,

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.—*[Mr. Peter Walker.]*

Question again proposed

Foreign Affairs and Defence

9.36 am

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs(Mr. Douglas Hurd): In his speech yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister dealt with our approach to the two intergovernmental conferences in Maastricht and also announced a two-day debate in the House later this month to examine both negotiations in greater detail. I shall say something this morning about the negotiation on political union, in which I am most closely involved, but I do not want to concentrate on those themes today, because the world has not obligingly stood still as we prepare the approach to Maastricht. Rarely can there have been so many upheavals in the landscape in so short a time. Therefore, I want to deal mainly with some other aspects of foreign policy.

Some formidable and even frightening features of the familiar landscape have disappeared, and obviously that is to our great content, but elsewhere there are new commotions and new uncertainties, and I should also like to deal with some of those.

As a general message, one can say that ideology is no longer the main cause of the divisions in the world or of potential conflict. That is because communism and its paler imitations have been decisively rejected and because there is a trend to more liberal and democratic values. Certainly it is patchy and there are setbacks, but that trend is clearly visible in continent after continent.

What we see now are the more traditional threats to peace arising from divisions between and within nations. Nationalism has revived and it has lost none of its old force. Against that background—I shall give illustrations in a minute—those in charge of British foreign policy should concentrate on three main points. First, we must help resolve conflicts and direct the force of nationalism into containable channels that do not flood the whole landscape. Secondly, we have to help countries emerging from dictatorship towards democracy and better government, all the time keeping in mind the background that our main task is the protection and promotion of British interests. Thirdly, we need to improve, update and strengthen the international institutions to which we belong and which are crucial in those first two tasks.

The oldest and perhaps most bitter conflict that this House has discussed year in, year out—certainly ever since I have been a Member and long before that—is that in the middle east between Arab and Israel. Many efforts have been made by many people in the past to bring the parties round a table together. It has been clear to me, and I think

[Mr. Douglas Hurd]

to most people, for some time that the only way to achieve that is through a strong and sustained effort by the United States, fully backed by us in Europe.

From time to time, we have had, as is perfectly right, our own ideas, proposals and procedures. I am thinking of the Venice declaration in 1980 and efforts made by many other people, including Lord Carrington. I thought it right, and other European Foreign Ministers thought it right, to put aside any differences of emphasis and to shove hard on the same wheel as the Americans to try and get the dispute out of the ditch and into some sort of negotiation.

Yesterday, the Leader of the Opposition rightly praised the effort that Secretary Baker has made. It has been a formidable effort, considering what else is on the plate of the American Secretary of State at any time. The way in which he has shoved at the wheel, persevered and found a way through many disappointments and difficulties is notable, whatever happens hereafter.

Two days ago, the peace conference opened in Madrid, and we shall do everything we can to help it forward. We have an official from the Foreign Office there, and we are discussing through the presidency, Hans van den Broek, the Netherlands Foreign Minister, what kind of support and impetus we can give to the peacemakers.

It is a huge opportunity. It may be a bit of a long march, as I heard one commentator say on the radio this morning, but the opportunity must not and cannot be neglected by people who are interested in matching their rhetoric of many years with deeds. There is a possibility for Israel to find a way to dwell in peace within secure borders and for the Arabs to correct and see corrected the injustices from which they have suffered. I am thinking particularly of the Palestinians. All of us must make an effort to do what we can to bring about the success of the conference.

Another conflict, which again has exercised the House for as long as I can remember and long before, and which often seemed desperate and unyielding, is the conflict within South Africa. That is yielding to treatment essentially by leaders in South Africa—President de Klerk, Mr. Mandela, Chief Buthelezi and others. The legal pillars of apartheid have been abolished and those concerned are on the edge of crucial constitutional talks which we hope will lead to a democratic constitution.

The scene is painfully marked by violence in the townships. It is crucial that the agreement that has been reached on the means of preventing and dealing with such violence should be fully and quickly carried through. Part of the solution to the violence is effective and professional policing. Everyone agrees that the way in which the South African police traditionally dealt with these matters under the apartheid system is changing and must be changed. If we can help with that, we shall do so, and I have made that clear. We have invited representatives of the South African Government and opposition groups to visit Britain to look at community policing here and see whether our experiences can be of some help in their townships.

The change in South Africa was mirrored strikingly at the Commonwealth summit in Harare. No longer did wrangles over South Africa dominate that meeting. There was some discussion of sanctions, but it was measured and good tempered because it was not about the principle of sanctions. It was about the pace at which sanctions should be dismantled. There was no dissent about the principle of dismantling sanctions; there was some discussion, and indeed disagreement, about the pace. Not everyone agreed with us that the time had come to move faster than the committee that met in New Delhi shortly before the conference, recommended.

There was substantial respect for the argument which the Prime Minister put with great force. It was accepted to a considerable extent even by people who perhaps came to the conference expecting to disagree. His argument was that there was a big time lag between the decision to invest and the fruits of investment. There is a time lag between when people in a boardroom say that they will invest in South Africa and when there are jobs, skills and opportunities for blacks as a result. The economic background in South Africa is formidable, with nil economic growth and 3 per cent. population growth. The need for foreign investment decisions is now, not later.

If we wait, to authorise those foreign investment decisions or to encourage people to take them, until a perfect constitution is in operation, we are condemning ourselves to a great gap between the time when those decisions are taken and the time when they bring benefit. Now is the time to sow if the harvest is to be there when it is needed.

That argument made a considerable impact. Anyone who follows the discussions within the African National Congress on this subject knows that it is wrestling with exactly that point and trying to find ways through it. I think that considerable progress will be made on that score.

Before I deal with the dispute in Yugoslavia, perhaps I can make a general point—I should be interested if it coincides with the views that right hon. and hon. Members have formed—about disputes in the world after the end of the cold war. It is increasingly clear that the United States is not willing, and the Soviet Union is not able, to act as policemen or magistrates of the world. At the end of the cold war, some people thought that there would be one super-power and some form of American domination. That does not seem to be the instinct or the will in Washington or the United States as a whole. Increasingly, the US will look to regional or international organisations to settle regional disputes.

That has great bearing on what is happening and what might happen in Yugoslavia. It has meant clearly and specifically that the European Community has been expected to take the lead in international efforts to help find an answer to the problems in Yugoslavia. That is right. The House would reject the idea that we or other countries in Europe should sit by calmly while a European country disintegrates in violence and suffering such as we are now seeing. Partly because of the strong feelings that have naturally been aroused by that suffering, I have tried to be realistic in what I have said on this matter in this House and during the recess.

We cannot impose peace on the peoples and republics of Yugoslavia—nobody can. For example, few hon. Members would argue that we should launch British soldiers into operations to which it would be hard to see a limit or an end. I have been strongly against pretending that there is an ability and willingness to do that, because that would be unreal. If we started to do that, we would encourage hopes which we would not be willing or able to realise. It would not be sensible to go down that path.

However, we can and have sought to offer from outside other ways to peace.

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): Before the Minister leaves the question whether we can intervene directly, as he and the other members of the Community are considering an oil embargo to reduce the possibility of the Yugoslavs using their air force, would it be possible in practice to close Croatian air space and thus prevent the bombings and killings without undue involvement or danger?

Mr. Hurd: I shall come to that point as I cover the various possibilities.

We have already offered ways to peace. We have monitors from the European Twelve in Yugoslavia and when, as has often happened, a ceasefire has been arranged, they have done their best to help it to stick. They have not had great success, because too many agreements have been signed and then not honoured. However, it is worth while continuing the monitor's efforts. Indeed, as one of the worries is that the southern republics might explode in the same way as Croatia, there is a point in having—as we now have—EC monitors in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

We have also provided a framework in which the parties can talk. Europe owes a debt to Lord Carrington for undertaking, under no obligation, to chair that conference. He intends to persevere in that task, which makes a substantial contribution, for which the House should be grateful.

We are anxious to help on the humanitarian side, which is increasingly necessary. We are contributing £250,000 for relief to the International Committee of the Red Cross and we are ready to step up co-operation with Yugoslavia and the republics on the economic side, once they become interested in economics. I am afraid that the passions of politics prevail over consideration of their standard of living.

Thus, we have opened those doors and offered those facilities, and we now need to build up pressure on the parties to pass through those doors and use those facilities, to stop fighting and to come to realistic and effective negotiations. Last month in New York, the Security Council approved a mandatory arms embargo. This week, the Secretary-General's report shows that that has been breached and needs to be tightened. Significant meetings of the European Foreign Affairs Council and perhaps also of the Security Council of the United Nations will take place this week to consider how we can build up the pressures.

I believe that the time has come to suspend the Community's trade and co-operation agreement with Yugoslavia and, as the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) said, it is well worth while examining how an oil embargo would work. It would have to be mandatory and imposed by the United Nations—that is already clear—but its impact might differentiate to some extent between those who are willing to work for peace and those who are, so far, somewhat obdurate.

We must increasingly differentiate between those who have heeded all the calls and efforts that have been made and those who, to put it mildly, have had difficulty in doing so, especially the Yugoslavia national army, which seems increasingly to be struggling for its own existence as an army, regardless of any constituted authority. The siege of and attacks on Dubrovnik can be justified by no political argument, and that has swayed many people into believing, as I do, that we must increasingly differentiate between those who are working, however imperfectly, for the need for discussion and negotiation and those who are not.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): On the important point of differentiation, does my right hon. Friend agree that, so long as the United Kingdom and its Community partners refuse to recognise the democratically expressed wish of Slovenia and, more importantly, Croatia for independence, the Yugoslav Government and army and the Serbians will maintain their aggression against Croatia because they will see that, by force of arms, they will have a virtual carte blanche to do as they like?

Mr. Hurd: No, I do not agree with my hon. Friend about that. Although countries that assert their independence and are unwilling to re-enter any kind of union will not be denied that, I have two thoughts about the timing and style of recognition. First, to recognise without effectively being able to guarantee protection is somewhat misleading and I have already dealt with that. My second thought concerns the southern republics. If one recognises at the wrong time and in the wrong way, there is a real danger that the other republics of Yugoslavia will be left in a state in which they will almost certainly explode. That dilemma has weighed heavily with those of us who have thought about that problem. I do not reject my hon. Friend's argument entirely, but those of us who have met collectively within the Twelve have not felt that the time has come to take that step.

I am not sure whether the practical suggestion of the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber about interdicting air space is meaningful. Obviously it has crossed our minds, and I have read about such a suggestion. It would probably involve activity by the United States and others which could be authorised only by the United Nations, and I doubt whether the United Nations would authorise it. That proposal would not be viable, but I have made two others this morning which we shall pursue.

It is very important to keep the peace conference going. There are signs that those concerned wish to discuss the underlying problems. However patchily and imperfectly they do so, the opportunity offered by the Hague conference must be kept alive.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson (Newbury): Is it conceivable that we can sit back and watch Croatia being defeated by the Yugoslavian or Serbian army—whichever name one chooses to use—and do nothing about it? Would not our recognition of Croatia automatically give that country a status that would allow the United Nations to become involved? Because we have not done that, the issue is treated as domestic and the United Nations therefore stands apart.

Mr. Hurd: No, the United Nations is quite rightly involved—I went to the Security Council debate on that—and it will be involved again. The international community does not view the matter as an internal issue. Moreover, recognition of Croatia would not add to or subtract from that. It will be and should be treated increasingly as an international matter.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is it not fair to say that, in respect of the quest for independence of Croatia from Yugoslavia, some people in this country and perhaps in

[Mr. Dennis Skinner]

Yugoslavia may ask why Britain and Britain's Foreign Secretary talk about an oil embargo against Yugoslavia, which is trying to keep its country intact, when that same Foreign Secretary has similar troubles in Northern Ireland but would not thank Common Market countries for intervening there? What is the real difference?

Mr. Hurd: The real difference is that we maintain our position in Northern Ireland because that is the wish of the majority there, constantly and repeatedly expressed by democratic means. Our position in Northern Ireland is solidly and democratically based, which is why this House —at least all but a few of its Members—agrees that Britain should sustain its effort in that part of this country. The position in Yugoslavia is entirely different.

Mr. Skinner: That is what you say.

Mr. Hurd: It certainly is. I rather suspect that most people agree with me, too.

Of course there is a worry that there will be a read-across from what is happening in Yugoslavia to what may happen in the Soviet Union. I spent a morning two days ago in Leipzig at an Anglo-German meeting attended by our ambassadors to Moscow—German and British—and our experts on the Soviet Union. We tried to reach a solid and agreed analysis of the situation and also tried to agree on certain practical means of co-operation on the ground. We did reach a common analysis: there is no doubt that the old system is smashed beyond recall. There is no doubt that its total failure has left the Soviet Union and the peoples of the republics in a disastrous state. The economy is disintegrating, the institutions are discredited —a very bad combination for any country or group of countries.

The House must face the possibility that the centre in Moscow will wither away, not at all in the way that Marx envisaged—[HON. MEMBERS: "Engels, actually."] Opposition Members are more expert in these matters than I. So the centre will wither away, not as Engels imagined it would, but because of the fierce assertion of sovereignty in different forms by one republic after another.

The consequence is that we in Britain increasingly have to deal with republics. That is already in hand. Most of the House will agree with the distinction that we have drawn between the three Baltic republics and the other republics, because of the history and because we never accepted legally their assimilation into the Soviet Union in 1940. We have recognised them, and we have three ambassadors in those countries.

The other republics are in a different category. While they are still groping to decide what use to make of their power, they must accept that certain responsibilities are also involved. The republics will not be easily accepted into the international community if they repudiate the responsibilities of the Soviet Union in the same way as the Bolsheviks repudiated the responsibilities and obligations of the Czar.

There are several aspects to this; one of them is debt. There was an educative meeting between Group of Seven officials and representatives of the republics in Moscow last week at which this point was thrashed out. Even more important are the Soviet signatures on disarmament and arms control agreements. It is crucial that those agreements should not unravel—a point that we continually make to the republics as well as to the centre. This country is concerned with the control of strategic weapons, but there is also the ratification of the conventional forces in Europe agreement. It is important that it should be honoured; otherwise, the world will take not a step forward but a big step backward in the crucial area of arms control.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, as chairman of the Group of Seven, has a particular responsibility in co-ordinating the response of the west to the needs of the Soviet Union. We are mobilising that response within the Community, and with the Japanese, Canadians and Americans, first of all to deal with hunger. There is a great deal of conflicting evidence about the extent of the probable hunger in the Soviet Union and the republics this winter. Each visitor I receive leaves me with a different impression, but it is likely that there will be hungry and suffering people in the cold, and it is therefore important that the western world use food and food credits to relieve their suffering.

In addition to food, there is technical assistance. It is already flowing and it is needed to remedy the disastrous gaps and defects in certain operations in the Soviet Union —especially the gap between growing food and getting it to the shops, between producing oil and getting it onto world markets. These areas of Soviet life, always inadequate, have now virtually collapsed. It will require new ideas and new people whom we can help to train and equip to put matters right.

The House has debated eastern Europe in general terms several times, and I will not go over old ground. The urgent need is to conclude the association agreements being negotiated between the Community and Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia. There was a hiccup during the recess, but the Commission now has a reasonably liberal mandate, which should enable it, I hope, to conclude these agreements in time for the beginning of next year.

I want to discuss the strengthening of international institutions. I do not want to talk about the content of the Maastricht negotiations, except to mention one point. As the House knows, the co-operation between Foreign Ministers has grown very quickly in recent years. We believe that we should build on that success and we therefore support the idea of a common foreign and security policy, although not on all matters. That would not be possible or desirable, but it is possible to identify certain issues on which it is sensible for the Twelve to act together. I have already dealt with some of them. I know from my short experience of the past couple of years that this co-operation works best and is strongest if it is the result of agreement—of sitting around a table and thrashing out a problem, and then reaching agreement on what needs to be done.

If we moved, as is proposed, to qualified majority voting on matters of substance in foreign policy, far from strengthening co-operation that would weaken it. People would think in terms of a vote. My clear instinct is that a weakening of co-operation would result from qualified majority voting on substantive foreign policy decisions, however qualified the voting may be.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that one of the problems of qualified majority voting in any sphere is that votes are

rarely taken? A view emerges around the table. Does not that make it even more difficult, meaning as it does that some people would be dragged by arithmetical chance into policies of which their Governments, Parliaments or people did not approve?

Mr. Hurd: That is certainly part of the point. I am talking about substantive decisions. It would be difficult for me to come here or for the Irish Foreign Minister to go to the Dail and say, "Look, I argued against this major foreign policy decision, but I was outvoted, so we shall have to spend money, or apply sanctions, or send troops." Actually, sending troops does not come into it, because defence does not come into this; I am talking about foreign policy measures such as sanctions, recognition and so on. Substantial decisions are best taken by unanimity, not least for the reason given by the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing).

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): My right hon. Friend has clearly distinguished between foreign policy and defence issues. I am sure that he agrees that foreign policy decisions may often lead in due course to the necessity to commit forces, so the two issues are closely linked—and I support my right hon. Friend's position.

Mr. Hurd: They are certainly closely linked, but we do not believe that, as a result of the Maastricht discussions, the Community should resolve itself into a defence Community. Our proposals, particularly in the Anglo-Italian paper on strengthening the Western European Union, are designed to deal with that point.

I wish to draw attention to the notable agreement reached between the Community and the European Free Trade Association countries, to form the new European economic area. Twelve Community countries and seven EFTA countries are involved; several of the latter will join the Community as full members before long, but at this stage they are joining together under the agreement negotiated the other day in the world's largest single market, covering 40 per cent. of world trade.

In world trade, one must look more widely. It is important that the long-running argument about the Uruguay round of the general agreement on tariffs and trade should be brought, at last, into the final straight. It is important that we take every opportunity to remind all concerned of what is at stake. Failure would bring serious dangers of impoverishment to all of us in Europe, in the United States, in New Zealand and in Australia, and especially to the developing world. Success will renew confidence in a world trading system that, on the whole, has functioned pretty well since the end of the second world war and would bring trade in services and agriculture fully into GATT. Among other more dramatic events, we must not lose sight of the importance of once again bringing the negotiations to the boil and to a successful conclusion.

Next week, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will go to the NATO summit in Rome. NATO is completing the present phase of its transformation, which was launched at the summit in London in July last year. It is absolutely right that Europe should take a proportionately greater share of the effort in its own defences. That is the thinking behind the Anglo-Italian proposals which I mentioned. However, we are clear that it is neither wise nor safe to make or suggest arrangements within the European 12 which duplicate or undermine NATO. The existence of NATO and the presence of United States and Canadian forces in Europe—albeit at a reduced level—which comes with it is not a luxury. History tells us that it is crucial for the security and safety of Europe.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Foreign Secretary concede that NATO was the creation of the cold war politics of the immediate post-1945 period? As the cold war has obviously ended—and many of us did not believe in it in the first place—will he explain why there is any need for retaining NATO with its nuclear capability when there is no external threat, real or imaginary, to western Europe?

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman may genuinely believe that we live in a peaceful, comfortable world in which history has been more or less abolished. If he has never believed in the cold war, he may believe in such a fairy story. Clearly, it is not so. Europe is vulnerable to all kinds of uncertainties and instabilities. We have talked about eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. No one can be sure about what will come out of that. Looking at the middle east or at north Africa, no one can be sure what threats that have not yet been clearly identified may emerge. To say that we should dismantle our security organisation and say goodbye to the Americans and Canadians is simply to fly in the face of history. The same mistake was made in the early 1920s, when people like the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) put exactly the same argument. It was a great mistake; one must try to make some effort to learn from history.

The threat has, of course, changed. The Warsaw pact has dissolved and we no longer face massed tanks and aircraft arranged in the centre of Europe. That is why Britain and its allies have undertaken a cautious and prudent reassessment of what is needed, from which comes "Options for Change" and the reorganisations involved in that. To go beyond that and to say that we do not need an army of 116,000, that we do not need to continue to have forces in NATO and that the Americans and Canadians do not need to either is to trifle with our safety, and we will not have anything to do with that.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): The caravan moves on. Although I can accept what the Foreign Secretary says about the need for our own defences and for European defences in an uncertain world, why should America have to play a significant role in Europe in that respect? We are mature countries. Surely we are now capable of looking after our own defences in terms of priorities and everything else.

Mr. Hurd: History clearly teaches that the instinct of the United States is right and that it should continue to be involved in its own interests—albeit at a lower force level—in the defence of Europe. To discourage that is foolishness. In view of the interventions by the hon. Members for Islington, North and for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks)—and I am trying to make a remarkably uncontroversial speech—I must say that it is a disagreeable feature of the present political scene that both the main Opposition parties—and the Scottish National party—are exploiting the difficulties created by the amalgamation of regiments while proposing far harsher cuts, which would lead to far greater difficulties than any proposals from the Government could.

[Mr. Hurd]

It is one of those occasions on which people are saying and doing things, and creating scares, that bear no relation to the policies of the parties that are making such points. I hope that all my right hon. and hon. Friends will lose no opportunity to score that point.

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): My right hon. Friend is right. Far from dismantling NATO, we should be building on its vast success over the past decade. In the light of what he has said, will he now accept that there may be a case for being more positive towards the wishes of Czechoslovakia and Hungary to be associated with or to come under the unbrella of NATO? Before he leaves the subject of NATO, will my right hon. Friend share with the House his thoughts on the Anglo-Italian agreement which he has recently reported as having been discussed and approved? The House would like to give its approval and to hear about the details.

Mr. Hurd: I agree with my right hon. Friend's first point, which will be one of the main subjects for discussion in Rome this week. Going beyond what was said at the previous NATO summit in Copenhagen, we need to find ways in which to show the countries of central and eastern Europe that NATO is their friend. We are not talking now about the formal extension of security guarantees, which is a different matter and not expected, but we need to find ways in which to work more closely with those countries.

The principles behind the Anglo-Italian paper, which I have mentioned and into which I do not want to go in great detail, are that any reference to a European defence identity or a European defence policy needs to be married absolutely to the Atlantic alliance, that the security of western Europe rests on that alliance and that we should not regard it as something temporary or superfluous with which we can dispense. I have argued that the Western European Union can be strengthened in two main ways —to act more coherently within the alliance as a European voice and to plan and prepare in any cases in which the countries of western Europe feel that they wish to make a military intervention outside the NATO area. Those are the two main thoughts in the Anglo-Italian paper. We warn strongly against any developments or plans in Europe which duplicate or undermine the principles of NATO.

Again, there is clearly an opportunity for strengthening the United Nations, which is capable of helping to resolve conflict. We have taken two initiatives in the General Assembly. First, there is the arrangement for a co-ordinator for disaster relief, which explains itself, and, secondly, there is the Prime Minister's initiative in proposing an international register of arms transfers. That is now going through the General Assembly, and when I was there in September it seemed to me that the prospects for getting that were reasonably good. Those would be two ways in which to strengthen the United Nations as a result of British initiatives.

The House has often shown concern about Cambodia, because the events in Cambodia during the past 20 years have been appalling. We have always sought a comprehensive political settlement in which the Cambodian people could determine their own future through free and fair elections. The agreements reached in Paris on 23 October, which were signed by my right hon. and noble Friend Lord Caithness, show that we are part of the progress that has been made and that Britain will play a full part in carrying out the agreements now being reached with that country.

Cyprus from time to time arouses controversy in the House among hon. Members who study the matter. Whatever angle people bring to the dispute, they all believe that we in Britain have to be fully committed to searching for a settlement. I discussed this recently with the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister discussed it with the President of Cyprus. I have also discussed it in Ankara with the Turks. The old resolution, 649, and the new resolution, 716, map the way forward, and I hope that it will be possible for the Secretary-General to convene an international meeting leading to a framework agreement by the end of next year.

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): The right hon. Gentleman is speaking about Cyprus, but may I bring his mind to a similar conflict closer to home? His speech to the Tory party conference caused deep concern throughout Ireland and seemed to be in contradiction to the initiative by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. The Foreign Secretary said in that speech that issues such as partition and sovereignty were not for discussion any more.

However, the initiative undertaken by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, which we understood was with the full and unequivocal support of the Government, included the proposal that all sets of relationships that go to the heart of the Irish problem—within Ireland, within Northern Ireland and between Britain and Ireland—were on the table for discussion. We understood that any party was free to put on the table any proposal aimed at resolving those relationships. The right hon. Gentleman's statement gave the impression that the Government were talking with two voices, and when one is trying to resolve a conflict, one does not do that.

Mr. Hurd: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman takes my speech that way. I have read press reports of it. I have kept a vow of silence since I left the Province precisely, because whatever one says is seized upon and can be interpreted in a way that enables someone to disagree strongly with it. I shall send the hon. Gentleman a text of what I said, where he will find a strong endorsement of what my right hon. Friend is trying to do and of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

I was trying to tell people in this part of the nation that, as a public, we were not exerting ourselves to understand clearly what was happening in Northern Ireland and that, on the whole, the changes were hopeful. I have heard the hon. Gentleman give that message. I think that, if the hon. Gentleman reads the full text of my speech, he will change his interpretation of what I said.

Hong Kong is a matter of particular responsibility for Her Majesty's Government, in a way that most of the disputes that I have mentioned are not. During the recess, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister reached a satisfactory agreement on the airport, which will enable that project to go ahead, to the great benefit of Hong Kong, while maintaining the principles to which we have stuck throughout the negotiations, and which led to the difficulties earlier in the spring when I went to Peking. That illustrates our intention to co-operate increasingly with the

Chinese, as the joint declaration lays down, but to do so in a way that enables us to continue to administer Hong Kong and to stand up robustly for its interests.

The House will have noticed that we have reached an agreement with the Vietnamese Government about repatriation of those of the 65,000 people who are now in camps in Hong Kong who are screened out—that is, found not to be refugees. No one can have anything but great sympathy for people who take great risks to seek better lives overseas, but this is a problem not just in Hong Kong but, increasingly, nearer to home. We must distinguish between refugees as defined by the United Nations and those who are simply seeking a better life elsewhere.

Many of those in the camps in Hong Kong have been cruelly deceived into believing that, if they get to Hong Kong, they will be resettled in America or Australia. It cannot be right that this process should continue. Hong Kong has acted honourably in being a country of first asylum, but its burden cannot continue at this level. I hope that the agreement that has been signed and the steps that have been taken will send a clear message to those who might think of setting sail that there is no future for them in Hong Kong unless they are genuine refugees.

The Commonwealth has not featured much in foreign affairs debates in recent years because of the extent to which it has been immersed in rather futile arguments about South Africa. I believe that the Commonwealth is emerging from that stage. It is easy to be sceptical about declarations such as that which emerged from the Harare conference, but it is a crisply phrased endorsement of the principles of democracy and good government to which one would not have thought that the Commonwealth would agree. It is more than a set of words; more than a repetition of the Singapore declaration of 1971.

It is overwhelmingly in the interests of the countries concerned in the Commonwealth that they should go down the path sketched in the Harare declaration. The other model is discredited both intellectually and practically. It is not in communist Moscow or communist east Berlin that the future technicians and engineers of Africa and other places will be trained. The policies that came from those capitals, universities and colleges will no longer guide the future of, for example, Africa.

I went to one African airport last month and found the fringe of it littered with MIGs in various stages of decay. That is an illustration—a parable—of what is happening in Africa and other states to these morals, principles and philosophies, which are now being abandoned.

The Commonwealth can help with what is sometimes a difficult task. Britain has to get the note right. We are entitled to talk about good government, the importance of dealing with corruption and getting better administration, but we must find ways to do so that are not patronising and do not suggest either that we have got everything right ourselves or that there is a Westminister model that can be imposed willy-nilly on people with different backgrounds and cultures. It is helpful if the Commonwealth can take up that cause with the present Secretary-General and the present set-up. For example, it is helpful that there is a Commonwealth team monitoring the multi-party elections being held in Zambia yesterday and today. The Commonwealth can do that in a way that individual members could not.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): The Foreign Secretary is talking about good government. Should we not have a statement on Government policy in relation to the changes that have been taking place in Cambodia and on the still frightening situation in south-east Asia caused by the presence of the corrupt dictatorship in Indonesia, which has been practising genocide on the people of East Timor? That is particularly important because we still trade with that government, which is not a good Government.

Mr. Hurd: I have dealt with Cambodia. The hon. Gentleman's attention may have strayed, and I apologise if I did not hold it. I do not want to give an extensive account of our relations with Indonesia, but the principles that I have mentioned apply. I was talking about the Commonwealth. There is a possible relaunch—I do not want to be certain—of an institution that is finding a new role for itself.

It may be that I have dealt particularly with points of conflict, but I believe that the trend in world events is, on the whole, in the right direction and that governments are coming to realise what ordinary people know—for example, that market systems create more wealth and personal liberty than socialist systems.

The search by governments in Africa and eastern Europe is not for a halfway house. The applications for our know-how fund are not for schemes that Professor Tawney, the Webbs or the Fabian Society would have approved. They are going the whole way. Governments want help in privatisation schemes, in establishing competition, free trade and private ownership. They have an appetite for that now and Labour Members are being dragged rather unwillingly in the wake of the way that the world is going.

Sometimes since the war—quite often, in fact—those in charge of British foreign policy have felt, perhaps, that they were working against the grain of history, against the way in which the world was going. Sometimes the pressures on us to dismantle the British empire were felt to be forcing us to move more quickly than seemed at the time to be safe or sensible. Sometimes it seemed that the pressures of communism were prevailing, that our friends were going under, that more and more parts of the world were succumbing to the temptation and that our security was increasingly at risk. There is no such feeling now.

Those of us who try to work for British interests in these areas feel that we are going now with the grain of history. We are at the centre of events. No other country belongs to NATO, the Community, the Commonwealth, the Group of Seven and the United Nations Security Council. We are uniquely central in the developments and discussions that I have been talking about. It means that the merry-go-round of meetings is pretty formidable. It means also that our foreign policy has to be strenuous and energetic. However, I believe, that, under the leadership of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, and with the support and understanding of the House, we are well placed to persevere and to succeed.

10.30 am

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): In an extraordinary year this week has seen history being made. For the first time ever, Israelis and Arabs and Palestinians and Jews have sat round the same table. This could be the beginning of a process that we all pray will at last bring peace to the region, self-determination for the Palestinians, and security for the state of Israel. The conference has for

[Mr. Gerald Kaufman]

years been dreamed of by many, myself among them. I pay tribute in particular to Shimon Peres, the leader of the Israeli Labour party, who has put his party's interests and his own prospects of premiership second to the convening of such a conference. I pay tribute above all to James Baker, the United States Secretary of State, without whose patience, persistence and determination the conference would never have happened.

Yet it was Mikhail Gorbachev, in his opening address in Madrid, who most accurately assigned the credit for such a marvellous development. I say "marvellous" even though I share the Foreign Secretary's view and the view of President Bush that there are many hazards along the way. However, it was Mikhail Gorbachev, who, more than any other person, has been responsible for the ending of the cold war, who rightly said that the ending of the cold war made the middle east peace talks a reality.

The end of the cold war has, of course, brought difficulties. With the end of communism, problems long buried under the paraphernalia of repression have surfaced. The most obvious is the tragedy of Yugoslavia, to which the Foreign Secretary has referred. The assault on Dubrovnik is not the worst event in the conflict, but the jeopardising of an international treasure such as that beautiful city exemplifies the savage and futile nature of the fighting in Yugoslavia. I am relieved that the flotilla has now got through with supplies, but I repeat my urgent request for the Government to seek the reconvening of the Security Council and to sponsor a resolution proposing comprehensive international sanctions, including an oil embargo, to supplement the United Nations arms ban. I agree with the Foreign Secretary that that ban must be much more resolutely enforced.

In the Soviet Union, instability triggered by the failure of perestroika, but made plain for all to see through the success of glasnost, made possible the August coup, which the instincts for freedom of the Russian people speedily destroyed. The certainties of the iron curtain—the west united in NATO against any potential threat from the east, the Warsaw pact satellites rigidly controlled by a monolithic Soviet Union—have gone. NATO is no longer sure of its function. Six weeks ago, the NATO war game in Germany was handicapped by lack of an identifiable adversary for the NATO forces. Instead of hostile red forces, NATO's troops were required to contend with politically neutral gold coloured forces. The alliance has lost an enemy and not yet found a role.

In Brussels this week the NATO meeting suggested that the alliance is even moving towards political and security co-operation with ex-Warsaw pact countries. That demonstrates the transformation of the scene in only a couple of years.

At home, negotiated disarmament in the conventional forces in Europe process—together with the shambles caused by the Government's defence cuts, with Cabinet Ministers publicly at odds with one another over the end of historic regiments—has meant that since "Options for Change" was published 40,000 jobs in the defence industries have been lost.

The Foreign Secretary referred to what other political parties have been saying about the fate of the Gordon Highlanders. He referred to Opposition parties creating scares. I hope that the Minister of State, when he replies, will be good enough to tell the House what he thinks of the scares that were apparently created by the Secretary of State for Transport when he was in the Kincardine and Deeside constituency yesterday for the by-election campaign. He seemed to suggest, as did the Secretary of State for Scotland, that the decision of the Secretary of State for Defence on the future of the Gordon Highlanders was once again open to review. I hope that the Minister of State will state clearly, so that the House and the voters of Kincardine and Deeside can understand, whether the Government's decision, announced by the Secretary of State for Defence just before the summer recess, will be firmly adhered to or, as the Secretary of State for Transport indicated yesterday, that the matter is now being reopened. I think that the entire country has a right to know.

Mr. Hurd: The right hon. Gentleman is at it again. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State will deal with the matter when he replies. Will the right hon. Gentleman say how many jobs would be lost in the defence industries, how many installations such as Rosyth would be closed and how many regiments would disappear completely if the Labour party's policies on defence were ever implemented?

Mr. Kaufman: As it happens, I am coming to that very matter. I shall deal with it fully. I say to the Foreign Secretary that the Government must state clearly where they stand on their defence review. We have had three Cabinet Ministers saying different things in less than three weeks. The people, and especially the people of Kincardine and Deeside before next Thursday, have a right to know with the utmost clarity where the Government stand. Instead of the silly intervention that the Foreign Secretary made, I thought that he would give us the answer that we are wanting. But perhaps he does not know the answer. Perhaps it will have to be worked out before half-past two so that the Minister of State can give it to us.

I am concerned about the loss of jobs in the defence industries that has been brought about by the Government's shambolic defence review, by the results of negotiations in the CFE process, and by technical change in the defence industries. At British Aerospace 10,000 jobs have been lost. Six thousand have been lost at Rolls-Royce. There have been 1,500 lost at GEC, and more at Yarrow, Westland, Thorn EMI, Dowty, the SEL and at Marconi Underwater Systems. At Marconi, workers were told that the closure of the factory at Neston was to be

"blamed on the reduction in defence spending since the end of the Cold War."

We are told that up to 300,000 more jobs are at risk in the defence industries in the first half of the decade. Yet the Government have no policy on this matter, as I shall illustrate. I shall, however, state clearly the Labour party's policy.

The problems that we face are great, but the opportunities that are provided by the end of the cold war are even greater for those with the vision to understand them and the resolution to grasp them. The middle east peace conference is one example. The mood to bring to an end at last the agony of Cambodia, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) referred, is another. The Opposition are wholly opposed to the participation in any Cambodian regime of the blood-stained Khmer Rouge. I take the opportunity of

saying that we condemn the Government's covert military assistance, which was revealed by questions by my hon. Friends. Without that questioning, the Government's convert military assistance to co-belligerents of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia would never have been admitted.

The United Nations, with a Security Council that is at least capable in Cambodia and elsewhere of functioning effectively, and with the co-operation that led to the liberation of Kuwait as an example, can play a more constructive role than ever before. It is already seeking to do so in the western Sahara, where the Labour party is adamant that the plebiscite must take place in January, as scheduled. I hope that the Government will make it clear to the Moroccan Government and the United Nations that they will not tolerate any departure from the agreed timetable for the western Sahara plebiscite.

The United Nations can take action, as it has, greatly to the credit of the Secretary-General, in the freeing of hostages held in Lebanon. We rejoice in the freeing, at long last, of John McCarthy and Jackie Mann, and we look forward eagerly to the release of Terry Waite. We should not forget Ian Richter, wrongfully imprisoned in Iraq, from whom I recently received a most moving letter written in the gaol in which he is so wrongfully incarcerated.

The United Nations should act in Cyprus. The Opposition deplore the frustration by Turkey of the admirable initiative lauched by President Bush for talks on Cyprus. We urge the United Nations to renewed efforts to convene talks that can reunite the island in a sovereign structure, providing justice for both Greek and Turkish Cypriots. I have been invited to Cyprus, and I shall be having talks with the President at the end of next week. I shall tell him of the clear view of my party that there must be a reunion of that island in the federal structure to which President Vassiliou has committed himself, and that the invading Turkish forces must be withdrawn.

Perhaps the United Nations could help in Kashmir. I am wel aware of the concern of the Indian Government, which I understand, about any possibility of outside interference. However, having visited on two occassions this year the incredibly beautiful but ineffably miserable state of Jammu and Kashmir, I am sure that the time has come for a solution to such a grievous problem. The good offices of both the United Nations and the Commonwealth should be explored—not to meddle, to arbitrate, or to mediate, but to provide good offices both to India and to Pakistan, which are both old and close friends of our country. Amid all the charges and counter-charges about Kashmir, it is important to remember that, whoever is to blame for the problem, it is not the people of Jammu and Kashmir—the Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Sikhs and Buddhists who are suffering, losing their livelihoods and, all too often, losing their lives in that tragic situation.

There is scope for a new and expanded role not only for the Unied Nations and the Commonwealth but for the other international organisations to which the Foreign Secretary referred—NATO, CSCE, the Group of Seven and the European Community. Of course, in addition to her role in those organisations, Britain has foreign and Commonwealth policy issues to deal with on her own. Hong Kong can only be dealt with bilaterally between China and ourselves. Unfortunately, the United Kingdom, as on so many of these issues, is too often inactive or isolated. A couple of months ago the Prime Minister made a brief visit to the colony, but while there he spent more time with one ultra-wealthy donor to Tory party funds than with the whole of Hong Kong's democratic movement. He dismissed curtly the clearly expressed aspirations of many citizens of Hong Kong for accelerated and enhanced democracy. In the Foreign Secretary's brief reference to Hong Kong today, he said nothing about democracy.

In the Commonwealth, last month's Heads of Government meeting in Harare showed that, once again, the United Kingdom remained isolated on the issue of South African sanctions. When the Foreign Secretary said that some countries did not agree with the United Kingdom, he actually meant that all countries disagreed with the United Kingdom on that issue.

In NATO, the Government have fought a rearguard action against reality. I am amazed at the effrontery of the Gracious Speech in referring to developments that

"permit changes to NATO's strategy",

because the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for Defence have fought doggedly against every change in NATO strategy. They advocated modernisation of the Lance missile when everyone else was against it. They championed first use of nuclear missiles and the nuclear flexible response strategy, when every rational observer knew that such stances were obsolete. They said that nuclear disarmament in Europe had gone far enough. The Government, who were against every change, are now participating complaisantly in huge NATO nuclear arms cuts. While they forlornly try to pin on the Labour party the label of unilateral nuclear disarmers, they are indulging in a bout of unilateral nuclear disarmament—as announced by the Secretary of State for Defence.

Yesterday the Prime Minister, in his silly speech, accused the Labour party of changing its policies on defence after eight years. The Government have changed their policies on defence in less than eight months, meekly carrying out policies that they have sworn to oppose. Again and again at the Dispatch Box, in answers to questions that I put repeatedly to him, the Foreign Secretary urbanely explained why it was quite impossible for the Government to abandon policies that the Gracious Speech now claims credit for abandoning and to which the right hon. Gentleman wisely did not refer.

The Government have performed a remarkable somersault on Europe, not in eight months but in less than half that time. It is only three months since the Foreign Secretary, in this House, assured me that the cherished Tory notion of the hard ecu common currency was still on the negotiating table. It was not on the table at Apeldoorn when the Chancellor discussed the issues. It is not on the table for Maastricht. For the Government, it is now a single currency or nothing. The right hon. Members for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) and for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) want nothing, and certainly not a single currency. What the Government want, no one knows; they have no policy.

I want to know the Government's position on the extension of majority voting in the Council of Ministers. As recently as June, the Foreign Secretary told the House that the Government oppposed extensions of majority voting. Now the position is far less clear. There are reports in the press today that the Government are even ready to accept majority voting on some foreign policy matters. I carefully noted the words that the Foreign Secretary used in his speech. He spoke about not liking majority voting "on matters of substance" and on "substantial decisions".

[Mr. Kaufman]

Does that mean that he is opposed to all majority voting on foreign policy matters, or only to some majority voting on some foreign policy matters? A few moments ago, the right hon. Gentleman intervened with alacrity on another point, and I shall readily give way to him again if he is ready to tell the House clearly whether he is opposed to any majority voting on foreign policy matters, or opposed only to majority voting on matters of substance. If the latter, will he please define "matters of substance"? Well, as Mark Antony said in his funeral oration,

"I pause for a reply."

The Foreign Secretary cannot reply because the Government are shifting their position day by day.

When the issue of federalism was first mooted at Luxembourg in June, the Foreign Secretary was so shocked that he behaved like an aged aunt jumping on a chair at the sight of a mouse. The press reported him as moaning, "We've got real problems with this." He seems far more relaxed now. When I watched him in a recent television interview, he said in that offhand manner of his that federalism was only a word. What is the Government's attitude? Will they accept the word "federalism" because they are not worried about it, or does it mean so much that the Government cannot accept it? Once again, the Foreign Secretary, who a few minutes ago intervened on a point to which he could not give me a response, sits in his place unable to give an answer. He knows that he and the Prime Minister will follow the Thatcher line of loud protests, followed by a cave-in on that issue, as on so many others.

It is time that the Government told us exactly where they stand on majority voting, the powers of Parliament, federalism, a single currency, a single European bank. In July, in one of his many slips of the tongue, the Prime Minister told the House that he believed that a central bank should be accountable to a democratically elected body, but No. 10 Downing street than had to give a briefing to explain why the Prime Minister made that statement, and implied that he had not done so.

When the Foreign Secretary contested the Conservative leadership just under a year ago—and, for its sake, his party would have done well to elect him—one of his campaign promises was that we would be getting a White Paper on Europe. After nearly a year, we still have not seen one.

Mr. Hurd: I lost the leadership contest, but the right hon. Gentleman did get a White Paper a little later.

Mr. Kaufman: Did it set out the Government's position on majority voting, federalism, the European Parliament, and a single currency? The right hon. Gentleman could have fooled me. As the Prime Minister has promised the House a two-day debate in less than three weeks, I hope that we shall reach a sensible conclusion about all those substantial issues, and that the White Paper will be published before that debate, setting out the Government's negotiating position at Maastricht. It would be helpful if the House could study positive Government proposals.

During the summer, the Prime Minister kept saying how essential it was for him to be present at Maastricht in December in order to make decisions, but the word from Downing street now is that the Prime Minister's greatest ambition at Maastricht is to fend off making any decisions. The would-be statesman is now an aspirant escapologist.

The Government's position on other issues is only too clear. In the Queen's Speech, they refer to the requirement for

"full, unconditional compliance by Iraq with the United Nations Security Council's Resolutions, including the disposal of its missiles and weapons of mass destruction."

I entirely agree. As the Foreign Secretary knows, Labour has fully supported every United Nations decision on Iraq and will continue to do so. In fact, we urged the Government to seek resolutions when they were not always willing. I should be a good deal more impressed with the Government's determination to deal with weapons of mass destruction in Iraq if they did not have such questionable record on assisting Iraq to obtain a nuclear capability.

The Government still have not come clean about the information revealed in a Select Committee appendix. I wrote to the Secretary of State, and my right hon. and hon. Friends wrote to the Prime Minister, but we have not received a reply. Nor have the Government responded to reports in Conservative newspapers such as *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* which were apparently augmented by evidence brought back from Iraq by United Nations inspectors, and the details of which were plastered all over those newspapers. When will we have an honest statement from the Government about arms supplies of every kind that they undoubtedly licensed for export to Iraq? An extremely long list is available for everyone to see. I wrote to the Secretary of State, but he has not even begun to justify the Government's action.

Perhaps the cheekiest passage in the Gracious Speech is:

"A substantial aid programme aimed at promoting sustainable economic and social progress and good government in developing countries will be maintained."

As my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) has pointed out, Britain's overseas aid budget last year was not maintained but was the lowest ever as a percentage of this country's gross domestic product. It was only 0·27 per cent.—little more than half the 0·51 per cent. provided in Labour's last year in office. The world's needy have been deprived of £10 billion of aid due to the cuts made by the present Government in Labour's programme. How can the Government conceivably justify the untruth of claiming that they are maintaining an aid programme when, according to their own figures, they have halved that provided by Labour?

We still await any perceptible Tory Government initiative in providing aid to the Soviet Union. At Kennebunkport, the Prime Minister staged a public relations stunt about helping the Soviets. Since then there has been a strange silence. Today, the Foreign Secretary could only say that the Prime Minister is still "mobilising" —though what he is mobilising is not at all clear, because very little appears to be happening.

If the Government ever had any ideas about foreign and defence policy, they have run out of them. Labour has a clear programme for action that has been endorsed at successive party conferences, including that held last month. I was grateful for the Foreign Secretary's friendly reference to me at the Conservative party conference, and his acceptance of my expertise on one subject—even though it was only the cinema. However, although the Foreign Secretary can have fun with inaccurate statements

about Labour policies on the European Community, he cannot have fun with his own—because he does not have a single policy to joke about. Today, I have given him many opportunities to intervene and to clarify the Government's position, but he has not taken them.

Professor Roland Smith, the former chairman of British Aerospace, said that

"Defence conversion is an important consideration, which is already being pursued vigorously by our European aerospace partners."

The United States Congress has also sensibly turned its attention to the essential diversification process. The House of Representatives issued a bulky and authoritative report, but in this year's defence White Paper the Government stated, in respect of diversification:

"It is not for the Government to seek to influence such decisions."

Labour rejects that short-sighted Tory approach. We do not believe that the nation can afford hundreds of thousands of redundancies in high technology industries. That is why—unlike Tory Ministers, who snubbed approaches from heads of the defence industries, and the press reported that the Prime Minister himself ignored an approach from the defence consortium—Labour will work with industry, trade unions, academic experts and others to help the defence industries to make a positive contribution to national output and employment.

Labour will establish a defence diversification agency to save skills and talents that the nation cannot afford to lose. —*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members can chortle if they like, but at the general election the three quarters of a million people who work in the defence industries will be able to compare Labour's positive policies with the Conservative's total absence of policies.

Mr. Hurd *rose*——

Mr. Kaufman: Here we go again.

Mr. Hurd: I pay the right hon. Gentleman a compliment in seeking to answer his question. Let us get it straight. I am not sure—because of the differences in Labour and Conservative policies—how many extra jobs in the defence industries will be abolished under Labour's plans. I understand that Labour intends to establish an agency. I am sure that that will make a very deep impact on those concerned. Is the right hon. Gentleman saying that all the jobs lost will be replaced as a result of the magic work of that agency? Can he give the House any figures?

Mr. Kaufman: It is clear that none of them will be replaced if the Conservative Government remain in office, because not only have they no policies to deal with the matter but they said in the defence White Paper:

"It is not for the Government to seek to influence such decisions."

The Government are creating the redundancies from which all our constituents are suffering and they are not lifting a finger not only to save jobs but to save the skills of highly trained workers for the nation. In Preston, one meets former British Aerospace workers in whose training the nation invested a great deal of money; they are now driving taxis. Is that what the Foreign Secretary wants to happen to British high technology?

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Archie Hamilton): When the right hon. Gentleman talks in those terms, he must have some idea about the extra jobs that will go as a result of Labour policies. Will he tell the House how much this will cost?

Mr. Kaufman: No extra jobs will be lost as a result of Labour policies. Unlike the Government, which havers even on the single issue of the Gordon Highlanders, not knowing what they will do, the Labour Government will ensure that the necessary funds are available for the proper defence of the country. That is our clear position on the matter. I am grateful that the Minister intervened, because I am pleased to be able to state clearly and absolutely on the record that the Labour party will provide whatever funds are necessary for the proper defence of our country.

On Hong Kong, we shall take the earliest possible opportunity of consulting representative groups and individuals in the colony, especially the directly elected members of the Legislative Council, about what can practically and sensibly be done to enhance the attenuated and retarded democratic process there. We shall consider direct elections to the Legislative Council and see what can be done to enhance democracy in its functional and nominated sections. I have discussed during my recent visit to Hong Kong the many opportunities for enhancing democracy in both those sections as well as those that will arise as a result of direct elections.

As a Government, we shall wish to consider the relationship of directly elected Legislative Council members to the Executive Council, and whether there are sensible ways of making senior officials as well as the Executive Council more accountable to the Legislative Council. I make that statement fully conscious of the way in which it will be received in the colony, as I have discussed the subject there within the past few weeks.

In the Commonwealth, we shall work with the consensus on South Africa instead of isolating ourselves from it, as the Tories have done. We shall abide by the Commonwealth policy on sanctions and seek to join the Foreign Ministers committee on sanctions, which the Tory Government have boycotted.

Mr. Hurd: The right hon. Gentleman must be aware that, if he abides by the Commonwealth consensus on sanctions with regard to South Africa, he will break the European consensus on that issue.

Mr. Kaufman: We have made it clear that we shall abide by the Commonwealth consensus on sanctions. At the end of the Foreign Secretary's speech he made a great song and dance about the Government's commitment to the Commonwealth. That was a breath of fresh air after the way in which the former Prime Minister behaved towards the Commonwealth over the past 11 years. We take our Commonwealth responsibilities seriously, just as we take our European Community responsibilities seriously.

In the European Community, we shall have to take into account the circumstances existing when we come into office. When we are in office, we shall put forward positive proposals on economic and monetary union, aiming to make a central bank answerable to the economic and financial Ministers' council. We shall put forward positive proposals to achieve economic convergence by agreement on common positive regional and structural policies and other matters.

[Mr. Kaufman]

We shall put forward positive proposals for greater political progress, including majority voting in the Council of Ministers on social and environmental issues, and an expansion of the powers of the European Parliament.

We shall advocate the widening of the Community, first by urging immediate acceptance of the Austrian and Swedish applications for membership—I cannot understand why there is any delay in accepting them—and then by seeking the adhesion of the other EFTA countries, and, as they become ready for membership, the former communist countries of central and eastern Europe.

We shall oppose a defence role for the Community which would involve the deployment of British troops against the wishes of the British Government and Parliament, or which would create a new nuclear power with 10 new fingers on the nuclear trigger.

In the Group of Seven, we shall seek agreement on a new Marshall plan to help the reconstruction of the Soviet Union and other former communist countries—not so much by financial aid, although some will be necessary, as by assisting with investments and credits, and helping with the attainment of stable and convertible currencies and with advice more expert and reliable than that available from the present Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Over our first Parliament, we shall increase the United Kingdom aid budget to the United Nations target of 0·7 per cent. of gross domestic product. We shall seek international action to solve the debt problem. We regard it as unacceptable that last year the World bank collected more in interest and capital repayments from the developing countries than it disbursed in new loans and assistance.

In the United Nations we shall seek agreement on an international convention controlling and limiting arms exports. It is obscene that, as international peace talks on the middle east have at last begun, armaments are once more pouring into the middle east and that China is helping Iran to obtain nuclear weapons capability. We shall seek international controls to prevent arms exports to countries with poor human rights records and those with policies of internal repression and records of external aggression.

We shall seek to build on the remarkable September and October initiatives taken by President Bush and President Gorbachev for reducing stocks of long-range nuclear weapons. I was astounded that in a speech lasting more than 50 minutes the Foreign Secretary did not mention the historic moves of President Bush and Gorbachev that have helped to transform the international situation and to make possible deep cuts in armaments through sensible international negotiations.

We believe that Britain should participate in the next round of the START nuclear disarmament negotiations as a partner with the United States. The aim should be to bring about further reductions in world stocks of nuclear weapons. We hope that at an appropriate stage France will join in such talks—President Mitterrand has suggested that, in certain conditions, France would do so—and we would seek to persuade China, too, to take part.

Meanwhile, we shall seek to achieve a comprehensive international nuclear test ban treaty. The United Kingdom may not be a super-power, but, as the Foreign Secretary said, we have a unique role in the world. We are the only country that is a member of NATO, the European Community, the Group of Seven, and the Commonwealth, and also a permanent member of the Security Council of the United Nations. That role gives the United Kingdom a great potential which has not been properly exploited by the Tory Government. A Labour Government will seek to realise Britain's true potential.

The Labour party has a clear agenda for action. In eight from now, at the most, the people of Britain will give us the mandate to implement that agenda.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. It will be evident to the House that many hon. Members wish to speak in this important debate. I hope that they will help each other by making brief speeches.

11.9 am

Sir Rhodes Boyson (Brent, North): I propose to refer to five matters dealt with in the Gracious Speech, the first of which concerns the matters of foreign policy to which my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary alluded. I must say that, having listened to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), I have the impression that the Labour party is on every side but suicide in its assessment of every situation throughout the world.

I know that we are to have a two-day debate before the summit at Maastricht, but I want briefly now to explain my position on Europe—a subject on which genuine differences exist between hon. Members irrespective of their political colour. I voted in 1975 for the continuance of our membership of the common economic market, as we described it at the time. I also welcome the fact that we now have the agreement with EFTA, and I should like to see the free market expanded into eastern Europe and, eventually, a link forged across the Atlantic with America.

I am suspicious of the notion of having one bank and one currency. I say that as a Hayekian, as I should like every bank in the country to be allowed to issue its own currency; it is not just a question of Europe. The good currencies—the ones that did not inflate—would be the currencies that remained. I remind the House that, 100 years ago, about 48 banks in Britain still issued their own currencies. Just think what that would do for collectors of currency. *[Interruption.]* I thank the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) for reminding the House of the existence of a separate Scottish currency.

One of the things that fuelled inflation in Britain was the move to decimalisation: after decimalisation people did not realise what the value of money was. If we now move to a European currency, we shall experience another period in which people cannot work out its value and that will also mar our domestic harmony.

I am not in favour of having one army, one foreign policy and complete political union in Europe. I shall be interested to see what happens over the next months, but if we are to move in that direction, we should hold a referendum beforehand.

I know that many right hon. and hon. Members wish to speak, so I shall limit my remarks, but I wish briefly to refer to Kashmir, which was mentioned by the right hon. Member for Gorton. I have a large number of people of Indian origin in my constituency. I have also visited

Kashmir and, many years ago, I was in the services in India. I believe that the only solution to the problem is a return to the Simla agreement calling for a peaceful solution and an end to terrorism. We should place greater emphasis on that agreement, which was signed by both Pakistan and India. Such situations can escalate. In the past, problems between India and Pakistan have led to war and I am sure that no hon. Member would want that to happen again.

Reference was made in the Gracious Speech, to local government, and it may not surprise hon. Members to hear that I wish to refer to that question. There has been too much tension between national and local government. Local government is part of the balance of power. We do not want all power vested in central government—or anywhere else, for that matter. The tension that has existed between national and local government under the present Government has been bad for the country. It seems that local and national government are always now of different colours. When the Labour party was in power, all local authorities became Conservative controlled. During 11 years of Conservative Government, more and more local authorities have become Labour controlled, and that has created a clash. In local government, it is important to work towards smaller units wherever possible, because smaller units involve more people and bring the whole process nearer to the people.

I warmly welcome the document, "The Structure of Local Government in England", produced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment in April this year. It says:

> There is still a feeling in some areas that history and tradition were perhaps disregarded in the search for administrativew uniformity."

I am sure that many hon. Members will agree with that. Paragraph 27 says:

> "The aim would be to achieve the structure which best matches the particular circumstances of each area."

That, too, is excellent. Unfortunately, however, London and the metropolitan areas are to be denied all the advantages that would flow from that. Paragraph 28 states:

> "The Government have no plans to change the general structure of local government in London and the metropolitan counties."

So the rest of the country is to be allowed to reorganise itself on the basis of its historic boundaries, destroyed 20 years ago, but London and the metropolitan counties, whose boundaries were destroyed 30 years ago, are to be deprived of that right. As a Lancastrian who now represents a London constituency, I find that totally unfair. We in London should have the same opportunity to reorganise on a historical basis. A recent draft report on Brent's boundaries totally ignores what is happening in the rest of the country and merely suggests chipping bits off here, there and everywhere. Some 98 per cent. of my constituents would vote for the return of Wembley tomorrow, if asked. No doubt the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) would say the same of Willesden. My constituents and I intensely resent that discrimination against London. One should never take any area for granted.

My third point concerns the council tax. First, let me emphasise that there is no enthusiasm anywhere in the country for the Labour party's so-called fair rates policy —in essence, a return to the rating system that was, and would remain, so unpopular. As the election approaches, I shall use my ammunition against the Labour party on its fair rates policy. For the moment, however, I want us to get our policy right, because that will make it easier for us to destroy the Labour party.

In 1988, I warned that the community charge would not work because it discriminated against the north and those living in low-rated properties. After three years and a whole series of concessions—as well as the Ribble Valley business—we eventually got it right. The problem now is that, although the council tax is right in theory, in practice it will discriminate against London and the south-east—the high-priced areas. I should prefer the Government to make concessions now rather than battling it out for three years and then sorting matters out. It would be nice to know that the listening Government were listening and that changes would be made immediately. It is accepted that property is differently priced throughout the country. After all, we have separate sets of bands for Scotland, England and Wales. But the largest differences are not between Scotland, England and Wales but between the north and south of England, where the disparities in property prices are tremendous. Only 1 per cent. of houses in Greater London are in the bottom band, whereas in the north 47 per cent. of houses are in the bottom band. In greater London, 31 per cent. of houses are in the top three bands, whereas in the north only 4 per cent. are in the top three bands. Those are not anomalies—they are great chasms. In Barnet, 46 per cent. of houses are in the top two bands.

Mr. Wilkinson: And in my constituency.

Sir Rhodes Boyson: My hon. Friend says that the same is true of his constituency. When people in London realise that they are going to have to pay so much more than people in the Ribble Valley area on a similar three or four-bedroomed house, a reverse Ribble Valley factor will apply. People will say, "This is unfair." On this occasion, the recession has hit London and the south much harder than it has the north or the midlands and such discrimination is totally unjust. What we need is a separate set of bands for London and the south-east and possibly for certain other areas of the country. Now that we have accepted the principle of different sets of bands for the council tax, it is merely a question of getting it right.

I have a solution for the Secretary of State. There is no point in his sitting up all night in his Department working it out. The London Boroughs Association—a healthy institution and Conservative controlled—has produced a separate set of bands for Greater London. All that is needed is a cyclist from the Department of the Environment—I could suggest one Minister who is very good on a bicycle—to go to the London Boroughs Association and bring back the document setting out those bands and hand it to the Secretary of State, who could announce their adoption some time during the debate. If that happened, a cheer would go up throughout London and the south-east. If it does not happen, the Government will create problems in the south similar to those that occurred with the community charge throughout the north. Concessions should be made now and the matter cleared up.

The 25 per cent. rebate for the single household is not enough. Millions of pensioners, widowers and widows and one-parent families will be much worse off with the 25 per cent. rebate than they were when they paid the community

[Sir Rhodes Boyson]

charge. They will not like it. They will not rejoice. The fact that they will be worse off sometimes affects voting habits. As a general election is coming, the Government should seek to make sure that we have more people on our side than there are on the other. That is how we win elections —as you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with your long experience.

During the last year of collection of the community charge in 1992-92, all those on income support and students should be exempt. They will be exempt when the council tax is introduced. They will therefore resent having to pay the community charge for 1992-93. That will result in a huge debt which could sink the council tax in its first year.

Reference is made in the Gracious Speech to education. I commend the Government's efforts. The present Secretary of State for Education and Science is the first person who has really tried to knock the education system into shape. I commend him for that. The results of the tests for seven-year-olds were published last week. We saw how bad they are, compared with other countries. Our economy will never revive until we get our education system right. Primary school children should be taught by means of phonics—not by means of real books and all this other nonsense. They should be provided with their multiplication tables. There should be a return to old-fashioned teaching, which usually works. Again I commend what the Government are doing. It was the trendies on the Left who followed the policies advocated by Rousseau and Dewey, who said that children should be allowed to run wild and even fall off cliffs, after which they could say, "At least I've discovered something by doing that." They did not believe in sitting children down in classrooms and teaching them.

I should welcome the return of a Conservative Government because the Labour party is wedded to the concept of the egalitarian comprehensive school. All our competitors, whether they are socialist, mixed economy or free market countries, have some form of selection—by ability or interest—at either 11, 12 or 14. That is true in Sweden, Russia and Germany. Only the Labour party is trapped in that egalitarian comprehensive concept. I pray every night for the Labour party that it will be released from such a destructive view.

During the last 12 years Britain has been an example to other countries as it moved towards the free market. Even the Labour party cheers the Government for that. We have reduced taxation, introduced privatisation and lessened the control of the trade union barons. Our efforts have been watched by the rest of the world. We have created a new industry, with people going around the world lecturing on the benefits of privatisation. Most of them are bankers from the City rather than Members of Parliament. I trust that in its election manifesto the Conservative party will pledge itself to continue in that direction. Tax reductions should go further. The standard rate of tax should be 20 per cent., while the top rate should be set at 30 per cent. This country has provided an international language, through computers and English. Our most skilled business people and our top scientists and hospital consultants can easily move to Australia, Canada and America if the rate of taxation here is too high. Nearly all people in continental Europe now understand English. Our most skilled people could move there, too.

I am also pleased that the Gracious Speech refers to the eventual privatisation of rail and coal. During the last 12 years the Conservative party has acted as a signpost for the future. I hope that after the next election it will continue, under the leadership of the present Prime Minister, to be an example to the rest of the world and to the Labour party by moving towards lower taxation, privatisation and a free economy, all of which help to raise living standards and increase human rights.

11.25 am

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): I hope that the hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) will forgive me if I do not follow him into the foreign fields, for me, of London or the esoteric pastures of education. I suspect that we should for ever argue about the best way of doing things.

I agree with the Foreign Secretary's introductory remarks. Many of us, understandably, have been preoccupied with the developments in the European Community, leading up to the intergovernmental conference in Maastricht in December, but many other events have been taking place at incredible speed. I intend to comment briefly on some of those events.

I happily associate myself with the remarks made by the Foreign Secretary and the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), when they paid tribute to the work done by James Baker. He has done a fantastic job. When one considers how hard he has worked recently in other areas, he deserves our praise.

It is about a decade since I went to the middle east with a Liberal party delegation. Then, as now, the issue was peace for land, or land for peace. Mr. Shamir will have to recognise that fact. I regret the fact that he left the conference this morning. He would have heard others tell him that. To be fair, however—though it is difficult to be fair when referring to the middle east—the Arab side must recognise that the land that was lost was lost after the wars that it conducted against Israel, and that peace means security to Israel. The Israelis will not give up land unless they have security. It will be the task of the bigger powers —the United States, in co-operation with the European Community—to find a means whereby peace can be achieved.

As for the development of the Soviet Union, the threats to peace presented by the instability there and the position of the central European countries, I agree entirely with those who have said that we have a responsibility to help to the greatest possible extent. In parenthesis, may I echo what the right hon. Member for Gorton said about President Gorbachev? We could also pick out his name and say that he is a remarkable man, who by himself has made a positive contribution to world peace.

Last weekend, I went to Poland to observe the elections on behalf of the Council of Europe. The economic position is parlous. Many people in Poland thought vaguely that with freedom would come prosperity—and pretty damn quick at that. In fact, the opposite has happened. Things have got dramatically worse and will get worse still. As hon. Members will be aware, the election produced a 40 per cent. turnout only, and an extremely fragmented

outcome. I see no reason why the course of events in the republics of the Soviet Union will be much different when they approach such matters in due course.

What is different about the Soviet Union is the presence of nuclear weapons in Russia, the Ukraine and Kazakhstan. That sends a shiver up one's spine. It is very much in our interests to press for an acceleration of the disarmament talks and at the same time to play the fullest part in economic and, where necessary, food aid assistance.

As a country we are not over-generous in providing aid. I observed the other day that the most recent OECD report records that our contribution to overseas aid is now down to 0·27 per cent. of the gross domestic product. That is a new all-time record low and something of which we should not be terribly proud.

On Hong Kong, I stress the essential importance of giving support to the lamentably late but very necessary move to democracy. The former leader of the Liberal party, my right hon. Friend—my right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel)—there are so many of us now that for a moment I could not remember the name of my right hon. Friend's constituency—saw Mr. Martin Lee yesterday. I pay tribute to what Mr. Lee has contributed to the revitalisation, or perhaps one should say vitalisation, given that it did not exist before, of democracy in Hong Kong.

Many of us considered the agreement made by the former Foreign Secretary, the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) as a considerable achievement. However, since the events of Tiananmen square, many of us have asked whether we did the right thing in supporting that agreement. Probably at the time we could do nothing else. The right hon. Member for Gorton said that the issue of Hong Kong is a bilateral question between Britain and China. However, one of these days it might become a United Nations question. If circumstances exist in 1997 similar to those that existed at the time of the events in Tiananmen square, I would find it difficult to see a British Government voluntarily handing over 5·25 million people into such a situation. We must look ahead.

The Foreign Secretary referred to the UN. My party has long argued that the UN should be more interventionist. At some stage in the future, the UN will be able to stop conflicts and to intervene in internal matters to protect human rights, but that is still a long way off. However, that is the objective. The idea that existing boundaries are sacrosanct and must remain so for all time is a nonsense. If international agencies have certain standards, they have an interest to see that those standards are maintained wherever in the world. That will mean that the UN will become more interventionist.

The Foreign Secretary referred, not for the first time, to what he described as the Prime Minister's initiative on an arms register at the UN. I entirely support such a move, but I should like to point out that it was first suggested by the German Foreign Minister, Hans Dietrich Genscher, 10 years ago. At that time, it was not supported by the United Kingdom. We should be a little more modest in this matter. Plagiarism is said to be the sincerest form of flattery, but I do not believe that one should then go on to claim authorship.

The Foreign Secretary made a lengthy reference to Yugoslavia, but, rather surprisingly, he did not refer to the remarks made yesterday by the Italian Foreign Minister, who said that, by mid-December, the Community would recognise the independence of all republics that requested it. Is that the case? I had expected the Foreign Secretary to say something about that. The right hon. Gentleman generously gave way to me, so I did not seek to intervene again on that matter, but I should like to know.

The latest figures on the Serbian-Croat war are 5,000 Croats dead. My noble Friend Lord Mark Bonham-Carter was in Yugoslavia last weekend, and we know that there are some 400,000 refugees on both sides. The Serbian army is about 100,000 strong and it is supported by tanks, heavy guns, aircraft and warships. It stands against the lightly armed Croatian force of about 50,000. However, there is a great lack of morale in the Serbian army, that is why it has not swept through as, on paper, it should be able to do. We can no longer try to pretend to be even-handed in this matter. It is an aggressive war led by Serbia under an old-fashioned communist leadership that still flies the red star from its tanks.

I was appalled to read in *The European* this morning as I crunched my muesli—a social democratic habit I got into—that Saatchi and Saatchi have been called in by Serbia. It reports:

> "International public relations agency Saatchi and Saatchi may be able to take on the toughest job in advertising. A spokesman . . . confirmed that it was continuing negotiations . . . They are worried that Croatia is winning the propaganda war and Western sympathy".

I sincerely hope that Saatchi and Saatchi has a bit more morality than to take on that cause. I do not believe that any amount of PR washing will make it any better.

In July, I set out my party's position on the negotiations that are about to take place in Maastricht. However, yesterday the leader of the Labour party referred to my party and said:

> "As far as I know"—

that is a proper qualification for him to make—

> "the only party in the European Community, in any of its parliaments and assemblies, that is not interested in securing the necessary safeguards for progress is the British Liberal party."

Various of my hon. Friends, including myself, tried to intervene, but the right hon. Gentleman would not allow any interventions. I found his remark extraordinary, and it is extremely difficult to answer because it is so foolish. The right hon. Gentleman may disagree with our stand, but the views that we advocate on political, economic and monetary union are those that we believe to be in the best interests of our citizens. We regard them as the safeguard for the future of our citizens.

The right hon. Gentleman made a strange reference to "any of its parliaments and assemblies"—[*Official Report*, 31 October 1991; Vol. 198, c. 22.]

But we are in complete accord with our fellow Liberal and Democratic parties with whom we work in the European Liberal and Democratic and Reform Federation. My party is in regular contact, for example, with the FDP—the Free Democratic party, which is in the German Government. We have regular meetings with those German Ministers and we are in regular contact with the Dutch, the Belgians and all the others. I know very well that, within the European Community, there are similar contacts between the Conservative and Labour parties, and rightly so.

I should be obliged if the Leader of the Opposition would not say such silly things any more. He may attack

[Sir Russell Johnston]

us—that is perfectly all right—but considering the record of the Labour party in such matters, I take the right hon. Gentleman's comments rather ill.

We believe that a common currency is essential in a single market. That will not be done at once. Yesterday, the Prime Minister said that such a move would be terribly dangerous if there was not sufficient economic convergence. However, that is already laid down in the agreement that was achieved in Apeldoorn in the Netherlands. That is the object in hand. We will have convergence, and a proper timetable was set out to achieve that. It is of the greatest importance that we make a commitment to that.

We support a central bank, on the Bundesbank model, we support full decision-making between the Parliament and the Council and we support the proposed committee of the regions. Indeed, we want a general study of ways in which areas such as Catalonia, Bavaria, Scotland and Wales, which have real cultural, historical and national identities, can play a more effective role in the Community.

Although I listened carefully, I could not understand the Foreign Secretary's statement that, in some vague way, the validity and effectiveness of foreign policy decisions would be weakened by majority voting. I think that he said that he had "a feel" that that would be the case. I do not know, but I do not see any qualitative difference between decisions reached by the majority in institutions that we have agreed will operate Europewide and decisions reached by the majority within this House, which controls the United Kingdom. We believe that that will inevitably lead to taking over defence responsibilities in the Community, probably with the Western European Union acting as the bridge. Although that may not happen until the end of the century, it will happen.

I was concerned to read one of the headlines in *The Guardian* this morning—all the newspapers gave me indigestion today—in which British Airways is accused of

"conspiring to breach European Community . . . rules"

with Boeing in the United States to "freeze" out Airbus. I do not know whether the Minister will be able to say anything about that in his reply—probably not—but I hope that he will take the opportunity to say that, if there is any truth in the allegations, such action is wholly reprehensible.

The Foreign Secretary oft times says that the main thrust of British policy must be to promote British interests. It is not only a question of promoting British interests in an advantageous way. It is in the interests of Britain, France and Germany that there is fair trade within the Community and throughout the world, that human rights are respected and that democracy flourishes. I hope that our foreign policy will be directed to achieving those fundamental aims.

11.42 am

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in this debate. Before reaching the substance of my speech, I must briefly refer to a procedural matter. I hope that the Leader of the House will take into account the fact that it is increasingly unrealistic that the programme of debates under broad headings which follow the Queen's Speech should not be in the public arena before the day of the Speech. Considering the interest that the public now take in Parliament, we could well remove that tradition. We need to avoid any possibility of the majority of Back Benchers being managed on the mushroom principle. I shall not discuss what that means, because it is a little crude, but I hope that those hon. Members who appreciate it will take note.

I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston). The name of his constituency is a veritable route to the isles. I associate myself with his comments on the Hong Kong treaty and the concerns of hon. Members on both sides of the House about how rapidly we can move towards a democratic position for Hong Kong. I urge the Government to take every action within their purview to encourage the development of the democratic process in Hong Kong as an ultimate safeguard against the sort of problem demonstrated by the Tiananmen square massacre.

I also associate myself with the remarks of the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber about human rights and the democratic process. That is a clear point in our foreign policy—I have no reason to suppose otherwise—and it is important that that should continue.

A year ago in the debate on the Queen's Speech, I spoke of the Baltic states and referred to a visit that I had made there with other hon. Members during the previous summer. I highlighted the absolute determination of each of the Baltic Governments, who were indeed speaking for their peoples, to achieve full independence from the Soviet Union. Few, including myself, expected independence to occur so completely and so soon.

I especially welcome the reference to the Government's full commitment to help Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to establish themselves in the international community or better, as stated in the Queen's Speech, "to re-establish" themselves, because they had an excellent record for economics and for improvements in the lot of their people when they were independent between 1920 and 1938. There are great skills in those countries: a dedication to good quality workmanship and a wish to ensure that they have a better standard of living as rapidly as possible.

My hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office is directly involved in discussions with the Baltic Governments about the gold deposits that were placed in London when they were invaded. I understand that it is the Government's desire to achieve a result that will be a positive help to those countries. If that is correct, I strongly support that intention and I hope that the matter will be settled rapidly.

Practical financial assistance in the early days of independence is vital to the Baltic countries. The chance of success in moving quickly to a market-based economy is good because they are small countries, but we must be aware that the development of democratic systems in the long term may well depend on that economic success there as well as elsewhere. There are worrying signs in parts of eastern Europe that the democratic process may not hold unless people realise the benefits in terms of goods to buy and an improved standard of living.

It is exciting and encouraging that Britain now has three ambassadors in post in the Baltic countries and that that piece of unfinished business from the second world war is at last settled.

More than once, the Foreign Secretary emphasised the potential for future instability in Europe and elsewhere in the world. We still live in uncertain times. The suggestion that, as a result of changes in the Soviet Union, we are now

inhabiting a safe world where the outstanding strengths of the United States involvement in Europe through NATO is no longer necessary, beggars belief. I assure my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence of the continuing support of the vast majority of British people for his present policy and approach to European defence.

As has been said during the debate, we must pay increasingly close attention to how the world as a whole can control arms sales, particularly to small powers. There is the problem of starvation in Africa. All of us, whatever side of the House we are on, wish to improve the amount of aid that we can give to needy countries, but how long do we go on doing that, when a great deal of suffering in those countries is brought about by wars between them? We will never stop that unless we find a way of controlling arms sales to small powers. That was a much bigger problem during the cold war. Now, the bigger, more sophisticated countries are emphasising arms control. I appeal to the Government to bring those small countries into focus and to concentrate more heavily on them in future.

My reference to defence brings me to a particular point that I have wished to raise for some time, but have been unable to, as I did not have the opportunity to speak during our debates on the defence estimates. I support the main thrust of the Government's defence policy: to achieve our security with smaller but better equipped forces. It is clear from discussions in this House and the country that the Navy and Air Force as unitary services have been better able to settle the arrangements under the defence review "Options for Change" than has the Army.

I appreciate why the Army is finding change harder to accept. There are two main reasons. First, it still has the regimental system. I am not for a moment suggesting that that does not have value and should not be retained, but it means that change is more difficult to accept. The regimental system generates strong emotions both outside and within the regiments. That is its strength when people go to war. Secondly, the Army has a good case for demanding some reconsideration of the size of the military that present plans allow for.

I do not have the sort of difficulties that the shadow Foreign Secretary spent so much time on when he suggested that the Government's policy on the Army was unclear. I think that it is very clear indeed. The Prime Minister has confirmed that these changes will take place over at least three years and will be subject to reconsideration in the light of any changes in the world. Therefore, I do not find the comments just made in the present by-election campaigns so much out of order.

My final plea is that the Scottish regiments, which have so readily dominated the debate in this House about the size of the Army and changes to the regimental system, should not forget that there is a regiment in the south of England—indeed in my area—the Queen's regiment, which for many years has been ready to amalgamate and is now made up of six old regiments. Under this review, it is yet again being required to amalgamate, with the Royal Hampshire regiment, in a rather unreasonable and shabby way.

I speak for many—I can see support on these Benches for this—when I say that that regiment represents London and the south-east, has responded in the past to demands for change in the Army and should be given a readier response from Ministers and the Ministry of Defence than it has achieved so far.

11.53 am

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): It is true that 45 years of cold war have now come to an end and that everyone is appreciative of that, but a new spectre is haunting Europe—that of an unthinking and often mischievous nationalism.

Mr. Corbyn: Racism.

Mr. Wareing: Indeed, the nationalist card, like sometimes the racist card, is played for political ends.

Most of my comments will be about the problems in Yugoslavia, a country which I know well and which I visited in the first week of August, when I was able to see the problems from the Croatian, Serbian and Slovenian sides.

The Government have been correct in their even-handed approach to the Yugoslav problem. There is no doubt that Herr Genscher of Germany is mistaken in wanting to rush into recognition of Slovenia and particularly Croatia. The nationalist card has undoubtedly been used for political ends in parts of Yugoslavia. That applies as much to Franjo Tudjman as to Slobodan Milosevic who have both exploited the nationalist card. When Milosevic first came to prominence in the mid to late 1980s, I was worried because he was tipped by some to be the next Tito. In reality, he has been antagonising the Albanian majority in Kosova. I asked him about that when I spoke to him at the beginning of August. There can be no question of seeking social justice for Serbs if one ignores Albanians and other minorities in Yugoslavia.

It is wrong to imagine that Croatia is somehow a western democracy and that it has adopted the cultural, social and political attitudes of the west while the same is not true of Belgrade. Elections have taken place in Serbia and Croatia. Indeed, Mr. Milosevic has more support in Serbia than even our former Prime Minister had in this country, even taking account of the problems during the election period in Serbia. Mr. Micunovic, leader of the democratic party in Serbia, and Mr. Drasskovic, leader of the Serbian Renewal party, both talk of the persecution of Serbs within Croatia.

I saw some of the 60,000 Serbian refugees presently accommodated in Serbia who have had to flee their homes to find shelter with families in Serbia. The blame cannot be laid on one side or the other. The problem is not black or white, but there are faults on both sides. Although Mr. Tudjman would argue that he is a barrier against the Bolshevism of Mr. Milosevic, when he came to power the Croation Government took on the policy of removing Serbs from their posts in Croatia and acted in an extreme nationalist way. It is interesting to note that, whereas Mr. Tudjman refers to the communists in Belgrade, the communists are also being blamed in Belgrade for the present boundaries between the republics of Yugoslavia.

I spoke to the highly prejudiced Dr. Budimir Kosulic, the deputy Prime Minister of Serbia. He is a lawyer in his 40s who has never belonged to a political party. I expected enlightenment from him, but got only sheer anti-Croat, anti-German prejudices that go back to the second world war. I asked him whether he remembered the second world war, because I did. I asked whether he had ever run away from the bombs of the Luftwaffe, because I had. He said "No", yet he was full of prejudices, which he tried to cover

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with anti-communism. The boundary between Croatia and Serbia, he said, was created by and was the fault of the Tito communist regime.

If there are those in government in Zagreb and Belgrade who are extreme nationalists using that nationalism to prejudice the views of ordinary people who for decades have been able to live together in peace, there are also plenty of people in the background in Croatia and Serbia who are even more extremist. We have witnessed the revival of the Chetnik party and the crazy antics and words of Vojislav Šeselj, a fascist who is the sort of inspiration for the Serbian irregulars in eastern Slavonia who are persecuting Croatians in their villages, using the excuse of the Serbian majorities in certain parts of Croatia. He is the man who spoke of distributing the remains of Marshall Tito throughout the four corners of Yugoslavia: he is a madman.

Mr. Arkan has been calling for Serbia to declare war on Hungary before Christmas. These Serbian extremists are the same sort as the ones who were to be found among the Chetnik bands at the time of the second world war.

Similarly, there are madmen in Croatia such as the extremists in the neo-fascist Croatian party of rights, as it calls itself. One thinks of people such as Branimir Glavas who wants more extreme action to be taken against Serbs inside Croatia. Nothing has inflamed atavistic anger in the Serbs more than the Croatians' use on all their flags of the chequered shield, the insignia used by the hated Ustasha fascists in Croatia during the second world war. All over Zagreb, flags displaying the chequered shield are to be seen. The Croatians are wearing their nationalism on their sleeves.

As for the federal Government, the old Yugoslavia no longer exists, although I still found people of good will in some parts of Yugoslavia. God knows whether that good will still exists after so many deaths in the recent conflict. Such people still think of themselves as Yugoslavs first and Serbs or Croats second. In the last census in Croatia more than 500,000 Serbs were found to be registered as living there, and another 400,000 people registered themselves as Yugoslavs. The latter may well have been Serbs afraid to say who they were, but we can assume that in Croatia there are between 500,000 and 900,000 Serbs, mostly living in compact areas.

Krajina has a Serbian majority and in eastern Slavonia there are communities with overwhelmingly Serb majorities. This enables Milosevic to make the point to visitors from the west that he, like them, believes that Croats and Slovenes should be allowed self-determination, but what about the Serbs living in Krajina and eastern Slavonia?

Some people argue that we should rush to recognise Croatia and Slovenia. In some respects Slovenia is less of a problem, but recognising Slovenia begets the attitude: why not Croatia too? Slovenia is less of a problem because the only minorities living there are 15,000 Hungarians and about 5,000 Italians. They live in peace with their neighbours. I argue that it would be perfectly safe for any British citizen to go as a tourist to the mountain resorts of Slovenia. Croatia is different. If we say, "Let us recognise Slovenia, Croatia and Macedonia", what do we do about Bosnia-Herzegovina?

Bosnia-Herzegovina is the one non-nationalist state in the Yugoslav federation. It cannot be described as a Serbian state, or as a Muslim or Croation state because each of the nationalities has substantial minorities in it. That presents a real problem. The people of Bosnia-Herzegovina, above all, want some form of Yugoslavia to continue to exist. It is in the interests of Europe that Yugoslavia, possibly as a loose-knit confederation, continues to exist. Such a confederation will be created only if the Croats and the Serbs end the bloodshed. I have no doubt that if the bloodshed continues, Tudjman and even Milosevic will be overthrown. In time, the fascists will come along and say that Tudjman has not defended the Croats from the Serbs and that Milosevic has not acted strongly enough against the Croats.

It would be a mistake to assume that the federal army is really under the command of the President of Serbia, although it is Serbian dominated. I get the feeling that the army is acting as its own boss and that the Minister of Defence, who defied federal Prime Minister Markovic by refusing to resign, is still in command of the army. The army high command must be drawn into any talks on the future of that sad country.

Yugoslavia is a very sad country. Many in the House are good friends of Yugoslavia. It is a beautiful country and one of great variety. It has known a considerable period of peace despite all the problems and difficulties. I know that it has not had a democratic form of government, but it is a lovely country and has been loved by people from this country. It is a disaster that the people there should be tearing themselves apart when they should be building up investment in industry and spreading their great asset, the tourist industry.

I congratulate Lord Carrington on taking on his role, which would be a difficult one for anybody. I notice that our Irish friends are not with us at the moment, so I shall have to substitute for them by saying that they would understand the problems faced by ordinary people in Croatia.

The Serbs have had real problems with Tudjman. At least 12 months too late, he has come along with a declaration of rights. That should have been on the table at the outset of any declaration of independence.

In spite of the case that many Serbs may be able to put forward to the effect that their rights are being taken away in Croatia, there can be no excuse for the vicious attacks by the federal army, the federal navy and the federal air force on Dubrovnik. That cultural gem is part not only of the Yugoslav heritage, but of the European heritage and it needs to be preserved. I do not, of course, put the walls and ancient streets of Dubrovnik ahead of human life, because the preservation of human life is more important. However, if Serbia wishes to have its rights recognised, it must restrain its forces from making these vicious attacks on Dubrovnik and on other areas that have no military importance. Incidentally, only yesterday I was speaking to the leader of the Serbs in Bosnia and last week I spoke to Mr. Micunovic, the leader of the democrat party in Serbia and both said that they were outraged at the attacks on Dubrovnik.

The European Community must have a part to play. I regret that, over six months ago, when I wrote to the Prime Minister and asked that the federal union of Yugoslavia be given active support—by, for example, recognition of its right to be a full member of the Council of Europe and having a real association treaty with the European

Community—my plea was ignored. The Government were wrong to ignore the growing crisis looming on the horizon in Yugoslavia.

Such measures as reconsidering the Yugoslav debt and giving more economic assistance to Yugoslavia could go hand in hand with the setting up of working commissions by the European Commission to ensure that bloodshed is ended and that ceasefires hold. I have nothing but the greatest admiration for the job that the European monitors, including some of our people from the Foreign Office, are doing. However, their job should be extended and we should look to trying to improve the democratic institutions in that country.

I started by saying that there was a new spectre haunting Europe. If the Tudjmans and the Milosevics of this world are allowed to show that they can win with the nationalist card, their example will be emulated in other parts of Europe. I applaud the granting of independence to the Baltic states, but parts of the Soviet Union—or is it the old Soviet Union?—have problems similar to those in Yugoslavia. We have to give our fullest support to Mr. Gorbachev and others in the Soviet Union who want to avoid those problems. It was the old nationalism of eastern and central Europe that gave rise to the fascist threat which embroiled so many of us in the years between 1939 and 1945.

The European Community has an important role to play and I am only sorry that the Government are so lukewarm in their attitude to the development of the Community. My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) referred to that, and I know that the future of our country depends on our ability to work inside Europe, although not for the market economy. One of the problems in eastern Europe is that they have been taken in by Thatcherite propaganda that one can replace Stalinism by a market economy. One of the reasons for the way in which they are voting in Poland, and are beginning to vote in Germany, is that they see that the answer is not Thatcherism nor a return to Stalinism, but the democratic and socialist idea of a mixed economy in which public ownership and the public sector have a real part to play.

I am also sorry that the Foreign Secretary was unwilling to give the proper reply when I challenged him on the question of good government. It is no use telling the Commonwealth countries in Africa that they must be democratic. It is no use saying to the Serbs in Belgrade, "You must be democratic in your country." It is no use saying that we are sponsoring good government while at the same time pouring money and assistance into Indonesia, which has been responsible for untold genocide. We must be even handed in Yugoslavia and with all of our foreign policy. There should be no double-talk on democracy.

12.14 pm

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): Despite his post-script, in which he condemned free enterprise systems and declared himself an apologist for socialism in Europe, I am pleased to be able to take up the remarks of the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing). I share the agony that he expressed about the way in which Yugoslavia is tearing itself apart, not least because of some loose cannons in the Yugoslav army. I listened with interest to the hon. Gentleman's proposals for a selective approach towards a recognition of states such as Slovenia and for some form of loose federation for the rest of Yugoslavia. We must all hope fervently that a peaceful solution will be found sooner rather than later, that lives will be saved and that great cities such as Dubrovnik do not fall to be perished, as others have.

I join those who have given an enthusiastic welcome to the Queen's Speech and to the measures within it. In my view, it is a programme of legislation which matches the needs of the time. It contains some important proposals for Bills on local government and on education. There are proposals for less contentious but equally important Bills. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and all his Ministers on being sensitive during the last Session of this Parliament and on continuing the radical and responsive approach that our people need. It is a programme for victory at the next general election and one which the people will support.

I shall speak to the part of the Gracious Speech which refers to Europe. I was pleased that the Government confirmed their commitment to play a constructive role in the two intergovernmental conferences on economic and monetary union and on political union. That will undoubtedly be the political battlefield or frontier in the months ahead. I shall set out what I see as the main objectives and the minefields that lie ahead.

To me, the argument about Europe is simple. It is whether we want to be rich or poor—rich in Europe or poor outside it. All too often we ignore the bottom line. The standard of living and individual prosperity of our west European neighbours are increasingly outstripping ours. Where is the wealthiest part of Europe? Is it in Bavaria or is it around Madrid? Is it on the Cote d'Azur? Is it in the home counties? No, it is in northern Italy. Who would have thought it? Who knows it?

Over the next 20 years or more western Europe will forge ahead as a prosperous single market. It will attract global investment, employ the latest technology and use the advanced skills of its people to provide goods and services to nearly 3 billion people. The affluence of modern-day continental Europe is open to inspection. Even the most casual visitor cannot fail to notice the quality of homesteads, the increased personal incomes, the efficiency and comfort of transport systems and the pride in culture and heritage, which is so often a reflection of economic security.

To the great credit of the Conservative Government, the opportunities and aspirations of our people have been transformed; but only by being at the heart of Europe, in the words of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, can we realise our full potential. My younger constituents want to look forward to higher incomes, more spending power, home ownership, the accumulation of savings and investments and time to enjoy the fruits of their labour. My older constituents want to protect what they have saved and to be assured of first-class public services, especially in health and social security, when they need them. Only by being in the economic powerhouse of the European Community can we satisfy those aspirations. Only by hitching our wagon firmly to the pioneers of the new Europe can we achieve economic growth to provide the quality of public services that people rightly demand and the prospect of higher personal wealth, choice and freedom.

From the time of Churchill's vision of Europe, through accession to the European Community and to the signing

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of the Single European Act, Conservative Governments have led the way towards ever closer political co-operation and economic convergence. We now stand poised on the brink of a great new episode in European evolution and I am proud that the party of which I am a member has taken our country forward and is now leading the way to a sustainable economic and political union.

Those of us who believe that our future and national interest lie in such a course do not do so in a spirit of emotional faith or constitutional adventurism; rather, we take a hard-headed view of where our economic interests lie and where the money will come from in the years ahead. My enthusiasm for economic and political union is therefore built quite simply on the financial interests of our nation. Were it not so, I might well have more sympathy with an isolationist approach. If we would not be better off, it might be better to go it alone. However, not just on the economic front does our interest lie in closer co-operation, but in defence and foreign affairs the collective strength and influence of the European Community will assume new importance with the demise of the Soviet Union and the disarray of eastern Europe. For all those reasons, it is essential that there is a successful conclusion to the Maastricht summit next month.

From what I have said, it follows that political union is more likely to be achieved when there is economic advantage. Conversely, political integration will inevitably fall apart if there is no financial benefit. We have only to consider what happened to East Germany and ask what was the underlying reason for secession from the Warsaw pact and reunification with West Germany. Over the course of time, it was clear that that was where its economic interests lay. When a country can no longer afford to feed its people under an outdated political system, it will look elsewhere for its material prosperity and survival.

I wish to deal with some of the key issues in the intergovernmental conferences—first, the question of a single currency. I believe that there may be distinct advantages to the adoption of a single currency at some time in the future and so do most of the business men I know in my constituency and elsewhere. The Government are right not to rule out progress towards that, and to point out that a high degree of convergence of economies will be necessary before any single currency can be contemplated, agreed by this House, or sustained thereafter.

Let us consider what people actually want. So often the debate about a single currency is dominated by misunderstanding and emotion. We would do well to reflect on the interests of those whom we seek to represent. Most people want to be paid in a valuable, stable currency that is a sound store of wealth. People want to save in a currency that does not depreciate every year as much as the pound has done over many years. People want to be able to borrow for their homes or businesses in a currency where the interest rate is not exorbitant. For too long we have regarded the pound as sacrosanct, but who wants to be paid in funny money that is for ever being debased by inflation and buffeted on the financial and foreign exchange markets?

Just as benefits were clearly derived from the Government's decision to join the exchange rate mechanism this time last year, so will advantages be derived by moving to the new narrow rate band and possibly, in time, to a single currency. What happened to Italy when it decided to move from the wide band to the narrow band within the ERM? Did that make its currency, economy, inflation rate or fiscal policy more restrained and more problematic? It did not. Instead, the value of Italy's currency shot to the top of the parameters and there was a mass inflow of money as people realised that it was a more stable currency and there was less of a case for high interest rates, which were brought down still further. Were Britain to join the narrow rate band, the effect would be the same, and the economic dividend is there to see. We would pay lower interest rates, with all that would mean for our constituents.

My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer deserve every praise for joining the exchange rate mechanism at a sustainable parity, despite prophesies of doom from Europhobes; they were wrong and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister got it right. We have been able to maintain parity within the ERM, interest rates have been reduced on eight successive occasions and we now have one of the lowest, if not the lowest, monthly inflation rates in the Community. The Government's courage and confidence and the decision that they took have been vindicated by events and they deserve recognition for their action.

The emerging treaty proposals on economic and monetary union seem to meet British requirements in full, but I will address some of the critical issues. As to a two-speed Europe, Britain already meets most of the criteria drafted by the Dutch presidency for membership of the fast track, in terms of having a low rate of inflation and the stability of our exchange rate. I hope that there will be no question of the British being regarded as second-rate Europeans and members of some slow track to economic and monetary union.

Although I am much in favour of that union, the Government were right to rule out signing a declaration of intent alongside their treaty commitment. We must stick to the view that only the treaty matters. Once we start encouraging member states to sign declarations of intent, we risk undermining the integrity and force of the treaty documents and obligations.

I want to see the development of a European central bank emerging from the European monetary institute, in stage two, beyond 1996. That is essential. Where is the sovereignty in going it alone? My right hon. Friend the Chancellor would be much more constrained in his fiscal and monetary policies if Britain tried to go it alone. He would have to bump up taxes, or impose higher interest rates or stiffer credit controls if we did not have the security of being a monetary member of the Community.

I share the belief of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, which he reiterated yesterday, that convergence is important, but we must not allow total convergence to be an absolute precondition for further steps towards economic and monetary union, for that could be used as an excuse for never-never progress.

As to European political union, it is vital that we consider favourably proposals for increased confidence for qualified majority voting and for co-decision, not just because the Community's budget is so large that we need improved accountability and democratic restraint, but because in so many other areas—such as in respect of the

environment, conditions of employment and judicial co-operation—common responsibility requires the same observance of high standards.

It is an extraordinary paradox that those who ostensibly seek to defend the sovereignty that Britain already enjoys deny the accountability that should be imposed within the Commission. I should like to see more control over the Commission, and its executive being checked. There is much more to gain than to lose from the proposals for co-decision.

I share with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister the hope that the Community will one day be able to enlarge its fold and that that enlargement will include some of the currently problematic countries of eastern Europe. Frankly, I do not see that as an early prospect. Their problems are so deep and the solutions will take so long that it will hold back political and economic progress in western Europe if we insist that they are brought into the fold sooner rather than later. It would be far better, as my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said, to conclude association agreements with those countries and to help them in every way to catch up and to adopt the principles of a single free market rather than trying to integrate them within new political structures.

I agree with my right hon. Friend's approach to foreign affairs. As with defence, foreign affairs are a difficult issue. In principle, and in theory, it may be appealing to believe that we can all unite and go along together with common defence and foreign policies, but the reality—and after the Gulf war, I must say, the experience, too, to some extent —suggests that we have not yet developed the degree of cohesion and common purpose that must must be a prerequisite for common foreign and defence policies.

Nevertheless, my right hon. Friend is right to point out the role that we can play, where countries come together on issues, whereas on other issues—certainly on major critical and substantial issues—they must retain absolute national sovereignty in the development of their own foreign policies.

That much is clear on defence, too. The Government are right to seek a twin-track approach whereby we retain the essential strength and security of NATO while developing a new role for the Western European Union. I attach great importance to the proposals for discussions at NATO level between Ministers of eastern European states —the former Warsaw pact countries—and those of NATO countries. That will be greatly for the security of western Europe and, it is to be hoped, will mean that, in time, there will be a more practical integration, exercising and deployment of our defence capability.

It is vital to remember how important and unique is the protection of our alliance with the United States—and with Canada, too, whose defence training facilities are essential for our country. I mean more than the nuclear umbrella and the massive and rapid reinforcement capability that America offers within a NATO structure. It is, as we saw clearly during the Gulf war, the very sophistication of America's procurement and the new technology of weaponry that demand that we count the Americans as friends and allies rather than trying to go it alone.

I believe that I speak for many others, both in my party and outside it, who want to see a successful conclusion at Maastricht and who want political and economic union in Europe to go forward. Ministers are right to protect our national interest at every stage. It is right that in the negotiations, which must remain confidential, they should seek to prevent us from going too far too soon. I am delighted that the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), who is one of the most influential Ministers in the discussions, is here today, and I say to him and to others that I want Ministers to be more positive. There should be less negativism about our role in Europe. It may be necessary to appease, reassure and satisfy those who, understandably, for generational and other genuine reasons, have objections and fears about further progress. At the same time, many of us strongly believe that our future and our interests lie in Europe.

The Conservative party will go along with what the Government decide. It will support the Government if they lead, provide the vision and deliver at Maastricht an agreement and draft treaty proposals that will give the people we represent the standard of living, the incomes and the prosperity that they deserve. We place a great duty of trust on the Government. I, for one, have every confidence that they will discharge that duty with distinction.

12.34 pm

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): It is a refreshing experience to follow the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) and I hope that the level of debate on the European Community that we have attained today will be reflected in our two-day debate on 20 and 21 November. The Prime Minister said yesterday that, in discussing these matters at Maastricht, the Government would reflect the views of the House of Commons. I look forward to hearing thoughtful and far-reaching speeches such as that made by the hon. Member for Chichester when these matters are discussed at Maastricht, and I hope that views such as his will be reflected in Maastricht—a subject to which I may return in due course.

The Foreign Secretary opened his speech by referring to the monumental events that now surround us. Maastricht is in prospect and we also have the Madrid conference. Great praise has been given to Mr. Baker, the United States Secretary of State, for arranging that conference and so fulfilling the commitment that he gave at the time of the Gulf war, when he said that he and President Bush would do all that they could to bring the parties to the negotiating table. That has now been achieved and, although we know that a long road awaits the negotiators, it is refreshing to see the leaders of the Palestinian people at the conference table and to watch their demeanour as they approach the massive problems. It is important to understand that they are the people living in the area—the people who have suffered so much since 1947. Those at the conference table are not Palestine Liberation Organisation representatives working out of Tunis but people who actually live in the occupied territories, who have been deprived of their homeland, as they see it, and who are now looking to the future and trying to negotiate some kind of settlement.

The world has changed greatly since 1967 and it is not easy merely to return to United Nations resolution 242. The peace conference in Madrid seems to me to subsume all past resolutions. When we reach the face-to-face negotiations, the parties themselves will be able to confront their ideological and territorial difficulties and seek to reach some kind of compromise. Since 1967, we

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have seen the rise of the concept of Judea and Samaria within the Israeli people. Personally, I do not support that concept, but the fact is that it has given rise to a large number of settlements on the west bank and even in the Gaza strip. We have also witnessed the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and the influx of thousands of Soviet Jews into the area as a result of the changed policies of Mr. Gorbachev. The Palestinians are now calling for the return to the area of 4 million Palestinian people from the diaspora. Thus, great complexities have arisen since 1967.

We should note important changes that have already come about. The area is no longer an area of global conflict, with the United States and the Soviet Union locked in battle through their surrogates, Israel and Syria. In the early 1980s, American troops were stationed in the Lebanon and Soviet troops were stationed some 40 miles away, in Syria—that was the closest that we have come to conflict between Soviet and American soldiers on the ground since 1945. The fact that the Madrid conference is sponsored by the Soviet Union and the United States means that this is no longer a global conflict. The area is now faced with a regional conflict—deep and dangerous for those who live there and tragic for those who lose their lives.

A little noticed event, perhaps, is that the Soviet Union has now re-established diplomatic relations with Israel. As a consequence, it is now back in the game as a sponsor of a conference that can lead to peace, as we all hope it will. In my view, it was a monumental error by the Soviet Union to withdraw its diplomatic mission in Tel Aviv following the six-day war in 1967 because, in doing so, it kept itself out of the area as a serious negotiator.

Let me refer to the problems of Europe that the hon. Member for Chichester mentioned. One of our difficulties —and one reason why debates such as this are so welcome —is that we do not yet quite understand or know what we are trying to achieve. Is the purpose of a single European currency and the central bank to assist us in improving living standards by providing a level playing field or are they steps towards some kind of federal Europe? No one has been able to answer that question. There are different views throughout the European Community about whether we are moving towards a federal Europe or whether all these issues are steps on the way towards improving trade and increasing standards of living. I agree with the hon. Member for Chichester that it does not matter to the British people whether they have a pound sterling or an ecu in their pockets if their level of prosperity is being maintained and enhanced. The duty of Her Majesty's Government, whoever may form that Government, is to maintain and improve those standards of living. We have not yet, however, resolved the dilemma over whether that is part and parcel of the free trade area or part and parcel of the advance towards a federal-style Europe. All of that may, sooner or later, be made clear to us.

The Foreign Secretary made a careful distinction between a common foreign policy and a common defence policy. The hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson) raised that point with him. The fact is, however, that our foreign and defence policies are linked. Our defence policy is based on our massive commitments, due to our former empire and colonies, now our Commonwealth, and the variety of organisations with which Britain is involved while our European partners are not. We witnessed recently a singular event in Zaire when Belgian and French troops went in to protect their citizens. They, too, had colonies. They too, therefore, have difficulty in arriving at a foreign policy reached by means of a unanimous decision rather than a foreign policy based on a majority decision.

I was interested in the Foreign Secretary's definition of the Western European Union. I agree with him that it is important and significant to develop the Western European Union and to have a defence force, but if such a force existed now, would it have gone into Yugoslavia to separate the Serbs and the Croats? Is that what such a force would have done, acting at the behest of the Council of Ministers? Would we not have repeated the errors of 1914 by involving ourselves again in that region? The consequences of the 1914-18 war are only now being reversed. After that war we saw the rise of communism and fascism and of Hitler. All those events shaped the world after 1945. Only now are we returning to the age-old problem of nationalism to which my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) referred. That distortion of history is only now being reversed. The danger, however, is that by creating a western European defence force we may repeat the errors of old. We ought to take that serious danger into account.

Another difficulty of the last 11 or 12 years is that we have always faced west, towards the United States of America. During the war, Churchill quoted Longfellow to Roosevelt:

> "And not by eastern windows only
> When daylight comes, comes in the light.
> Out front the sun climbs slow, how slowly,
> But westward, look, the land is bright."

The fact that we were looking towards the United States might have been an acceptable concept during the war, but it has been an unacceptable concept for the past 12 years, during which Europe has been creating itself and showing an enthusiasm for a single European currency and a central bank and for increasing the powers of the European Community's institutions. The British Government have lagged in their support for events in Europe and have not been so enthusiastic as our European partners.

My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby was right to say that we are witnessing the creation not simply of a free market in Europe, but a free market which is linked to the Delors principles and will ensure proper working conditions and adequate social provision. The only way in which the European Community can work in the future is by linking the concept of the free market with that strong collective provision. There must not be an imbalance in Europe between those who work and those who do not, and between relative social and living conditions. That would make the European Community unworkable. We must link the free market with the provision of proper social and working conditions. In that way we shall have a Europe that is stronger, more sympathetic and a better one in which to live.

What are we seeking to do in Europe? Are we seeking to create a federal Europe or a new free trade area or a Europe that is neither federal nor based upon a free trade area? Are we seeking to create a totally different entity? That entity must be based on consensus and it must be one to which the British people will willingly belong because

they appreciate the advantages to which the hon. Member for Chichester has already referred. It must be an entity that this Parliament can recognise.

I welcome the cautious approach that has been adopted towards the Maastricht negotiations. I do not believe that Maastricht will be the ultimate summit on such matters. I believe that it will be another stage towards reaching an agreement that will take us forward.

Earlier I quoted Longfellow and I should like to conclude by quoting from Anton Chekhov. I know that the Foreign Secretary is a literary man and he may read this speech. Chekhov said:

"In search of truth a man takes two steps forward and one step back. Suffering mistakes and the weariness of life thrusts him back, but the search for truth drives him on and on. And who knows? Perhaps he will find the real truth at last."

As a result of the Maastricht conferences and the debates that we shall have in the House we shall create a real, true Europe—a new Europe that is neither federal nor based upon free trade alone. It will be something in which we all participate. We shall be able to reach conclusions on the current problems through debate, consensus and, at the end of the day, the unanimity of Parliament.

12.47 pm

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson (Newbury): The Gracious Speech is that annual event when our Queen and her Government set out for this Parliament those national and international policies that are in the best interests of the United Kingdom, and only the United Kingdom, whether they relate to domestic legislation, to our defence commitments or to those foreign policy objectives which, to quote my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, protect and promote the British interest. That is no more or less than a sovereign Parliament within a constitutional monarchy should be able to expect. I hope that it will continue.

Now, however, I have grave misgivings as we begin to hear from the European Community more and more talk about a federal Europe and closer political integration. Such talk might reasonably follow if the EC had achieved all its earlier aims, but, as we know, it has not. We also know that, in 1992, the 12 member states will prepare to open the single European market at the end of that year.

If the single European market can be established and made to work as that common market that has been talked about for the past 30 years, it will be a considerable achievement, but it will not be easy. It will have its costs. Even today, we are told that it would cost the Inland Revenue about £250 million, because of the reduction in customs barriers.

We already know that many of the existing members of the Community currently pay little more than lip service to EC directives. Despite the requirement to open contracts and business opportunities to all comers, somehow those countries manage to choose their own nationals. The recent decision by the French Government to give in to their farmers on the lamb war only underlines the position. At a moment like this, one might think that the single market should dominate the Community thinking, but that is not so.

At Maastricht next month, political, economic and monetary union will take pride of place. I find that surprising. Since the Community's inception under the treaty of Rome in 1957, mutual self-interest has been the driving force behind it. The Six each saw benefits to themselves from joining the Common Market and hence signed the treaty of Rome. In 1972, after our brief flirtation with the European Free Trade Association, we thought that our self-interest would be better served within the EC, so we joined, and I supported our membership in this House.

I do not believe that altruism, good neighbourliness or even the visions of Jean Monnet have been the motivation behind the EC but simply hard-headed self interest. Because that self-interest has continued, we have maintained our membership, even though we continue to run an imbalance on our trade. Last year it was £9·5 billion, and in the first nine months of this year it is £2 billion. We all know that the common agricultural policy has not given our farmers the return that their efficiency deserves or our housewives the food prices that they should be able to expect.

But, even if one accepts those difficulties, the balance of advantage has lain in our continuing membership and in arguing from our position within the Community—from the "heart of Europe" to use the words of the Prime Minister—as my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) did so successfully over our budget contribution. I have never understood why she was criticised by the Opposition for speaking up for Britain, but I am not exactly clear about their present position, except that they seem to be claiming that they can negotiate better conditions than the Government, despite their failure when in government in 1975 to negotiate proper terms for our entry. Indeed, that negotiation was something of a farce and I have no reason to have any greater confidence in the present Opposition's ability to do any better.

If the balance of advantage has stayed with our continuing membership of the Community, we have paid a price for it. In publications as diverse as *Pharmaceutical Marketing* and *Country Life*, reference has recently been made to the arguments at Westminster seeming increasingly academic, as EC directives move us irrevocably towards the single market. Perhaps we should draw satisfaction from our willingness to accept such directives, unlike so many of our European colleagues, but if that is the situation now, when most Members of Parliament believe that we are still Members of a sovereign Parliament, what might it be like if we were to surrender the rest of our sovereignty to Brussels or to the European Parliament, in which we have only 16 per cent. of the seats, and to majority voting?

Mr. Delors has already warned us that, in a few years, 80 per cent. of the major economic and social decisions facing member states will be made in Brussels. If European political union comes about, he will undoubtedly be right. But why should it? Where is the self-interest that should make it attractive to us? We are told that, having lost an empire, we can have a new role in a European superstate, as if we were being asked to be its leader—which we are not.

I find nothing especially attractive about a European superstate. I do not want to be part of some supposedly dominant united states of Europe which, it is argued, would exert a similar influence to the United States of America and the now defunct USSR in world affairs. If that is the carrot to persuade this Parliament to give up such independence as it possesses and to move it on from the treaty of Rome, I would want a lot of persuading that that was in our best interests.

[Sir Michael McNair-Wilson]

I want the United Kingdom to live at peace with all its European neighbours—to trade and to co-operate with them but to retain control of its defences and of its foreign and economic policies. I want this Parliament to continue to be the forum of our nation and I believe that the vast majority of our people share my wish.

Where political union and sovereignty are concerned, I can see no natural political affinity between the United Kingdom and Luxembourg—a country with a population smaller than Berkshire—or with Belgium, with its divided population, Holland, with its total dependence on its neighbours, or Italy, which has so much difficulty in implementing EC directives, which moralises over other people's shortcomings and has a new Government roughly every 18 months.

A former Minister of the Republic of Ireland told me recently that sovereignty did not mean the same for the people of Ireland as it did for us. They were so dependent on Britain for their trade and knew that they were accepted into the EC only because we had become a member that it was not a subject that exercised them overmuch. Thus, while a Luxembourger, an Irishman, a Dutchman or a Belgian may see a European superstate as giving them a much larger stage on which to perform and one that would cost them nothing in sovereignty since what they have is already so diluted, to us it would mean the end of that independence which has allowed us to play a unique and continuing role in world affairs and to have this Gracious Speech setting out our parliamentary programme.

It was that independence which enabled us to participate in the Gulf war and to initiate the Falklands conflict without having to secure the agreement of our 11 Community colleagues. All that we required was United Nations approval for the legality of our action. If, as I have suggested, the 12 members of the Community do not have much in common with us over sovereignty, what do we have in common over foreign affairs?

The failure of the 12 to act in concert does not give much ground for optimism. They could not agree on the Gulf conflict and seem to have no agreed middle east policy. They have made no impression on the Yugoslavian tragedy—so much so that I wish we had developed our own foreign policy towards the future of Yugoslavia in general and to the states of Slovenia and Croatia in particular. We could hardly have achieved less than the Community's observers.

I take issue with the Foreign Secretary's remarks this morning about it being expected that the EC would take the initiative. Expected by whom? To pretend that the 12 can beat out a constructive, flexible, foreign policy based on majority voting seems wholly unrealistic. Quite simply, not only do we and they not share common objectives, but we do not even make similar appraisals of world events, as the President of France demonstrated at the time of the coup in Moscow, when he seemed willing to negotiate with the coup's leaders.

Now we are told that there should also be a European defence force, to which the 12 members would contribute. It might have sounded relevant if the Community had become a unitary European state, but it has not. Each of our national defence forces has its own command structure and its own training methods, and chooses its own equipment with little or no standardisation. Some have conscript armies, others do not. True, even with those drawbacks, NATO functions well, but it has had the advantage of 350,000 American service men and ourselves, all of whom speak a common language.

I suspect that the European defence force owes more to the French belief that, by merging German and French forces together, it effectively removes the threat of German militarism, while resurrecting the long-held French ambition to remove the immediate American influence from European defence, which is the case with NATO. I am glad the Government have set their face against that, and I welcome the further commitment to NATO in the Gracious Speech.

On European monetary and economic union, I will say only that I wholeheartedly support the views expressed by my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The time is not right for us seriously to consider the proposition. Indeed, if I may build on what they have said and sum up my position on the future of the European Community, it is this: in the new Europe that has emerged from the ashes of the second world war and now from the grim shadows of the cold war, new possibilities for peace and prosperity across Europe exist which have probably never before been seen on that continent.

A huge amount of political and industrial restructuring will have to take place as the east European states shake themselves down into the national structures that most suit their individual aspirations. Those national structures cannot be enforced, because to do so would be self-defeating to the idea of a free Europe and to their struggles to break away from the Moscow-dominated communist monolith. By the same token, the treaty arrangements that these countries may individually wish to make with other states must be matters for them.

That seems implicit in the sentence in the Gracious Speech which states:

"My Government will further encourage the development of democratic institutions and market economies in central and eastern Europe."

It would seem amazingly out of step for east European countries to be finding their national indentities after 40 years of being forced into artificial political groupings while the rest of Europe was seeking to impose federalism and political union on its member states at the same moment when they are starting down the road to a single European market—perhaps the acid test of how much one of us wants the Common Market to succeed.

A single market will not be easy to achieve. If it can be made to work—and time will show whether it can become a reality—that may be the moment to return to subjects such as political and economic union and the benefits of a different defence structure. Until then, let us seek to trade together, the Community with EFTA—I welcome the agreement to create a European economic area combining the two in 1993. We should trade with eastern Europe and, from mutual self-interest, which is essential to trading, see what new political alliances emerge. After all, the European Community of the 12 may already have been overtaken by the events of the past 18 months.

As eastern Europe transforms its economies to a western pattern, Europe in terms of the Community need no longer stop at the Oder, because the Community, as we use that term, has now become the western European Community. It is no longer a counterbalance to the COMECON block of east European countries dominated

by Moscow. That has disappeared and so, to some extent, has the European Community's reason for existence with it. Yet the EC continues to think politically in treaty of Rome and divided Europe terms.

To that extent, the EC does not seem to have accepted the ramifications of the post-communist years and has not decided whether it wants to consolidate itself as a rich man's club at the western end of the continent of Europe, to which the east Europeans can apply for associate membership, or to widen its institutions, starting with freer trade. That is surprising, for the future of the east European nations is now the most important issue involving Europe's mutual peace and prosperity.

Several hon. Members have spoken about the dangers of instability in the newly emerging eastern democracies. Surely this is the moment when the strong west should be able to offer a hand of assistance to those countries, rather than holding them at arm's length while it completes its own internal workings. The creation of a pan-European Community deserves the most serious consideration by the Twelve. It deserves to take pride of place at Maastricht, ahead of arguments about creating federal institutions, transfers of sovereignty and the powers of the west European Parliament. Sooner or later, someone in western Europe must take the lead in this matter. Perhaps that will be our task when we take over the presidency of the Community next July.

1.2 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I am glad to be able to participate in this debate. Having read what the Queen's Speech says on matters of foreign policy, I must say that I found it a bit of a mish-mash. In the past year the most horrific events have taken place in the middle east, with the Gulf war, and the most amazing changes have taken place in Europe, with the upheavals in the Soviet Union. It is important also to put on the record the serious growth of racism and neo-Nazi activity throughout much of western Europe and what was formerly termed eastern Europe. I was disappointed that in his opening speech the Foreign Secretary did not even mention the horrific growth in racial attacks and neo-Nazi bands that are now rampaging around the eastern part of what is now the unified Germany.

I was also disappointed that no mention was made in the Queen's Speech of one of the major consequences of the Gulf war—the plight of the Kurdish people throughout the region. Kurdish people are hanging on in the northern part of Iraq, desperately in need of support and aid that must come to them before a harsh winter sets in. The situation is desperate. Many have been homeless, not just for the past six months but for several years and they have been pushed from pillar to post within that area. Across the border, the Turkish army is continuing vigorous armed raids against Kurdish placements throughout south-eastern Turkey and is crossing the border and bombing Kurdish villages in Iraq. As there is supposed to be a degree of coalition forces air control in that region, the British and American forces must know about the aerial bombardments. They have access to the villages that have been bombed and can see that civilian targets have been hit by Turkish air force planes that are bombing northern Iraq. Their plight has vanished from the headlines, other stories have taken its place, but the killing continues and the loss of life continues. I hope that the Minister will say something about it this afternoon.

A great deal has changed in the world recently. As I said to the Foreign Secretary in an intervention, I was never one to support the idea of the cold war—the idea that there was an imminent threat of a Soviet invasion of western Europe. NATO, created in 1948, was the major bulwark of the cold war. The Warsaw pact was created in 1955. For some time my party held the perfectly logical view that NATO and the Warsaw pact should both be dissolved. Now the Warsaw pact has completely dissolved itself, so the experts in SHAPE headquarters at NATO are left looking for a role for NATO to perform. Increasingly, they use phrases such as "out-of-area activities". They maintain a significant degree of nuclear strength. This country is building three Trident submarines and there is increasing pressure to build a fourth.

Where is the external threat to Europe? How can nuclear weapons possibly be used except to destroy many lives—the lives of those on whom they are targeted and of those who fired the weapons in the first place? A report published last week on the consequences of the Chernobyl explosion—a minor explosion compared with that of a series of nuclear warheads—showed that there were several thousand deaths from cancer in the Soviet Union and in northern and western Europe as a result.

The idea that nuclear weapons deter anyone is laughable and horrific. We have the greatest chance ever to rid the world of nuclear weapons now, yet the consensus in this country is apparently that we need to maintain three Trident systems and possibly build a fourth at a total cost of more than £23 billion.

Mr. Tony Banks: A waste of money.

Mr. Corbyn: My hon. Friend is correct.

My next point develops a point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) this morning. He said that last year the World bank derived a greater income from interest payments and debt repayments than it paid out in development aid and investment in the poorest countries. That is an horrific statistic. We live in a world that is not developing uniformly. Most of the world's population have no expectation of rising living standards. They cannot be sure that their children will be able to go to school or that they will receive medical treatment throughout their lives. They cannot even be certain that they will have jobs in the future. The lives of a large proportion of the world's population are nasty, brutish and short. Increasingly they live in giant slums centred on the world's major cities and their countries' limited social services and education and health systems are being ravaged by the market economy.

History will decry our time as a period of market soothsaying when it was believed that the market could provide everything and solve all problems. The lives of the people in Africa and Latin America prove that that is not so. The countries in which they live labour under a massive debt burden—£784 billion of it. Repayments by the sub-Saharan countries alone amount to 500 per cent. of their export earnings.

This debt is unpayable, as is the interest on it. We do not need to look far back to find the origins of the crisis—the oil crisis of the early 1970s and the proliferation of large loans at low interest rates to third world countries.

[Mr. Corbyn]

Between 1980 and 1985 interest payments by third world countries more than doubled from 9 to 20 per cent., at the same time as average prices for their commodities fell by an average of more than 25 per cent. The gap between the two has resulted in the debt burden, in the loss of national sovereignty and in the loss of so many of the nascent social services in those countries.

We must face the issue seriously and not in the way in which the Prime Minister faced the issue at Harare when he said that he would write off some of the debts in return for the acceptance of an economic model imposed by the International Monetary Fund, and say that there has to be a write-off of debt. The current round of talks on the general agreement on tariffs and trade should not emphasise so much the free market in food, which will be very much to the detriment of the economies and the environments of third world countries. Instead, the talks should examine seriously the problem of underpayment for the major commodities that the third world countries produce, which would be a step forward. However, I fear that the GATT talks will go in the opposite direction. The GATT talks are motivated by a desire for a world free market which will give greater power to multinational corporations and less power to national Governments. It is a desire which will continue to impoverish many of the poorest parts of the world.

The situation has not arisen overnight. All the development aid that has gone to many third world countries comes back twofold and threefold through interest payments on the debt, underpayment for commodities and the over-profitability of multinational corporations. We live in a desperately and grossly unfair world. I hoped that in the Queen's Speech the Government would set out a programme that showed that we were prepared to play our part in removing the scourge of poverty, of short life and of environmental destruction which is the lot of so many people in the world. Instead, there is a narrow vision of a world dominated by market forces. We require a change in vision and in direction.

Future generations will not thank us for spending our energies and money on nuclear weapons, and on the unseemly attraction of enormous wealth to a tiny minority in north America and western Europe while the majority of the population of the world sees nothing but environmental destruction and the continuing decline in living standards. We live in short-sighted times. Future generations will condemn us for inaction in the face of what is obviously happening in the world at present.

1.11 pm

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): It is inevitable that much of the debate has been on the European Community and on what my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said in his opening speech. I do not intend to follow that, because we shall have an opportunity to do so on another occasion. I say simply that I support the views of my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) and of the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) rather than other views that have been expressed today.

This is the last occasion on which we shall have the opportunity to debate foreign affairs and the Gracious Speech in this Parliament. I may share with others the sense of wonder that none of us could have believed in 1987 that the most significant international changes would take place. Those of us who have been here since 1987 have a sense of fortune in being involved in the tremendous and dramatic changes in the world scene, which are reflected in the Gracious Speech. My right hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker) mentioned the two largest —the changes in the former Soviet Union and in South Africa. However, none of us should forget the relief of misery and the ending of conflict which have come about through the changes in Ethiopia, in Angola and in Cambodia, and we should not forget the changes in Vietnam, in Mozambique and in the western Sahara. Apart from the big changes, the populations of many other countries have had tremendous relief.

The changes represent diplomatic outlay by and diplomatic ability in this country. Although we may recognise that, those involved are often not thanked. Successive Foreign Secretaries, the ambassadorial input, the input of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and especially the input of those who beaver away at the top of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in dim Victorian rooms have made a tremendous contribution to the unique catalytic role which my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary mentioned.

We have invented new forms of assistance to match the overall situation. The know-how funds, for example, are widely appreciated in the newly emerging countries in eastern Europe. I mention especially the way in which we distributed aid in South Africa through the ambassadorial fund. We found a way in which we could help the black community directly and in the most positive way with considerable sums. We should repeat that in other countries and in other forms. I should like to see both that and the use of know-how funds extended. I recently saw a delegation from the new regime in Ethiopia, and it is obvious that that country needs know-how as much as anything. I hope that the Foreign Secretary will consider the extension of know-how to a much wider range of countries.

The authority of the United Nations is mentioned in the Queen's Speech and the Foreign Secretary spoke of what we are trying to do and of the involvement of the United Nations in Yugoslavia. The Queen's Speech also mentions the importance of making sure that Iraq complies with United Nations resolutions. It is equally important that the authority of the United Nations is upheld and supported wherever it is necessary. The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office said today in an answer that we are giving £2 million or £3 million to assist with the repatriation of refugees in camps in Thailand. It is essential that the United Nations should be in there and that, having made this contribution, we should be in there supporting it, to make sure that the inhabitants of these camps, whether they are Khmer Rouge camps, Prince Sihanouk or Son Sann camps, are properly protected against being forced, against their will, across borders. I agree with the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) that the same thing applies in the western Sahara. It is essential that the United Nations operation there is properly supported and that everything is done fairly.

If we want to support the United Nations in its role and in the reorganisations that we have suggested, it is essential that we vote the means for that as well as talking about it. Those of us who work with refugees recognise how stretched are the resources of the United Nations,

particularly those for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and those who have responsibility for coping with the enormous problems about which the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) has just spoken. We should be looking not just at what we give, but to ensuring that the United States and others pay their back dues. It is no good giving the United Nations a role and wanting it to carry out these measures on our behalf but not giving it the means to do so.

The same principle applies to the Foreign Office. We have seen significant changes world wide and that means that we should reappraise the amount of money that we devote to the diplomatic corps and to our aid budget. It is nonsense to close missions so that we can meet the new and welcome demand from the Baltic states and, for example, Phnom Penh. This applies also to the British Council, our arm of cultural diplomacy, which is facing unprecedented demands from the newly liberated countries which are looking out for English language teachers. I often say that if we thought as much about the English language and teaching it and all that that means as the French do about their language and the Alliance Francaise, we would back the British Council to the hilt. Wherever one goes in the world there is a constant demand for the teaching of the English language. I was interested to see that the first thing for which the Cambodians and Vietnamese asked—even before getting rid of mines in Cambodia—was English language training. I am delighted that the Government have responded to that and are providing English language training as part of our aid.

The same thing goes for the World Service of the BBC. It is all part of our input into the world. I welcome the opening of the World Service television broadcast, which will have a tremendous impact throughout eastern Asia and places such as Burma and the middle east. The impact of the visual world, which cannot be kept out by undemocratic and dogmatic regimes, will have a tremendous effect on many communities.

Furthermore, it applies to the aid and trade provision. As countries become more prosperous, they will want to improve their infrastructure, but the aid and trade provision is exhausted because not enough money has been allocated, so even schemes that are within the rules are not approved. In all those sectors, we need a reappraisal, because this is the defence of the future—our information, our ability to influence, our use of the English language.

Refugee asylum is also mentioned in the Queen's Speech. I am chairman of the Africa committee of the British Refugee Council, so I have worked closely with refugees for a long time. I understood what my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said about economic migration and refugees under the 1951 convention. Whether we see the Hong Kong boat people as economic migrants or refugees, and irrespective of how we see the hapless millions in Africa who move across boundaries, we must understand that these people need protection and help, even in the short term.

It is no good closing our eyes to asylum and the pressures on our European borders—the borders of affluent countries—if we do nothing to resolve economic problems that cause people to become economic migrants. The two factors go hand in hand. Unless there is a transfer of resources of the dimension that is necessary in terms of trade agreements and aid, we are not beginning to tackle the problem of economic migration, which I forecast will be the greatest problem that Europe and other parts of the world will face over the next 50 years. It will be a growing problem. There will be enormous pressure from the poorer peoples of the world as they seek to improve their situations by moving into more affluent countries.

With any changes to any rules about asylum or about dealing with short-term refugees, we must consider the essential element of the transfer of resources in a meaningful way. I believe that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has the necessary vision. When he was Chancellor of the Exchequer he started the orginal debt initiatives. He has gone it alone at Harare and I am sure that we all support that in every possible way. I hope that he will put forward this essential consideration in his various roles.

One of the ways in which that can be done—again, this is mentioned in the Queen's Speech—is by our support for the conference that will take place in Buenos Aires in June 1992 on the environment and on aid. It might be the opportunity of a world summit, or an earth summit, at which we can involve the public in Britain and throughout Europe in understanding that we have a common environment throughout the world. We all share that. We have a common economic future in this world and we all share that, too. The summit may be an opportunity—I know that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is encouraging other Heads of State to attend it—that will enable us to put over to the British population the need to recognise that there is a balance, an interdependence and a need for the transfer of resources.

1.22 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): The hon. Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) holds the attention of the House when he speaks on foreign affairs, and rightly so. He has such expertise and a liberal attitude to such matters. His speech was both thoughtful and exceedingly interesting. I wish to underline his support for the United Nations in the new world order that everyone talks so much about these days, and especially his comments about the British Council, the work of the council, and the BBC World Service. All Governments have failed in many respects in not giving to the British Council and the BBC World Service the resources that they merit. People throughout the world seem to admire these institutions, and far more than we appear to do in Britain. That is strange. I hope that the hon. Gentleman's words will fall on sympathetic ears when the Minister of State replies.

I listen to the BBC World Service all the time. I like to think that I share a love of the World Service and an interest in it with Mr. Gorbachev, who gave it one of the best unsolicited testaments that anyone could when he said that while being held prisoner he heard about what was going on in the world by listening to the World Service. I do not think that anything could have a higher commendation.

I shall be brief because I realise that at least two other hon. Members wish to take part in the debate. I shall refer to two subjects, neither of which will meet with the accord of my very good friend, my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). I shall not, however, let my hon. Friend hold me back during the few minutes that I shall use to unbridle myself.

I shall refer first to Yugoslavia. I listened with great interest to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool,

[Mr. Tony Banks]

West Derby (Mr. Wareing) when he recounted all the difficulties that one experiences in that unhappy country, or what is left of it at the moment. I do not claim to have my hon. Friend's detailed knowledge, but I remember my attitude when the Council of Europe recently passed a resolution calling for an armed intervention force in Yugoslavia under the aegis of the United Nations. I supported it as someone who opposed armed intervention in Iraq. I have the feeling that if oil supplies were somehow caught up in the Yugoslavian position, an armed intervention force would already be in that country.

I was pleased to note that the Gracious Speech referred to the Queen attending the European Parliament and the Council of Europe. That is excellent.

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): My understanding is that Her Majesty the Queen is visiting the Council of Europe because its headquarters are also the seat of the European Parliament. However, I regret that it does not appear that she is to address the Council of Europe, of which the hon. Gentleman and I are Assembly members.

Mr. Banks: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman because that point was not made clear in the Gracious Speech. Perhaps someone should point it out to the Queen, who may think that she will be addressing the Assembly of the Council of Europe. I believe that she should address that Assembly. As the hon. Gentleman and I know, it is usual to ask questions of visiting heads of state, but I suspect that we would not be allowed to ask the Queen any questions. I should like to ask her a few questions, such as what she really feels about the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher).

Perhaps the Prime Minister, in the few months left to him in that position, will think about visiting the Council of Europe Assembly so that we can determine whether the British Government actually envisage a role for the Council of Europe. I hope that the Government will provide time for a proper debate on Council of Europe affairs. I attend the Assembly as a Member of this House and I should like the opportunity to report back to the House, during a proper debate, on what I am doing in the Council of Europe.

I want to return to the question of an armed intervention force in Yugoslavia under the aegis of the United Nations Security Council. That seems to be an appropriate way to proceed. It is a European problem that must have a European solution. We cannot sit idly by and watch Yugoslavia tear itself to pieces, watch people being killed in vast numbers, and watch the wonderful archaeological and architectural gems being destroyed, while saying that there is nothing that we can do. We cannot even get the Government to say that they will fully support oil sanctions against Yugoslavia. The Minister of State said that the Greeks would not be too happy about imposing oil sanctions. That is not acceptable. It is no good doing one thing in Iraq and something completely different in Yugoslavia. We should intervene and it is something that the Western European Union could undertake. I understand the problems, but an armed intervention force would give everyone the opportunity to seek a political solution.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover said, the answer does not lie in a permanent military force in Yugoslavia, because that would not lead to a political resolution of the problem—as is the case in Northern Ireland. However, we now have an opportunity to show that Europe can address European problems and that we will intervene in a way that will give the people of Yugoslavia the opportunity to sit down together and find a peaceful solution to the problems.

My other point relates to developments in Europe, and especially the run-up to the Maastricht intergovernmental conference. When there was a change of leadership in the Conservative party, many European leaders—and, indeed, hon. Members—felt that that would lead to a dramatic change of attitude on Britain's position within the EEC. There have been some changes, but they have not been dramatic. It is clear once again, Britain is in a minority of one within the EEC, especially on monetary union. The opt-out clause is a fig leaf that the Prime Minister is clutching to his private parts to cover the serious disagreements in his party, and especially the objections from its right wing.—*[Interruption.]* The right hon. Gentleman does not need a fig leaf to protect himself against my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover, he needs a suit of armour.

Mr. Skinner: He wears his pants outside his shirt as well.

Mr. Banks: That is probably why he needs to hold a general election, to get his clothes on the right way.

We know that ultimately there will be a single European currency and that Britain will go along with it. The right hon. Member for Finchley used to stand on the sidelines wringing her hands, carping and whingeing, but in the end she went along with things. Unfortunately, she was never able really to influence developments in the way that Britain should, by being right in the middle of events, and being seen as a joint, willing partner in Europe—not a country that is always ducking and diving and looking for ways of putting party and even narrow national interests before those of the wider European concept.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover knows, I changed my position on Europe. Yesterday, the Prime Minister had a go at my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition for having changed his position. The world has changed so dramatically, as speech after speech has emphasised. Who could have believed, when we debated the Queen's Speech two or three years ago, that such changes would occur? And so, too, must the positions adopted by political leaders and other politicians change.

I used to view the European Community as being an economic and political bloc confronting the East and COMECON, and that is why I did not believe that it was uniting Europe. It seemed to be dividing it. However, when I heard Mr. Gorbachev speaking at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg in 1989, about a common European home, I could perceive an image of Europe that made me feel far more European than I had ever done before. I felt that there was nothing to fear from a united states of Europe with a single currency. We must look forward to such developments. They are historically inevitable.

As I have told the House before on numerous occasions, the days of the nation state are coming to an end. What does parliamentary sovereignty mean? We lost

ours a long time ago, but some people are still clinging to it, as they would to a piece of wreckage, in the hope that it will remain afloat. It is nonsense to think in those terms.

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend is right to talk about nation states in some respects, but today we are seeing the dismantling of conglomerations. The Soviet Union now has 17 different nation states. My hon. Friend spoke earlier of his desire to see armed intervention in Yugoslavia on behalf of the Pope. I remind him that there are examples of states coming together—as they have done in the Common Market—but then having to co-exist so closely that they cannot stand the sight of one another and begin to fall apart. In another 10 or 12 years, history will show that it is more likely that nation states will look after themselves to a greater extent than hitherto. That is my view of what will happen in the Common Market, especially now that there are 5 million homeless people in the Community and on its borders. It is not the great economic miracle that we have heard about.

Mr. Banks: I have been accused of many things, but never of being a papal legate. I am not taking sides in respect of Croatia and Serbia. There probably is no future for a united Yugoslavia, and Marshal Tito's ability to hold that federation together was a marvellous testimony to his abilities. I always disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover with great reluctance, but I do not think that he is right on this occasion. In the case of the Soviet Union, we are witnessing the break-up of an empire, but in the EEC, mature countries are voluntarily coming together. It is not that a military force is telling them, "You will do this."

In the aftermath of an empire, there will inevitably be an upsurge of nationalism in Europe, but gravity will bring states back together as we move towards that common European home to which Mr. Gorbachev referred—a Europe that stretches from the Atlantic to the Urals. On this occasion my hon. Friend's great vision has deserted him. What he sees is the reverse of what is actually happening. This is one of the few occasions on which I have disagreed with my hon. Friend either in the House or outside.

Lastly, I must mention the European social charter. There was an interesting article in *The Independent* yesterday, containing an interview with the European Social Affairs Commissioner, Mrs. Papandreou, who said that the British Government

"is against anything called social. They want to create an internal market for enterprises, but not take care of workers".

That is true both in this country and in a wider European context. Mrs. Papandreou can see that clearly, as we can too. In the interview she also attacked the rather imaginative use of statistics by the Secretary of State for Employment, who uses statistics as an art form rather than a precise science. Mrs. Papandreou wanted to know where he obtained the peculiar figures, with an error factor of anything up to 100 per cent., that he uses to discuss the social charter, a limit on the number of hours worked, maternity leave for pregnant women, and so on. The Prime Minister went along for another photo opportunity the other day, to talk about opportunities for women as we approach the year 2000. Yet again he makes sure that something decent coming out of Europe will be opposed by the Government. That is a scandal which we shall continue to expose.

One of the things that the people of this country can look forward to in a wider Europe is a fairer social regime —that is the other side of the Single European Act. If the Government are not prepared to render it, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, when he is Prime Minister, will ensure that we get all the benefits of the European Community.

1.37 pm

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): I welcome all the proposals in the Queen's Speech, as, no doubt, do the vast majority of my constituents. Before commenting on foreign affairs, I shall refer to two proposals affecting local government and higher education.

I have always believed that it was a great mistake to abolish the county boroughs in 1973. They were the finest units of local government in the world. I do not believe that schools, social services, roads, libraries, public protection and traffic management in my constituency have been better served by the remote control from county hall, given the conflicting priorities of a mainly rural county, without the benefit of the personal local knowledge and accountability that borough councillors can provide. We in Bournemouth welcome the review and the prospect of a return to a unitary authority.

As for higher education, Bournemouth, having only recently attained polytechnic status for its college, never dreamed that the opportunity for it to become a university would arise quite so soon.

However, I have two reservations. First, the dramatic increase that has already taken place in student numbers has not always been matched by a similar increase in the quality of teaching, in the number of tutors, or in equipment and facilities. As a result, students are having to wait too long to use computers and borrow books, and for space to work in libraries and access to their tutors. So the dream of higher education becomes a nightmare.

My second reservation concerns the implications of the proposals for research funding for the private sector of higher education. An illustration is provided by the pioneering research into the diagnosis and treatment of spinal pain undertaken by the Anglo-European College of Chiropractic in my constituency. Back pain is one of the most costly health care problems in the western industrial world today, and a recent report from the Medical Research Council has demostrated the superiority of chiropractic over national health service treatment. The potential savings are enormous. The demise of the Council for National Academic Awards and the denial of funding threatens private research and institutions of excellence such as that college.

The proposals to deal with asylum seekers relate to the broader issues that arise concerning what should be done in today's new world order to end the abuses of human and minority rights which cause such people to become refugees. There can be no doubt, as several Members have said, that one of the principal problems facing western Europe in the next decade will be the massive demand for a better life in the west before the new market economies of eastern Europe can deliver jobs and prosperity.

We must never allow our procedures to deny asylum to genuine refugees in fear for their lives; nor must we be as hostile or unsympathetic as I fear many of our consulates in eastern Europe are towards those seeking visas merely to enable them to visit this country as tourists or to explore

[Mr. David Atkinson]

business opportunities with us. I accept, however, that we, like our European partners, need to clamp down further on the widespread racketeering that is taking place in the absence of a clearly worked out European convention on migration—perhaps with agreed quotas—and a convention on the rights of minorities.

To promote good and just government worldwide must be our aim and I therefore warmly welcome the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary in the summer in which he proposed a clearer and closer linkage with aid and, in that regard, I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on what he achieved at the G7 summit and at the Commonwealth conference. That reflects our insistence on economic and political reform in the former Soviet Union, to which we now offer advice under our know-how schemes, and I hope that similar advice will be made available to all such countries whose performance on democracy and human rights gives rise to concern.

The principal offenders are now to be found in the Islamic world, particularly among those who apply the law of the Shi'eria, which is so intolerant and disregarding of human rights as defined under the United Nations declaration. This morning, in Madrid, Mr. Shamir rightly condemned Syria for its record, but he offered no prospect of extending Israel's democratic principles to the Palestinians whom it now administers. That will be essential for lasting peace and security and for confidence-building in the region.

I believe that an answer lies in seeking to extend to the middle east the Helsinki process, which contributed so much to the end of communism in Europe. That is being proposed by a number of European states through the concept of a CSCM—a conference on security and co-operation in the Mediterranean—to which my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary gave some support in his address to the United Nations General Assembly last year. A CSCM would represent the next logical step following—it is to be hoped—a successful outcome of the Madrid conference on the middle east. I hope that that will form the basis for future British and European Community foreign policy to secure peace, democracy and human rights in a region that has suffered more conflict, and whose people have suffered more misery, than any other since the war.

1.42 pm

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) has been typically generous in allowing me some time at the end of the debate. I am grateful to him and to other right hon. and hon. Members who have spoken briefly, although it would perhaps have been easier had Front-Bench spokesmen similarly curtailed their remarks.

I welcome the constructive measures in the Government's legislative programme as outlined in the Gracious Speech. I hope that the House will not consider me in any sense churlish if I utter two words of warning and make two points of textual criticism before conveying my principal message. The first word of warning is that in this, the final Session of the present Parliament and as the general election approaches, the Government should not seek to buy popularity by increasing public expenditure. I know that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will make a most important statement on this matter on Wednesday. The public sector borrowing requirement is already far higher than it should be and I expect that, by the end of this financial year, it will be higher still than was anticipated in the Budget statement last spring. If productive investment in private industry is not to be crowded out by the need to fund Government borrowing, and if interest rates are to be facilitated on their downward path, it would be better if the Government kept public expenditure genuinely under firm control and not just under firm control over time.

I hope that Her Majesty's Government will not impose a guillotine on the council tax Bill. It will be the most important measure of this Parliament and will need the most careful consideration by the House.

In his inimitable way, my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) spelt out some of the inherent pitfalls of the legislation, as proposed. I, like my right hon. Friend, urge the Government to allow a greater discount than 25 per cent. for people who live alone. That is only equitable and right. The regional banding system will also have to be widened or property owners in the south-east will be most unjustly penalised. Already they face higher costs in servicing the mortgages on their more expensive properties. They also face higher costs of living, through having to commute to work, and so on. It would be utterly wrong if they were to be disproportionately penalised by a uniform banding system for properties in England.

My points of textual criticism are relatively minor. The Gracious Speech refers to

"the Soviet Union and its republics,"

—an unfortunate use of the possessive pronoun. It would have been better if the Foreign and Commonwealth Office had tried to anticipate events. There is a movement towards a genuine breaking up of the Soviet Union—if that is still the right term—as we have known it and we should seek closer relations with the republics, which rightly desire their independence. To take but two, the Ukraine and Byelorussia have had quasi-independent status in the United Nations for a long time. We recognise the Baltic states. I am sure that before too long we ought to recognise other states and anticipate their independence.

Her Majesty's Government are also hoping for

"a peaceful settlement in Yugoslavia."

I do not know whether Yugoslavia, as an entity, will emerge from the tragic conflict there. All I know is that, as was made perfectly clear by the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) in his eloquent speech, Yugoslavia was plainly set for conflict this autumn, yet the Government, the European Community and the Western European Union were able to do little to stop it.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that the United States was looking to regional organisations to solve disputes such as that in Yugoslavia, that he hoped that we would play a more positive part in such organisations and that the United Kingdom hoped to strengthen the institutions to which we belong. If we had genuinely played a more constructive and positive role within the Western European Union and the European Community over a period of time, we should have now a much more authoritative voice within both.

The Government are correct to say that we support a common foreign and security policy and to make the distinction between security policy—the harmonisation of foreign affairs within the European Community—and defence per se. So long as defence remains the responsibility of sovereign Parliaments that vote funds on behalf of sovereign Governments in order to equip and maintain armed forces, so long will our collective security be one of voluntary co-operation between individual nation states. That is why the Western European Union is the right framework. That is why I wish Her Majesty's Government to play a more positive role within WEU.

The British-Italian proposals are essentially along the right lines. Again, however, we ought to anticipate events. When it comes to European security, the Soviets should be out of the Baltic states by the end of 1992. By then they should have withdrawn their armed forces from Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. At the end of 1993 they should be out of Poland, and by the end of 1994 they should be out of the eastern part of the Federal Republic of Germany.

After those withdrawals, we will have a totally new situation in Europe. We will still need the Atlantic alliance and the United States nuclear guarantee. However, I do not believe that the American people will be so willing as they have been in the past to maintain troops on the continent of Europe.

When we seek to modernise the WEU, we must create an institution that will, in the long term, be the nucleus of an organisation with a genuine European identity which is responsible for our defence. The Government are on the right lines, but they should not seek to build too much on the past. They should anticipate future events more.

1.50 pm

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): As always, this debate has been wide ranging. The nature of the Queen's Speech affords hon. Members the opportunity to exercise their ingenuity in a variety of ways. Perhaps the prize today will go to the right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) who took us through Kashmir, into Wembley and back again by way of son of poll tax. That tax seems to be just as unacceptable to the right hon. Gentleman as the previous form of tax. However, I shall not dwell on such matters today because hon. Members have set down a large agenda on which there has been a fair amount of agreement.

Few would disagree with the remarks in the Queen's Speech about the changes in European strategy that have come about as a consequence of the changes in the Soviet Union, or whatever one should call the Soviet Union now. Perhaps the most accurate definition was given to me by a European diplomat who said that we should call it the UFFR—the union of fewer and fewer republics. Our strategies must change. Do we alter our policy in anticipation of change or do we run along desperately behind, as the Government have in their attempt to find a fig leaf of respectability for arguments that they are now addressing for the first time?

The recognition of the fact that short-range nuclear forces have no place in the new Europe is welcome, as is the recognition of the need to continue the process of reducing the size of the nuclear arsenal.

There is also a need to address the problem of what we do with the fewer troops whom we shall require in central Europe. A number of nations within central Europe, however, are happy to have a continued multinational military presence. A number of the new democracies have expressed a willingness to join NATO. However, I do not believe that this is the time to consider such an application and, given the nature of developments, it is unnecessary. However, their desire to join NATO is an indication of their respect for the institution and for the expertise of those who work within it, be they civil servants or military personnel. They have brought that expertise to bear when dealing with the problems of security arrangements in central Europe.

I wish that we could applaud the way in which the force reductions have been handled in the United Kingdom. However, the Government have got themselves into a mess about the regimental system. When the White Paper was published we debated its proposals, but since then a variety of spins have been placed on that debate. It is incumbent on the Minister of State for the Armed Forces to tell us who is responsible for the amalgamation of the regiments and about what decisions have been taken.

As a Member of the House I have a close interest in this matter, but I am also conscious that the electors of Kincardine and Deeside are becoming increasingly confused by the statements from such people as the Secretary of State for Defence. Unfortunately, that right hon. Gentleman is unable to be with us today, for reasons that I perfectly understand. I should also offer my apologies to the Foreign Secretary. Because of weather problems in the United States I was two hours late arriving this morning and therefore missed his speech. However, I got the burden of his remarks from the debate that followed.

As regards the regimental system, it is more than appropriate that the Minister of State for the Armed Forces is following me at the Dispatch Box. We should like to know who has responsibility for reorganisation of the regimental system. Has the reorganisation been completed? Will there be some sort of extensive on-going review? When the Secretary of State for Transport—like a Trotskyite speaking at a protest meeting—operates in a personal capacity, by writing to people who are not in his constituency to tell them that a review is taking place, has he an axe to grind? Or is the reorganisation the sole responsiblity of the Secretary of State for Scotland, since the four Scottish regiments are based in and derive their personnel from that area? It is his interpretation that a review is continuing and that the quick-drying concrete that we were led to believe had been poured by the Secretary of State for Defence on 3 July is of a more slow-drying character, and that a number of other matters have to be taken into consideration.

I am not saying this simply to make fun of the Government over the regimental structure. It is more important than that. We are talking about the livelihoods of a large number of people who have committed themselves to this country, to their regiment and to the British Army and who now find a confusing scenario unfolding before them. This subject is important not merely in the context of a by-election or of poking fun at a Minister or at the shambles that the Cabinet have got themselves into, although those are important. What is more important is the grave disquiet within the armed services: they do not know what is going on and were led to believe that matters had been resolved.

This may be the last opportunity for some weeks to discuss the matter. The flurry of Question Time is not

[Mr. Martin O'Neill]

always the best time to resolve matters of this nature. I ask the Minister of State to try to clear up the confusion when he replies.

I do not speak out of mischief. It is clear that the Government have got themselves into a mess. However, more important than the mess that they are in is the potential mess that they will make of people's lives. Many men have given a large portion of their working lives to the armed forces and are now confronted with the prospect of the dole queue and homelessness as a result of the hamfisted approach of the Minister and his colleagues.

In some respects the changes afflicting the British Army are as nothing compared to those afflicting armies in what was the Soviet Union. We must tackle the serious issue of control and ownership of nuclear weapons in what was the Soviet Union. The changes that have taken place there and the confusion which is now commonplace brings the proliferation of nuclear weapons into a new light. When we talk about tidying up and completing negotiations and arrangements on conventional forces in Europe and on START—strategic arms reduction talks—we must recognise that many nuclear weapons are not in the same location as they were when the ink dried on the treaty. They are now located in what to all intents and purposes are independent countries. The military districts upon which the CFE agreement was established are now spread throughout a number of independent or near-independent countries.

How do we resolve the question of who owns the weapons and how the arsenals would be reduced? What has become increasingly clear is that the Soviet Union does not have the means whereby it can reduce its arsenal at the rate that its treaty obligations require. Countries such as the Ukraine have stated that they wish to have a non-nuclear Ukraine, but not on the basis of ceding influence and control over such weapons to Russia. They would look for the kind of assistance that countries with nuclear expertise, such as Britain, can give.

Mr. Wilkinson: That was the point that I was imperfectly seeking to make. We should get closer to republics such as the Ukraine, whose aspirations to independence we have rather belittled over the years. We should give them positive help to demilitarise themselves from their offensive capabilities as they desire, but not necessarily inhibit their right to self-defence with much less dangerous armaments.

Mr. O'Neill: There is little disagreement between the two sides of the House on this. In the early stages, the question must be handled more by diplomats than by the military because of the sensitivities in places such as Moscow, of those at the centre or of those like President Yeltsin who have been somewhat confused about who owns and has responsibility for these weapons.

In seeking to assist in the disarmament process and to take advantage of the opportunities, we could give a clear expression of support for the moratorium that President Gorbachev suggested. That could be the basis for a clear look at what would be required in a test ban treaty, if such an agreement is possible. Certainly it should be possible with the permanent five members of the Security Council. It is important to involve in the dialogue not only the United Kingdom, but the Chinese and the French. The Chinese, for example, have in the past supported countries such as North Korea. If we are to grasp the nettle of proliferation, we must involve as many of the suppliers of the potential proliferators as possible.

If we are to deal with the proliferation in Iraq, it is a matter of the greatest urgency that we provide the International Atomic Energy Agency with far greater resources than we now do to carry out the intrusive work that it should have been carrying out during the past decade when Iraq was remorselessly becoming a nuclear weapon state.

The whole question of maritime disarmament should engage the Government. As the major contributor of maritime support to NATO, we should be considering reductions in naval power. There is a school of thought that we should leave everything to structural disarmament —the disarmers' version of the free market system. It is the belief that if we leave it, the Soviets do not have enough money to put their boats to sea or to train conscripts or the volunteers who man their ships.

The continued presence and concentration in the Kola peninsular of large numbers of ships and military personnel presents the last serious risk to stability in northern Europe. Our Norwegian allies are greatly exercised by that. We should support them as, probably alone among the European members of NATO, we share a common awareness of that danger because we have responsibilities to support Norway if the worst were to happen.

When we talk about the European dimension within NATO we must be careful to remember—this has been made clear in several speeches today—that we should not encourage the forces of isolationism within the United States. The US, our major ally within NATO, is going through a period when the cost of defence not of its own land but, as it sees it, of the world is becoming a burden on its budget which it is not prepared to finance on the same scale as in the past. It would be wrong of us, when it is seeking to reduce its budget, to convey the impression that because the world appears to be safer we no longer require its presence in Europe. Labour Members recognise that the American contribution to the alliance is of a singular character. It is important not only because of the physical and military presence but because it engages the United States and Europe. We should not, in the name of spurious Europeanism, seek to alienate the Americans.

It is unfortunate that the spectre of Maastricht should hang over this part of our discussions today, because it would be wrong to move to decisions or non-decisions too early. The report in today's edition of *The Times* about the establishment of a north Atlantic co-operative council may go some way toward addressing some of the points that are being raised by eastern Europeans who wish to be connected in some way to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. However, it would be wrong of us to seek to convey the impression that the NACC, as it will probably become known, should be considered to be a strategic guarantee for those countries. Rather, we should strengthen the independent, democratically based and democratically controlled military in their own countries.

I welcome the moves that the Ministry of Defence has made to attract the serving forces from eastern European countries to our defence colleges. I was distressed to discover, however, that that has been done on the basis of allowing them to come provided that they have the money. Although the much-vaunted know-how fund is in the

hands of the Foreign Office, which is the arch-enemy, in bureaucratic terms, of the Ministry of Defence, perhaps something could be done to ensure that if Foreign Office money is the only source available for know-how it could be extended to encourage military connections between our defence colleges and the former Warsaw pact countries. The understandably high fees being charged are a distinct drawback to eastern European military establishments coming to this country. Eastern Europeans have given that as one of the reasons for the small number of people coming to our colleges. It is regrettable that that happens, but it could easily be corrected.

When we discuss security we tend wrongly to concentrate on military matters. Security is the building of understanding between countries so that the anxieties that have bred the prejudices, which have so distorted our continent in the past, can be allayed. We should pay as much attention to improving the health of the democratic institutions in those countries, supporting their free press and providing greater support to assist the political parties, as was provided for the Social Democrat and Christian Democrat parties in Germany. We often forget that the process of de-Nazification in Germany took place against a mature political system that was interrupted for only about 11 or 12 years between Hitler's rise to power and his defeat at the hands of the allies. Our task is now far bigger and the support that should be given to those institutions, not least to the free trade unions emerging in those countries, would be as much a form of assistance and support to eastern Europe as any military assistance, whether it is on the basis of nods and winks, or disarmament.

The Queen's Speech makes many of the right noises but does not go far enough. It does not deal with the problems which we consider to be the most pressing and important. We recognise that Maastricht will provide a catharsis and that the debate on it will contribute to the emerging dialogue, but we also recognise that yesterday's Gracious Speech was a poor substitute for the speech that would have been delivered two weeks from now had we had a general election on 7 November.

2.9 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Archie Hamilton): As usual, this has been a varied and interesting debate. I hope that right hon. and hon. Members will forgive me if I do not reply to all the points that have been made and if I concentrate more on those that dealt with foreign affairs and defence.

First, I should like to take up the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) and by the hon. Members for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) and for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) about the importance of the United States contribution to European defence. It is an essential tenet of our whole philosophy that the European contribution to our defence should be through the Western European Union. That is precisely because the WEU supports NATO and we feel that it is very important indeed to keep the United States playing a role in European defence, both for its own benefit and for ours.

When we come to learn the lessons of the Gulf war it is important that we should understand the significance of the American contribution. In that high intensity conflict, the Americans contributed 400,000 professional service men. It might, of course, be possible for the Europeans to raise that number in a similar conflict in Europe, but they would certainly not be professionals: they would be conscripts. Europe still depends mainly on conscript armies.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chichester referred to technology that the Americans contributed to the Gulf war. It, too, was significant. Patriot missiles, Tomahawks, stealth aircraft, much of the electronic warfare and radar suppression, the laser-guided capability bombs—all these were contributed by the Americans. These are fabulously expensive types of equipment. Europe is not in a position or is not prepared to spend the sort of money that the Americans spend on their forces in the pursuit of high technology armaments.

The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) made great play of the 40,000 job losses in defence industries since "Options For Change", but he seems to have forgotten that not long ago in the debate on the defence White Paper he voted for and probably put his name to an amendment calling for further cuts in defence expenditure. If the Opposition were in power, then, how many more jobs would be lost? It is hypocritical of the Labour party to criticise job losses in defence when the policy that it would pursue would result in even greater job losses.

Opposition Members talk endlessly about a diversification agency, but many of the industries in defence are alread diversified. British Aerospace has a large commercial aircraft division in which it can deploy high-tech operators and it will switch any of them that it can to that commercial side. It has also diversified into the Rover Group and it can use some of its skilled men in other areas. GEC, another large defence manufacturer, is already well diversified——

Mr. O'Neill: Why does not the Secretary of State for Scotland show the same antagonism towards defence diversification initiatives? On 14 October he announced a Scottish initiative to help companies that have to shed labour because of defence cuts.

Mr. Hamilton: Our development agencies in Wales and Scotland have always gone to the aid of industries in parts of the country where there have been job losses. I should also like to know what the sort of agency proposed by Labour would cost. How much will it cost to start creating these diversified jobs? It would be enormously expensive.

I was grateful for the presence of the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) in our debate. He is part of the substantial sector of the Labour party that still believes that we should get rid of all our nuclear weapons. I remind him that there are still substantial nuclear arsenals in the Soviet Union. What has come out of the debate is that nobody has a clear idea of what will happen to the Soviet Union. The intentions of the Soviet Union may have changed today, but we do not know what they will be tomorrow. We do not know what form it will take and we have no guarantee that its nuclear arsenals will somehow disappear. It is very important that we maintain our own nuclear deterrents in Europe when the world is extremely unpredictable.

I remind the House that United Nations teams looking for nuclear capability have operated in Iraq. I remind the House that Iraq is a signatory to the non-proliferation treaty. We had discovered little of its nuclear capability until the most recent investigation, when we discovered the

[Mr. Hamilton]

greater technical capability of Iraq in the nuclear area. There are enormous dangers in espousing a policy that says that we would get rid of our nuclear weapons, because we might be threatened by a country such as Libya or Iraq.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) said that the cold war has come to an end. That is no thanks to Labour. We must remember that the Labour party advocated our not deploying Pershing and cruise missiles. It has also opposed the strategic defence initiative introduced by President Reagan. Those were two significant factors in bringing the Soviet Union to the negotiating table. It realised that the pace was getting too quick for it and that it would be forced to come to the negotiating table, which it had been reluctant to do before.

Mr. Kaufman: As the Minister appears to have moved on to dealing with other speeches after having referred to mine, will he respond with the utmost clarity to a question that I put to the Government about the Gordon Highlanders? Does the statement made in July by the Secretary of State for Defence stand? Is that the Government's intention, or is what the Secretary of State for Transport has been saying the Government's new position—namely that the matter is open for review? May we have a totally clear statement on the Government's position on the future of the Gordon Highlanders?

Mr. Hamilton: I am grateful for that contribution, although I should point out that the matter was also raised by the right hon. Gentleman's hon. Friend the Member for Clackmannan, and I am coming to the subject quite soon.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby also produced a theory that eastern Europe does not want a free market economy. That makes one ask what it does want. I suppose that it is additional socialism for a few more years. Eastern Europe wants a free market economy, although people are unhappy about the process of getting there, and I have no doubt that it will be painful for them.

The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) raised the point that Soviet citizens believe that with freedom they will achieve prosperity. That is one of the great problems that they face. They believe that as they get political freedom, prosperity will follow automatically. One of the great problems of development in the Soviet Union has been that the economic reforms are coming on far more slowly than the political reforms. It would have been far better if the economic reforms could have gone in tandem with the political reforms. There will be a great problem as we try to get the basic changes which are needed in the Soviet economy before prosperity will come through.

The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber raised the question of Yugoslavia, as did the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby, who has recently been there. The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) also referred to Yugoslavia and very much supported the idea of armed intervention sponsored by the United Nations. I remind him that there is no legal basis for that. There is no evidence that the United Nations could agree on armed intervention in an internal struggle. Many members of the United Nations were wary about an arms embargo that had already been agreed. What would military intervention achieve? Peace-keeping works when the peace keepers are invited in and when there is a clear line to hold between the two sides. None of that is the case in Yugoslavia. Serbia opposes a foreign military presence. There is no clear dividing line. The communities are mixed, not just village by village, but street by street and even family by family.

The situation in Yugoslavia is tragic, but if we sent in our troops, we would simply be adding to that tragedy. Our soldiers would be dying alongside the Serbs and Croats. We are influenced by our experience in Northern Ireland. I do not have to remind the House that we went into Northern Ireland in 1969 with the objective of keeping Protestant extremists from killing members of the nationalist community. We had not been there very long when our soldiers began to be killed by people from that nationalist community. The year 1969 is now a long way away and no hon. Member can say that he can see the end of that conflict yet.

The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber also reminded us about the recognition of states in Yugoslavia. That statement was made by Mr. De Michelis, who advocated recognition of all the republics who wanted that by the end of December. He was setting out his own ideas, as he has every right to do, but he was speaking on behalf of the European Community and he was not propounding a policy that we have to follow. It is now increasingly clear that, at some stage, we shall probably recognise Croatia and Slovenia at least. The timing is not yet clear, but, as my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said, recognition implies a protection that we cannot give and too early recognition would lead to an explosive situation in the rival states of Yugoslavia.

Mr. Wilkinson: Will my hon. Friend clarify, beyond peradventure, that most important statement, which I take him to have made on behalf of Her Majesty's Government? He said that, at some unspecified time in the future, we could officially recognise Slovenia and Croatia. If that is so, would we extend that principle to Macedonia, for example, which has also opted democratically for independence? That is a most important matter.

Mr. Hamilton: We have to take this bit by bit, but the situation in Slovenia and Croatia is different from that in the other states in Yugoslavia. The time is not right for us to recognise them now, but it could well be that we are able to do so later on.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson) raised the question of the problems that we have met with "Options for Change", particularly as that affects the Army. He made a good point in saying that the regimental system, in which the Conservative party strongly believes—there is some ambivalence in the Labour party—makes the whole problem of restructuring the Army much more difficult. However, we would have more than enough infantry for the roles that we must fulfil—one is aware particularly of our commitment to Northern Ireland. There will be 41 infantry role battalions, which will include three Royal Marine commando battalions. That is adequate, especially given that we were anxious to ensure that we had the capability to deal with the Northern Ireland roulement.

My hon. Friend also spoke of the amalgamation of the Queen's regiment and the Hampshire regiment, and I am aware of the concern that there has been in the home counties and Hampshire about this amalgamation. The Army Board had to make a difficult and painful decision,

balancing factors relating to the individual regiments with the needs of the Army as a whole. This will be a genuine amalgamation and I am confident that the identity and important local links built up by both regiments will be carried forward into the new regiment. That amalgamation will be successfully achieved and the new regiment will become one of which most people in the south-east and London can be equally proud.

I know that there is concern in the House about the Scottish division. The division will be reduced by less than four out of five of the other infantry divisions in the Army. The result of our proposals and the deicisons that have been taken is that the percentage of infantry in Scotland will fall slightly. However, it goes up if one includes the amalgamations that are taking place in Scottish regiments and the armoured corps and artillery. Therefore, if we look at the percentage of the Army in Scotland we see that, overall, it goes up. In addition, and we are rather inclined to overlook this, there is a substantial Royal Air Force presence in Scotland, in Lossiemouth and Leuchars, and with the changes that are taking place and the displacement of our RAF assets, there will be an increase in the number of personnel at these bases. Therefore, overall, there will be a benefit there at a time when the Royal Air Force is reducing everywhere else across the United Kingdom.

Mr. Wilkinson: But RAF personnel in Scotland do not wear kilts.

Mr. Hamilton: That is the problem.

There is sizeable investment, for which we seem never to have any thanks from Scotland as it is represented on the Opposition Benches, in Coulport and Faslane. A massive amount has been invested in construction works. Until the start of the channel tunnel, it was the largest construction project in western Europe. I do not accept that Scotland is being unfairly treated.

As for the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, we must go back to what I said in the House when we debated the defence White Paper. I made it clear then that the amalgamations taking place in Scottish regiments would not take effect until phase 1 was completed in March 1993. It follows that the amalgamations that are taking place in the Scottish regiments will take place in the years 1993 and 1994. Although the decisions have been taken, military considerations could change during that time. Indeed, our commitments could be increased for some reason. As we see things at the moment, we feel that the decisions should stand and that the amalgamations will go ahead.

I am slightly interested that mention has been made of what is happening in the Kincardine and Deeside by-election. In fact, I should be extremely interested to know what happens when a Labour canvasser finds himself on the doorstep and tries to persuade the Scots in that constituency that they are being frightfully badly treated. That same Labour man, especially if he is a Labour Member, will have either supported or voted for further reductions in defence expenditure only a few days before finding himself on the doorstep. Presumably the impact of that decision is even more amalgamations for Scottish regiments, or abolitions. If the Labour party is to be honest with the electorate in the constituency of Kincardine and Deeside, it should tell the people how much further the process will go.

Mr. Kaufman: As the Minister has now purported to respond to the question that I put in an earlier intervention, will he say clearly whether the decision on the Gordon Highlanders announced by the Secretary of State for Defence in July still stands? And does that mean that the indication by the Secretary of State for Transport that the decision could be subject to further review is inaccurate and repudiated?

Mr. Hamilton: I thought that I made that position quite clear. I said that that the decisions on the amalgamations of Scottish regiments have been taken, but clearly they are due to be implemented in the years 1993 and 1994. An awful lot can change between now and then. If at that stage we have taken on a larger number of extra commitments for one reason or another that the Army at its then size cannot meet, we shall clearly have to look again at the decisions that have been taken. I hope that I have made that clear to the right hon. Gentleman.

I wait for these debates and hope that the Labour party will come forward to clarify its policy on defence. In fact, we never have any clarification of what is going on. We can only turn to the policy documents that the party has issued. The document produced in 1989 was entitled "Meet the challenge, Make the change". At intervals, depending on how convenient it is to those in the Labour party, it is said that that document still stands and that it sets out the party's policy. Alternatively, it is said that the document has been superseded by a subsequent remark made by some Labour politician.

If the document still stands, the position is that a Labour Government would negotiate away our nuclear deterrent. I shall be interested to know how that is explained to the people of Scotland. Such negotiations would lead automatically to the closure of both Coulport and Faslane and would result in the most enormous number of job losses in the area. I think that the Scots would be quite interested to know that.

Meanwhile, the Liberals think that their party will win the by-election. They keep on producing opinion polls that suggest that their party is leading. We all know that trick. When Liberals stand on the doorstep I have no doubt that they express enormous sympathy about the future of the Gordon Highlanders. Indeed, we all share that sympathy. But how do Liberals explain that under a Liberal-influenced Government the Gordon Highlanders would survive, when they have said already that their party would cut defence expenditure by 50 per cent. up to the end of the decade? That is rather a difficult one for them. On the whole, the Scots probably realise that a 50 per cent. cut is pretty draconian in anyone's life. It would make any of the reductions put forward by the Government seem like chickenfeed.

There seems to be a tremendous amount of hypocrisy going around this place. There is a playing up of the difficult decisions that have had to be taken on the future of the Army. No one enjoys taking decisions that involve amalgamating regiments with great histories. My hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks raised the question of the regimental system. Provided that we believe in that system, as we do, when reductions have to be made the decision is much harder, and people find it much harder to

[Mr. Hamilton]

accept. That is something with which we have to live. There is a great deal of hypocrisy among Opposition Members on this matter. Whichever of the Opposition parties the people of this country voted for, there would be much greater, draconian cuts in defence expenditure.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Monday 4 November.

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): With the leave of the House, I shall put together the Questions on the four motions relating to statutory instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

That the draft Magistrates' Courts (Remands in Custody) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning) (No. 12) Order 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 2077) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Town and Country Planning (Fees for Applications and Deemed Applications) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Town and Country Planning (Fees for Applications and Deemed Applications) (Amendment) Regulations 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

Question agreed to.

Basildon and Thurrock General Hospitals

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

2.30 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): I am grateful for the opportunity to mark the historic granting of trust status to Basildon and Thurrock health authority. I am pleased to see my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman) in his place, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) will join us in due course.

It goes without saying that the granting of trust status for our two hospitals has been achieved against a background of determined opposition by local socialist councillors and their friends. Just as we have noted nationally from Labour and Liberal Democrat Members in the House, locally the two parties have tried to scare our constituents and to spread alarm and despondency. They have tried to frighten our people about what trust status will mean and their anxieties have been worked up beyond belief. Far from trust status threatening their well-being, in Basildon, Thurrock and Billericay the quality of health care will continue to improve. How do we judge the success of the NHS? We look at the life expectancy of men and women, and that continues to increase. We look at the infant mortality rate, and that is decreasing. Babies are having a much healthier start to their lives.

The application for NHS trust status was submitted by Basildon and Thurrock general hospitals with a great deal of support from doctors, nurses and other members of staff. Of course, from time to time there have been criticisms of the care in our local hospitals. I and my hon. Friends accept no excuses from consultants, doctors or support staff if any of our constituents suffer from a lack of care and attention at our local hospitals. We accept full responsibility for our actions as Members of Parliament and we expect medical staff to do the same.

There is great enthusiasm for trust status in our area. I and my family are regular users of the NHS. We live just behind Basildon hospital. My children constantly seem either to be being delivered or being treated for odd ailments at the hospital, and they are extremely well cared for. The trust application was submitted so that the freedom and flexibility of trust status would enable us to provide a better range of services, locally based, to suit the needs of local residents. There is no doubt that the financial freedom would allow us to improve the physical environment of our buildings and to make them more welcoming.

Trust status will also enable the hospital to invest in new medical technology, which will in turn allow it to perform less invasive surgery and to reduce the length of time that patients will be required to remain in hospital. Patients will return to the community in a fitter state and it will be possible to treat more of them using the same number of beds. That will have the desired effect of reducing waiting lists and waiting times.

Trust status will allow the hospital to centralise its maternity services—of which my wife has taken advantage on five occasions, the most recent being just a few weeks ago. Basildon has a superb maternity service, but the technical advice is that centralisation will result in a safer and more comprehensive service for the future. The hospital will be able to offer a first class, 24-hour paediatric

service, deploy its highly skilled staff more cost effectively, and provide a safer maternity service to mothers and their babies. Those plans went out to public consultation five years ago and were approved.

Trust status will also enable the hospital to provide a range of services to the acutely ill elderly on the Basildon site. At present, elderly patients admitted to Basildon hospital's accident and emergency department are transferred to St. Andrew's hospital in Billericay or to Orsett hospital. The provision of an on-site unit at Basildon for such desperately ill patients means that they will not need to be transferred unnecessarily and that high technology equipment can be used in investigating and treating their conditions. That will provide a higher standard of service to the elderly in the district. Those plans were also agreed in 1986.

Members of the trust team and consultant medical staff from the unit have visited or have arranged to visit every general practitioner's practice in the district. That is of fundamental importance. Too often, throughout the country, GPs and consultants have not worked in unison as they should to ensure delivery of the highest possible quality of health care. Such consultation is under way in my district and it will benefit the constituents that I and my hon. Friends represent.

The trust will have a strong working relationship with the purchasing district health authority and is working with it to ensure that the highest standard of care and widest range of services can be achieved.

The most significant achievement of Basildon and Thurrock health authority over the years is undoubtedly that of achieving the biggest overall reduction in its waiting list out of 15 districts in the region. It achieved a reduction of 57 per cent. in the number of patients waiting for general surgery; of 20 per cent. for ear, nose and throat surgery; of 22 per cent. for orthopaedic surgery; of 11 per cent. for oral surgery; and of 12 per cent. for gynaecology.

As to the number of patients awaiting admission to the hospitals for more than one year, as at June 1991 the figure was 375, compared with 954 a year earlier—a significant reduction of 60 per cent.

The hospitals have also introduced a number of initiatives. All waiting lists are routinely checked to ensure that those who are on them still need an operation. Medical staff have been increased in problem areas. For example, a consultant oral surgeon, shared with Southend health authority, started work last August and new consultant posts in neurology and plastic surgery were created in April. Those posts have resulted in increased numbers of patients being treated. Short-notice waiting lists are held for filling last-minute cancellations by patients. Appropriate notice is given of admission to ensure that cancellations by patients are kept to a minimum. Three consultant surgeons blitzed problem areas on the waiting lists and held special day-case sessions. A community care team has been established to reduce the number of patients in hospital by getting them back home with proper support so as to free the acute beds more quickly.

New clinical techniques have been introduced to increase the use of day-case surgery. Significant developments have been achieved on waiting list funds. Basildon and Thurrock general hospitals have obtained from the North East Thames regional health authority waiting list initiative funds of £0·5 million to build and equip a dedicated day surgery unit, £12,000 to purchase special arthroscopy equipment, used in examining joints, £28,000 for a hysteroscope to enable gynaecological surgical procedures to be carried out on an out-patient or day-care basis, and £30,000 for keyhole surgery equipment to remove gall bladders, substantially reducing the average length of stay for such procedures and reducing the trauma of the procedure, too.

Out-patient waiting times are currently being examined to achieve similar improvements for people waiting to be seen as out-patients following referral by GPs. In the first few months after the introduction of the new GP contracts there was a big increase—about 45 per cent.—in the number of smears undertaken by local GPs. The acute services unit has managed to absorb that workload and the turn-around time for routine—that is, asymptomatic—smears is now 10 days, and for urgent—that is, symptomatic—smears two days.

Some of my hon. Friends and I were present at the opening of the new accident and emergency department at Basildon hospital. It was opened by His Royal Highness the Duke of Kent. I believe that it is the finest accident and emergency unit in the country, and about 200 patients a day are being treated there.

I have already mentioned the maternity unit at Basildon. The Basildon and Thurrock general hospitals trust will start work in April 1992 on a £1·6 million capital development to centralise maternity services within Basildon and Thurrock. As I have said, that will improve the service to local residents, as it will concentrate staff and facilities. As part of a regional plan to set up improved intensive care services for new-born babies, Basildon hospital will open five new cots this year, which will provide a service not only to the residents of Basildon and Thurrock but also to babies from outside the district.

In Basildon and Thurrock we have a first-class national health service—there can be no doubt about that. I have demonstrated its achievements over the past 18 months. I know that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are interested in the hospice movement. In Basildon we have the magnificent St. Luke's hospice—the subject of an Adjournment debate which I initiated about six years ago. That hospice was opened by the Duchess of Norfolk. More than £1 million has been raised and many patients are now receiving first-class treatment in the hospice. I have no doubt that, when the trust comes into being in April 1992, my constituents will continue to enjoy ever-increasing standards of health care in Basildon.

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock) *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Does the hon. Gentleman have the consent of the hon. Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) and the Minister?

Mr. Amess *indicated assent.*

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell) *indicated assent.*

2.44 pm

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) for allowing me to say a few words on a matter that is so important to my constituents and to his. I echo his remarks, supported by some impressive statistical evidence, about the way in which the national health service in Thurrock and Basildon is improving and treating more people.

[Mr. Tim Janman]

It is worth remembering that Basildon and Thurrock health authority now treats 11,000 more patients in hospital each year than it did when it was first created in 1982. As I have said in the local press, my only sadness is that we were not afforded trust status a year ago. We could then have enjoyed benefits such as those evident in Southend—where there has been a 9 per cent. increase in patients treated since trust status was granted—a year earlier.

We now have trust status, however, and I take this opportunity to congratulate the team on its application. I have a great deal of confidence in the management team on the clinical side at Basildon and Orsett. That application, which, thankfully, was approved by the Secretary of State, has received a lot of support from the medical profession and from people working in the health authority. Moreover, it was not the subject of opposition among the public at large.

My hon. Friend the Minister may like to know that the local Labour party circulated 50,000 or 60,000 leaflets, with voting slips attached, right across the borough, which has a population of 130,000 people. It received only about 3,000 returned forms, although there were about 6,000 votes because I understand that there were two votes on each one. The vast majority of people in Thurrock took my advice and put the silly leaflet in the bin. There is no local opposition to trust status because people are beginning to understand that trust status means the devolution or delegation of decision-making power to those who are in the best position to make the decisions about how local hospitals should be run. Those people are local managers sitting at desks in those hospitals, not bureaucrats sitting in a tower block in Paddington at the North East Thames regional health authority offices.

There is another piece of evidence to suggest that there is not hostility. Only about 60 people turned up to a recent candle-lit vigil outside Orsett hospital supposedly a protest against trust status being given. Subtract from those 60 people members of the Labour and Liberal parties and the odd left-wing GP and I doubt whether there would be anyone left.

The majority of people in my constituency are either totally in favour of trust status or are prepared to say, "Let's give it a try. Let's give the Government the benefit of the doubt and see whether they are right." I know that we will be proved right and that trust status will be good for my constituents and for those of my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon.

It is certainly true that, a few years ago, waiting lists in North East Thames area were among the worst in the country. We had some particularly bad waiting times in our own district. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon so lucidly explained, we are making great progress in reducing those waiting lists. It is worth noting —and I say this for the benefit of my hon. Friend the Minister if for no one else's benefit—that there has been a great deal of hyprocrisy on the part of the Labour party in Thurrock and Basildon concerning the centralisation of casualty services at Orsett. Although my hon. Friends the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) and for Basildon and I had certain concerns about the overall reorganisation proposed—my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay and I expressed them very forcefully, as my hon. Friend the Minister knows—we took exactly the same line as the community health council on the centralisation of casualty. Our CHC did not oppose the centralisation of casualty at Basildon and the Labour district and borough councillors from Basildon and Thurrock who served on the CHC did not demur from that position. Privately, those Labour councillors knew what was going on and why, and that the vast majority—if not 99 per cent.—of doctors and surgeons in the two hospitals involved supported the change. Therefore, they did not demur. It was left to other more prominent and vocal members of the Labour party to stir up people's fears with irrelevant and inaccurate claims about the consequences.

I have been delighted to have the opportunity to add to what my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon said. I know that we have an excellent management team which will take the trust forward. Some organisational changes have been made already. For example, 12 clinical divisions have been created, with 12 cores of people committed to making everything happen. Over the next year or so, my constituents will see tremendous improvements, on top of what has been achieved during the last 12 to 18 months in terms of the quality and quantity of health care that they will receive from the Basildon and Thurrock NHS trust.

2.49 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) on taking this opportunity to raise in the House the granting of trust status to the Basildon and Thurrock hospitals and on providing the House with the opportunity to mark the granting of trust status. I am grateful to him for pausing for a second, at the end of a busy day, to take note of and observe the great benefits to his constituents and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman) as a result of the establishment of the new trust.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon, before considering trust status may I refer to what has already happened to his constituents and to all the other residents in the Basildon and Thurrock health authority. My hon. Friend gave impressive evidence regarding the improvement in health care for his constituents. I shall add a little more evidence. My hon. Friend did not refer to the increase in the number of in-patients treated in the district during the last 10 years. It has increased by 40 per cent. Moreover, the number of day cases treated in the district has increased by 64 per cent. during the last 10 years. That is slim evidence of cuts in the national health service if we are treating more than half as many again day cases and 40 per cent. more in-patients than 10 years ago. It is evidence of a growing service that offers a wider range of facilities to a growing number of patients.

I remind the House of the benefits that will come to Basildon and Thurrock as a result of the Government's commitment to introduce weighted capitation. Both of my hon. Friends know that their constituents live in an area which for generations has had health care that has been relatively less generously funded than that provided in the central London parts of the Thames regions. The Government's commitment, through the weighted capitation mechanism, is to ensure that NHS resources reflect population densities and the health needs of those populations, and is an important commitment to the constituents of my hon. Friends. It will ensure that the

growth that we have established over the last 10 years in terms of the range and volume of health care facilities continues under future Conservative Governments, partly because we are committed to ensuring a fairer distribution of resources within the NHS, which will secure benefits for the constituents of my hon. Friends, and partly because of the commitment given from this Dispatch Box yesterday by the Prime Minister—that under a Conservative Government the national health service will have its real resources increased year by year—something which the last Labour Government were unable to do. They are the only Government in recent history to have cut the real resources available to the NHS in a particular year. The constituents of my hon. Friends have a considerable amount to gain from weighted capitation and from the commitment to ensure that the total resources available to the NHS continue to grow year by year.

My hon. Friend the Member for Basildon gave clear evidence of the improvement in waiting lists for his constituents and for those of my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock. He also listed the capital investments that have been made to improve health care in his constituency. The record of the NHS in the Basildon and Thurrock health authority over the last 12 years is one of which both my hon. Friend and all those involved in the NHS have every reason to be proud. It clearly substantiates this Government's commitment to ensuring that we maintain a national health service that is the envy of the world and that we continue to improve upon it.

As I have already mentioned, the record of the NHS over the last 12 years in the constituencies of my hon. Friends is good, but we are not complacent. We recognise the need to do even better in the future and we want to meet that need. That is why we have invented the concept of trust status, which gives us the opportunity to entrust to local people—those who work in the hospitals—a greater discretion and influence over the way in which resources are used in their institution.

Occasionally people say to me that the Government are seeking to turn health care into a business. That is completely wrong. We understand that the delivery of health care is not a business. However, our oppponents fail to recognise that we have a great amount to learn from those in business who have developed techniques to ensure that large organisations improve their efficiency and deliver their objective more effectively than was the case.

I am not seeking to make health care into a business, but I make no apology for seeking to employ business techniques in the health service in order to deliver the central objectives of the health service more effectively than in the past.

My hon. Friends will recognise that there is no conflict between the commitment to care and that to run the health service efficiently. The two objectives are designed to achieve the same end. If one wants to deliver a caring service one will deliver a better caring service if one manages it efficiently and uses the resources committed to it by the taxpayer to the maximum possible extent. The alternative is to tolerate waste; to see taxpayers' money go off hospital sites in skips. We are opposed to that. We are committed to using the resources available to the health service to treat the maximum number of patients and to offer them the highest possible quality of health care.

The inescapable conclusions from studying the management practice in large organisations, including the health service, in the past 40 years is that management is best carried out as close as possible to the chalkface. That is why we are committed to provide the opportunity afforded by trust status and to grant it to those health care units that seek it, where they can show that they will use the freedoms that that status involves. The motivation behind the introduction of trust status is the desire to localise management and to create a greater sense of ownership and pride in the service delivered. My hon. Friends are right to emphasise that that status operates within the NHS.

Earlier this week I debated the management of the health service with Mr. Bruce Kent. He took to task a nurse from Guy's hospital who interrupted him to say that those at the hospital were improving the quality of the health care they delivered. Mr. Kent replied that the nurse was wrong to talk about the staff improving the quality of health care. He sought to represent trust status as an invention of the management. That nurse was absolutely right. Trust status engenders in staff a sense of pride and commitment to the service delivered. It is precisely for that reason that trust status will be a more successful means of managing the health service. It is the blinkered approach typified by Mr. Kent's response to the nurse that we want to eliminate from the NHS.

What are the people in the new trust for Basildon and Thurrock, be they the managers, doctors, nurses or porters, committed to do? I can do no better than to quote from the trust application document. My hon. Friends' constituents should be aware of the exact commitment made by those who are to manage the trust once it is established on 1 April 1992. All those working within the trust are committed to:

"Reduce waiting lists and waiting times. It will seek to ensure that all priority patients are treated within three months and that nobody should wait more than twelve months for treatment. To help achieve this, the proposed Trust would aim to give all patients a date for admission to hospital when first placed on the waiting list."

That is an important assurance and it stands four-square with the patients charter that we published earlier this week.

The second commitment from the trust states that it will

"Complete the agreed building works to bring all Maternity and Gynaecology services together on the same site as Intensive Care for newborn babies and the Special Care Baby Unit at Basildon Hospital."

The trust also makes a commitment to

"Develop a purpose built ward for Day Surgery at Orsett Hospital."

That means that the trust will be able to improve on the successful record for day surgery that the hospitals established in the past 10 years and to which I referred earlier.

The hospitals that are the subject of the trust status already offer a record of success. The trust status will ensure that that record of success continues into the life of the next Conservative Government and the one after, just as we established that record during the lifetime of the previous three Conservative Governments.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 4 November 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Musgrave Park Hospital (Bombing)

2.34 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Peter Brooke): I regret to have to tell the House that a bomb planted by the Provisional IRA exploded in Musgrave Park hospital at 3.53 pm last Saturday, killing two soldiers and injuring 11 other people, among them a five-year-old girl and a baby of four months. The murdered soldiers were Warrant Officer Philip Cross of the Royal Army Medical Corps and Driver Craig Pantry of the Royal Corps of Transport. Two of those wounded have very grave injuries.

I am also sorry to report that early on Sunday morning in a separate incident a young man was found dead in west Belfast in a car which had earlier been seen in suspicious circumstances and pursued by police; that incident is being investigated by a senior police officer and the Independent Commission for Police Complaints has been asked by the RUC to supervise the inquiry. I know that the House will join me in extending sympathy to the families of all those killed and injured.

The bomb which the IRA left in the hospital is estimated to have contained 20 lb of Semtex. It was part way along a service tunnel between two hospital buildings: first, the Withers block, containing orthopaedic and childrens' wards; and secondly, wards and other medical facilities administered by the RAMC for the benefit of service men and their families, and some civilians. I must stress the fact that this building is not, as the IRA has callously and cynically claimed, an operational military base. Rather, like the rest of the Musgrave Park complex, it is purely and simply a hospital dedicated to healing and the relief of suffering. The nearest security force base is more than a quarter of a mile away and was manifestly not the target of the attack.

In addition to the deaths and injuries, the blast from the explosion caused severe damage to both buildings. In particular, a newly refurbished children's ward in the Withers block was damaged, with debris falling on a father who was nursing his baby daughter. Other children in that ward were immobilised in traction. So far, 97 operations due to have been performed early this week have been cancelled, 80 out of the 200 national health service beds in the hospital have been rendered unusable and damage totalling at least £250,000 has been caused.

I am sure that the whole House will join me in utter condemnation of this appalling attack. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] But the cynical depravity of this outrage—placing a bomb that would inevitably cause massive damage to a national health service hospital and was intended to kill medical staff when it exploded and which, only by great good fortune, did not cause many more deaths and injuries—must surely mark one of the lowest points in the IRA's inglorious history.

I reject all attempts to justify this attack. Let there be no doubt that it has shown the IRA in its true colours. It was an attack on the whole community—on sick children and their parents, on old people whose much-needed operations will have to be delayed, on the medical staff who devotedly care for them, and on the security forces who will continue to defend the community and bring terrorists to justice. Such attacks will not deflect the Government or the security forces from doing their duty in seeing off those evil men who want to destroy all that is best in our community. The horrible nature of the attack only underlines the fact that those are the sort of people whom all democrats oppose.

Just as the emergency services and the staff at Musgrave Park hospital reacted with superlative speed and dedication to allay the effects of this atrocity, so the security forces—to whom I pay the warmest of tributes—will continue with vigorous and impartial professionalism to defend the community and to bring suspected terrorists to justice.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement, and I bitterly regret the circumstances that made it necessary.

On behalf of the Opposition, and indeed the whole House, I wish to express our sympathy to the victims and their families of what can only be described as a crime against humanity. I should also like to extend our sympathy to the relatives and friends of all those who have been killed in recent incidents in Northern Ireland.

We all know how difficult it is for members of the security forces and their families, and we should now be aware that they are at risk all the time. We owe them a great deal and can best repay them by finding a political solution to the conflict in Northern Ireland.

The hon. Member for Wiltshire, North (Mr. Needham), the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, has rightly pointed out the complete disregard for the Geneva convention on the part of the perpetrators of this appalling outrage. It is worth noting what that convention says. In the second protocol to the Geneva convention of 1977, article 7 specifies:

"All the wounded, sick and shipwrecked, whether or not they have taken part in the armed conflict, shall be respected and protected".

Article 9 states:

"Medical and religious personnel shall be respected and protected and shall be granted all available help for the performance of their duties".

Clearly the IRA has cruelly and inhumanely violated those principles. The members of the IRA claim to be soldiers fighting a just war, but real soldiers are bound by the terms of the Geneva convention. The IRA has destroyed the credibility of its own claims. Members of the IRA are not soldiers, but assassins, carrying out a squalid murder campaign.

I have to say to the IRA and its supporters that their actions only strengthen the determination of all democrats in Britain and Ireland to reject them. We are not prepared to listen to lectures on human rights from people who have such a callous attitude to human life. However, it is important that we do not descend to their level. We must

[Mr. Kevin McNamara]

ensure that the security forces are the real defenders of human rights and freedom from fear and violence, and that they are clearly seen to be so.

There can be no substitute for the courageous and difficult efforts of the security forces [illegible] impartially, the rule of law. There are no "quick fix" measures that will put a stop to the violence overnight. No doubt voices will be raised in support of such measures, but I must urge the Secretary of State not to be hustled into steps that can only aggravate the situation.

Finally, I should like to ask the Secretary of State what progress has been made in an area where I believe it would be sensible to take action. Can he tell us the position on the police authority's request for 400 more officers? We would urge him to act rapidly on that request. Such a decision would be complementary to the steps already taken by the Chief Constable following the sectarian killings of the past few weeks. I believe that it is an item of additional expenditure that would win the approval of the whole House.

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman not only for the sympathy he expressed to the families of those killed and injured, but for his support for the courageous efforts of the security forces.

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for reminding the House of the terms of the Geneva convention. However, I think I should add that, as the hon. Gentleman implied, there are no legitimate targets on such occasions as Saturday. The hon. Gentleman condemned the IRA as assassins and I am sure that the whole House would wish to do so.

The hon. Gentleman asked a specific question about the RUC's bid for further manpower. That bid is at the final stage of its examination and I expect to be able to make an announcement soon.

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): On behalf of the Ulster Unionist party, I join other hon. Members in expressing our sympathy to the families of those who have been killed and to all who were injured in the incident at the Musgrave Park hospital at the weekend. Indeed, we sympathise with all the families of people who are killed unnecessarily because of terrorism and violence.

I find it not a little peculiar, however, that the Secretary of State chose to combine his statement on the deaths of the two young men whose duties involved the care of the sick in this hospital with a statement on the death of a car thief. The Secretary of State did not take the opportunity to mention that Roger Ellwood was killed by a stolen car driven by terrorists on 1 October this year. So I fear that some doubt may be placed in the minds of hon. Members about the cause of the shooting that resulted in the death of the young man that the right hon. Gentleman referred to.

I am disappointed that we have still been given no sign that the means necessary to contain violence and to disrupt the command and control structure of the IRA are about to be implemented. The need for internment is staring us all in the face. People who suggest that to intern is to bring the community on to the streets cast doubt on the integrity of the vast majority in Northern Ireland. The majority in the community from which I come would welcome internment at this time, and I cannot believe that the integrity of the Roman Catholic community is such that its members would choose this continued slaughter in our Province in preference to removing from the streets those who command and control the violence that besets us.

It is up to the Secretary of State, if he keeps internment on the books as he has told us he will, to begin to educate people throughout this kingdom about the need to implement internment at a time that he judges correct—when he is advised by the Chief Constable and the GOC to do so. It is unhelpful if Ministers or others speaking on the right hon. Gentleman's behalf suggest that internment will not be used or that it is not a viable and justifiable means of dealing with those whose training and speciality is keeping themselves out of the courts and out of the hands of those on whom we depend to impose justice for the deaths that have occurred in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Brooke: In preparing my statement so as to include another recent event, I was following the behaviour of my predecessors, who have done the same on such occasions.

I entirely endorse what the hon. Gentleman said about the death of Roger Ellwood. It seems to me to have been one of the greatest tragedies in the Province in the 27 months I have been Secretary of State. I, too, express my sympathy to his family and to his fiancée and her family.

The hon. Gentleman said that I had said that we would keep internment on the statute book. I would go further and say that we have kept it on the statute book already —there was an opportunity not to retain it during the passage of the emergency provisions Act, but we did retain it then.

The introduction of internment would be a serious step involving difficulties of implementation whose consequences would be difficult to predict. I repeat what I have said before: internment has been retained on the statute book. I would consider using it only in particular circumstances; for obvious reasons I will not predict what they might be. The fact remains that internment is on the statute book and is available to the Government to use.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I fully share the concern felt about the dastardly acts in Ulster and the United Kingdom as a whole, but I ask hon. Members to keep their questions brief.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): I should like to express to the House on behalf of the people whom I represent and my party our deep feeling of revulsion at what has taken place and our deepest sympathy for those who have suffered. All right-thinking people in Northern Ireland, whatever their creed, politics or vision, will join with us as we express that heartfelt sympathy and deep revulsion.

On the issue that the Secretary of State has just discussed with the defence spokesman of the Ulster Unionist party, the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis), while holding that it should be a weapon in the armoury of any civilised Government to take out of circulation those who are seeking to destroy, murder and maim, will he give a full assurance to the House that he will undertake that act, if he has to do so, as a British Minister responsible to this House, and not in cliques with the Dublin Government who say that they would need to approve such a move?

The Secretary of State must say today that he is in charge of security in Northern Ireland and that he will not allow his hands to be tied by any reference to matters coming from the South. Is he not worried about the rising scale of explosions and the rising tide of murders that are taking place? Is it not time for him to reconsider his whole security policy? Although it may be all right for the spokesman for the Opposition to talk about taking no measures, surely from all parts of the Province there is a cry for a security policy now to carry out what his own colleagues said would have to be done: to extirpate the IRA?

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the way in which he expressed his sympathy and that of his party and his revulsion at the events that have occurred. I give him and the whole House a full assurance that in the event of the introduction of executive detention, it would be carried out by Her Majesty's Government in line with legislation passed by this House and retained by this Government on the statute book.

Of course I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the level of violence during the past two or three months. I also want to pay tribute to the security forces for their response to the security situation. I remind the hon. Gentleman that 97 people have been charged with terrorist crimes during the past two months, including 11 for murder. Hon. Members should not doubt, either, the response of the security forces and the Government to that level of violence.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): In paying my respects and tribute to the bereaved of the two soldiers and the young man killed, I am tempted to say that I thought that I had seen it all. The young baby in the carry-cot described by the IRA as an accident of war, the young nun serving the community described by the IRA as being in the wrong place at the wrong time and a fireman trying to put out a blaze described by the IRA as helping the British war machine—we did not expect to reach the stage where the IRA would break every precept of human compassion and morality by bombing a hospital.

I recognise and welcome the fact that the Secretary of State has said that there is no such thing as a legitimate target anywhere, because once that concept is accepted, we are in effect saying that murder is proper in certain circumstances. We should take this opportunity to restate that. I am not about to tell the Secretary of State what to do. I do not know of any known way of preventing evil men from planting a little piece of plastic explosive in a vast complex like the Musgrave Park hospital.

What I know, and what I would like to tell those who, like me, are involved in the political process, is that we have a responsibility. There is something that we can do —we can give leadership, and we must play our part in trying to end this terrible spiral of despair and killing in the North of Ireland. Rather than give the Secretary of State expert opinions that I do not have, I suggest that all those involved in the political process here, in Northern Ireland, in the Republic of Ireland and everywhere have a bounden responsibility to start proper negotiations to end the nightmare that continued this weekend.

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to the hon. Member for the manner in which his question was posed. I am not in the business of calibrating the relative evil of the atrocities carried out by the IRA, but I am conscious that the events that we have just witnessed come in the train of the attack on the remembrance day ceremony in Enniskillen four years ago, when 13 civilians were killed, and of the proxy bomb a year ago, which killed a civilian who had been tied to the driver's seat of his vehicle. These are crimes against humanity, as has been said.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the political process. All who are constitutional politicians in Northern Ireland have a responsibility towards the political development process. We are quite clear, and we were clear when we conducted the talks this summer, that they were not peace talks because they would not bring an end to the violence, but were one of the pressures that can be mounted against the terrorists. If we can bring such talks into being, we shall be making our contribution.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): I do not know what the answer is, but I know what the answer is not. I hope that my right hon. Friend will join me, the rest of the House and the country in issuing a warning, in the hope and expectation that those who describe themselves as loyalist paramilitaries will not, under any circumstances, physically react to this ghastly occurrence. If they do, or even think of so doing, they will get no support from the House or the country, and no sympathy, direct or indirect. I hope that they hear that loud and clear.

Mr. Brooke: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for that expression of view. I join him in saying that the enforcement of law and order in the Province of Northern Ireland lies with Her Majesty's Government, the Chief Constable and those who support him.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): I join hon. Members in unreservedly condemning the act by the IRA. I also speak on behalf of the group New Consensus, of which I am chairman and which is both all-party and none. It fully condemns acts such as this, and acts committed by the Ulster Freedom Fighters, such as attacking Belfast taxi drivers. Does the Minister recognise that, as well as an escalation of violence, there is an escalation of the peace movement in Northern Ireland? Groups such as Families Against Intimidation and Terror, the Newry hostage support group, Enough is Enough, the Peace Train Movement and New Consensus in Northern Ireland are standing up against the people of violence so as to ensure that there is another approach and a different tactic.

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the sympathy that he has expressed, and I share his sense of encouragement, brought about by the action taken by individual members of the community and groups which are seeking to call an end to the terrible experiences that we have all had. Those of us who live and work in Northern Ireland would say that the feeling on the part of the community about bringing these matters to an end is not the result of any war-weary or defeatist feeling but because we want to bring them to an end and restore peace, and it is a very strong feeling.

Rev. William McCrea (Mid-Ulster): I join the House in expressing sympathy to the families who have been so grievously bereaved through this tragedy, a tragedy that has been the experience of so many of the British people in Ulster over the past 20 years. Does the Secretary of State agree with the Under-Secretary's statement that these "fascist beasts" should be consigned to hell? Having said

[Rev. William McCrea]

that, however, he asks the members of the Unionist community to sit in council chambers with the spokesmen of the "fascist beasts".

In the statement by Her Majesty's Opposition, the Secretary of State heard a continuation of the velvet glove policy, which means, do little or nothing against the terrorist. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the people of Northern Ireland demand equal rights with those on the mainland? They have a right to be protected, and after 20 years, a flawed and failed security policy must be radically changed.

The IRA, and those who support them, having listened to the Secretary of State's statement, will he tell the House what part of his statement will have driven fear into the terrorist's heart?

Mr. Brooke: I am conscious that one of the ways in which my colleagues in the Government, and even on occasions myself, identify with the Province is to relapse periodically into theological language. I recognise what the hon. Gentleman is saying. It is important that it is on the record in the context of Sinn Fein's reaction to the attack that occurred on Saturday that I understand that its president, Mr. Adams, when asked last night, specifically refused to condemn the bombing. I hope that the people of Northern Ireland will draw significance from that.

I have said before to the hon. Member for Mid-Ulster (Rev. W. McCrea), in the context of security, that the Government's policy must always be conducted within the rule of law, and that that is a critical factor in bringing terrorism to an end.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): I join right hon. and hon. colleagues, obviously, in expressing sympathy for the families of the bereaved. I pray that those who have been injured will recover quickly.

It is always popular in the House to condemn the IRA. I have more reason than most to do that, having been shot 10 times by the IRA. There must also be condemnation for those who fail to take on the IRA, and the finger must be pointed at the Secretary of State and those who sit behind him. The Government introduced Dublin rule through the Anglo-Irish Agreement. They gave encouragement to the terrorists, and they are responding in kind.

When the people in Northern Ireland were listening to these matters on the radio, they were wondering why a statement was to be made. Two Ulster Defence Regiment men were killed on the Killylea road in Armagh. Four UDR men in my constituency were killed in Downpatrick. They were from Newtownards. Three were killed recently, in June, in Glenanne. No statements were made to the House following those events, so why is there a specific statement today? We thought that there would be something in it, but instead there were just bland generalities. There is nothing to offer the people of Northern Ireland.

We must be given confidence in the Government who rule us without our consent. We must be given confidence in the Army and the police. The Government must encourage the people of Northern Ireland to give their support for the security forces by giving the correct political leadership. The Secretary of State has given nothing today but bland generalities, and the situation will continue as it is until there is a change of Government policy. Why did the Secretary of state make a statement today?

Mr. Brooke: The right hon. Gentleman quotes a number of incidents in the Province that are within the memory of us all and on which statements were not made. I remind him that there has been criticism historically when statements have been made about incidents in Great Britain, when it was commented that similar statements had not been made in the context of Northern Ireland.

If the right hon. Gentleman goes back to the incidents to which he was referring, he will find that they were not ones that could naturally and immediately be followed by a statement. When, on certain occasions, private notice questions were tabled because of the circumstances of a particular incident, you, Mr. Speaker, in your wisdom, declined to accept them. I made my statement because, against the criticism that on occasions we have not made statements on incidents in Great Britain, I believed it important that there should be one.

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): May I join in the expressions of sympathy to the bereaved and those who were injured in Saturday's incident? Will the Secretary of State call on the Roman Catholic Church—many of whose members have suffered at the hands of the IRA—to excommunicate those members of the IRA whose hands are dripping with the blood of innocent victims?

Mr. Brooke: It is my understanding that Cardinal Daly has outrightly condemned the events of last Saturday. As I am not a member of his Church, it would be improper of me to make any theological observations.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I understand the importance of the statement, but we have a heavy day ahead of us. I shall call one more hon. Member from each side.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): In deploring this latest IRA atrocity, and hoping that those responsible will be brought to justice—like all those, from both sides in Northern Ireland, who carry out squalid murders—may I ask whether the Secretary of State agrees that it is important that we do not play into the hands of the Provisional IRA by following policies which, although the IRA deny it, they want for propaganda purposes in the Republic of Ireland and the United States? I refer mainly to internment and other measures that cannot be justified. We should be careful not to play into the hands of murderers.

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his advice. The considerations that he mentioned are, among others, taken into account when determining policy.

Mr. Keith Speed (Ashford): I associate myself with the expressions of sympathy. Will my right hon. Friend have a word with our right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary about utilising the British information services to maximum effect, especially in north America, in the hope of cutting off the supply of money, sympathy and support for the sort of depraved attack that occurred on Saturday, and to show IRA sympathisers in America precisely what is happening?

Mr. Brooke: I am always content to discuss these matters with my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary.

However, I think that there would be fairly wide agreement that Government actions in north America during recent years have resulted in the proportion of funding coming from north America being greatly diminished.

BILLS PRESENTED

Further and Higher Education (Scotland)

Mr. Secretary Lang, supported by Mr. Secretary Rifkind, Mr. Secretary Clarke, Mr. Michael Forsyth and Mr. Francis Maude, presented a Bill to make new provision about further and higher education in Scotland; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 5.]

Cardiff Bay Barrage

Mr. Secretary Hunt, supported by Mr. Secretary Heseltine, Mr. David Mellor, Sir Wyn Roberts and Mr. Nicholas Bennett, presented a Bill to provide for the construction by the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation of a barrage across the mouth of Cardiff Bay with an outer harbour and of a tidal lagoon and for related works; to make provision for the acquisition and use of land for the works; to make provision about the operation and management of the barrage, the outer harbour, the water impounded by the barrage and the lagoon; to make provision for dealing with property damage resulting from any alteration of groundwater levels which may occur in consequence of the construction of the barrage; to enable other protective provisions to be made; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 6.]

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question,

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.—*[Mr. Peter Walker.]*

Question again proposed.

Employment and Education

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before I call the Secretary of State for Employment, I must tell the House that because of the numbers of right hon. and hon. Members who wish to participate in today's debate, I am placing a precautionary limit of 10 minutes on speeches between 7 and 9 pm. If those who are called before that time are relatively brief, it may not be necessary to impose the limit. However, under the Standing Orders I must make my announcement now.

3.7 pm

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Michael Howard): The policies set out in the Gracious Speech will expand opportunity, choice and quality in our nation's education and training. They will lay the foundations for the creation of yet more jobs, in addition to the 800,000 created since 1979 and the 2·6 million created since 1983. They will ensure that Britain is ready for the challenges of the 1990s.

Those who report on our deliberations in this place have predicted that our exchanges over the next few months will be blighted by charge and counter-charge, by accusation and counter-accusation, and by statistics from both sides crossing each other in the night. I have now faced the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) across the Dispatch Box on nine occasions during the past 21 months. Neither of us could claim that those exchanges have been free of the features that I have just identified. Indeed, the hon. Gentleman might acknowledge that his universally pessimistic approach to these matters is at times all too reminiscent of Private Fraser in "Dad's Army", whose response to every situation is to cry out, "We're doomed—doomed, I tell you." I offer the hon. Gentleman an opportunity this afternoon to engage in more constructive debate.

I begin by identifying those objectives which—I hope he agrees—the hon. Gentleman and his party share. I will describe the extent to which the considerable progress has been made by the Government towards achieving those objectives. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will have the grace to acknowledge that progress and those achievements. I will consider what more needs to be done—because undoubtedly more needs to be done and formidable challenges remain—and whether further progress towards the achievement of those objectives is more likely to come about if the policies of the Government continue to be pursued than if the policies that the hon. Gentleman's party advocates were introduced in their place.

[Mr. Michael Howard]

We all want to see better education and training for our people. That is fundamental to the needs of our economy in the years ahead; fundamental to the prospects for unemployed people; and fundamental also to the creation of opportunities for our people not only to obtain work, to have and to hold down a job, but to obtain work and jobs which give them satisfaction, which are truly rewarding and which enable them to fulfil their potential to the greatest possible extent.

We need to see more of our young people staying on at school, more of them going into further and higher education and more of them achieving qualifications. We need to improve the levels of skills and qualifications of all our people and to increase the quantity and quality of the training that is available to them.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Will the Secretary of State send a message to those Rolls-Royce apprentices who will soon complete their training at what once was one of Britain's best motor car factories, but who will be unable to obtain employment in that factory or in any Rolls-Royce subsidiary? What does the right hon. and learned Gentleman suggest that those apprentices should do with the training to which they committed a lot of their time?

Mr. Howard: I am sure that those young people fully understand that no Government could ever offer them a guarantee of employment with any specific employer or at any particular workplace. However, I am equally sure that the qualifications and experience that those apprentices have gained will stand them in excellent stead in achieving employment when they come to look for jobs.

We need above all—because it is the key to everything else—to increase the productivity and the competitiveness of our industries, because that alone will encourage more job creation. That alone will provide the resources that are essential if we are to build a steadily more prosperous society.

Those objectives are scarcely controversial. I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman accepts them—although it is true that he has surprised me more than once in the past by failing to agree with the most obvious proposition.

Let us then examine the progress that the Government have made towards achieving those objectives.

First, on education and training, more young people are graduating from higher education than ever before—the number is up by nearly one third since 1979. More of our young people have higher education qualifications than do young people in Germany or Italy. More of our school leavers have qualifications than ever before, as do more of our work force. For the first time, no fewer than two thirds of those who work have a qualification, and 39 per cent. have A-levels or higher qualifications—an increase of no less than one third since 1979.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): Were not the training and enterprise councils, the employment training programme and the youth training programme all the brainchilds of the present Government? They did not exist under the previous Labour Administration?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is entirely correct and it would be as well if the House bore that important fact in mind when considering some of the allegations that are made—although I hope this afternoon for a more responsible tone in the remarks of the hon. Member for Sedgefield.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): In my borough, unemployment has risen by 69 per cent. over the past year, but, because of poll tax capping, virtually no one in Lambeth will receive a discretionary grant for vocational training. Often, a graduate has to complete a year at college or at law school after taking a degree. Such a period of further study could qualify for a discretionary grant, but, because of poll tax capping, almost no one in my borough will receive one. Does not the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that it would be better to replace dicretionary grants for vocational training, which are a burden on local authorities, with mandatory grants paid for by central Government?

Mr. Howard: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman is citing Lambeth council as a model of efficiency and good practice. If that council harboured its resources sensibly and deployed them effectively, it would be able to spend them in the way that the hon. Gentleman suggests. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science will no doubt point out in due course, Lambeth spends less than its standard spending assessment on education. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman direct his remarks to Lambeth council: a reordering of its spending priorities seems to be long overdue.

We are laying the foundations for further progress. More of our young people are now receiving higher education than ever before—an increase from one in eight in 1979 to one in five today and nearly one in three by the end of the decade. More 16-year-olds are staying on at school than ever before—more than 50 per cent. of the age group, for the first time ever. Indeed, last year it is likely to have been as high as 60 per cent. and it will be higher still this year.

As for training, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) has just reminded us, the Government have introduced the first and only guarantee anywhere in Europe of a two-year training place for every 16 and 17-year-old who needs it. That has been made possible by an increase in the number of training places for young people from a grand total of 6,000 in 1979 to more than 260,000 today. Taken together, the progress that we have made in education and training has led to an increase of more than two thirds in the proportion of 16 to 18-year-olds receiving full-time education or training since 1980. It is not just a question of quantity; the quality is improving, too. In our schools, the reforms introduced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State and his predecessors are bringing results.

A recent academic study compared the training available to young people in this country and that available to young people in Germany—for so long held out as the model that all other countries should follow in this regard. It reached the conclusion that, in many important respects, our training was not merely the equal of that provided in Germany; it was actually its superior. My Department's spending on training and enterprise has increased two and a half times in real terms since 1979.

The proportion of our gross domestic product devoted to taxpayer-funded training is higher here than it is in Germany, the United States or Japan.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Howard: I will always give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Haynes: I do not know which gramophone company the Secretary of State works for, Mr. Speaker, but we hear the same old gramophone record every time he comes to the Dispatch Box. When the previous Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), occupied his post, the unemployment figures were going down. Ever since the right hon. and learned Gentleman has occupied it, they have gone up. Now they are rocketing. He is flipping useless and it is time that he was looking for another job.

I am not talking about statistics. I am talking about the real world—about what is happening out there. The Secretary of State should join that lot out there who keep losing their jobs and the people who cannot get a job. He has been to my constituency recently, although he did not inform me of the fact. He was telling people how wonderful things would be in the future; I want to see that future. The right hon. and learned Gentleman has not told me about it yet. He should get stuck in, or get out.

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his helpful intervention. It is perfectly true that some of the things that I am saying today I have said before; that is because they are true. It does no harm to repeat the truth, or to establish a degree of consistency. Of course, that is not something that the hon. Gentleman is used to observing on the Opposition Benches. I quite understand why he is somewhat mystified by consistency, with which he is not entirely comfortable or familiar. It is, however, something that he will be given by Conservative Members and I am sure that he will want to make the most of it before—sadly—he retires from our midst at the next general election.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept the good news, contrary to what was said by the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes), that although in recent times my constituency has experienced economic difficulties, so successful has my right hon. and learned Friend's training and enterprise programme been that the Crawley and District Industries Association has told me that this is the first time during a downturn in the economy when training by companies has increased rather than decreased?

Mr. Haynes: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Gentleman is bragging about unemployment in his constituency being 3·4 per cent., but unemployment is between 9 and 11 per cent. now. The hon. Gentleman has got a nerve.

Mr. Speaker: I have heard better points of order than that.

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) makes an extremely important point. The experience that he reports in his constituency is mirrored throughout the country. It is one of the most significant and important respects in which the recession from which we are recovering is different from all previous recessions.

We are using the additional resources to excellent effect. We are improving both the quality and the quantity of our training and we are improving and creating the skills that our people will need in the 1990s. Our progress in these vital areas can be summarised as record resources, record commitment, record results. I hope that there will be some acknowledgement by the hon. Member for Sedgefield of the progress that we are making.

Of course, the Government cannot do it all alone. Their success in these matters has been matched by record increases in the commitment of employers to training. There has been an 85 per cent. increase in the proportion of employees being trained over the last seven years alone. Over the last year alone, 92 per cent. of employers have increased or maintained the volume of off-the-job training that they provide. The latest Confederation of British Industry survey of manufacturing companies shows that more than six times as many companies expect to maintain or increase their investment in training over the next year than expect to reduce it. Today the Industrial Society published a survey of its members which shows even higher expectations of increased training over the next year.

There is an overwhelming body of evidence that British employers are more aware of the importance of training for their future than has ever been the case in the past. The proportion of employers with a training budget has increased by more than a tenth in the last year alone. The proportion of employers with a training plan has increased even more rapidly. The key to our success in this area, the cornerstone of our achievements, is the establishment of a nationwide network, now complete, of training and enterprise councils, ensuring that training is delivered in a way that fully respects the needs and requirements of local areas and is fully tailored to local circumstances.

The hon. Member for Sedgefield spends a good deal of time travelling up and down the country proclaiming his devotion to training and enterprise councils. I welcome that. Even though the hon. Gentleman occasionally speaks with forked tongue—and, as we shall see later, his views are not shared by his Front-Bench colleague, the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish)—I welcome the fact that he proclaims his support for the TECs. But when is he going to give an ounce of credit to the Government for having set up the TECs, for having put in place the instrument of the training revolution that is now taking place in this country, and for having taken the most imaginative step that we have ever seen in our training history? The hon. Gentleman has been noticeably reticent in this respect in the past. I invite him to be more forthcoming here and now.

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): If the right hon. and learned Gentleman supports the TECs so much, why has he started them off with a significant cut in funding?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman is not, I hope, going to return to that. Today the shadow Chancellor told the nation that the Government are spending too much money and that this is a profligate Government. However, in the very first debate in the House after the shadow Chancellor's statement, up pops the hon. Gentleman and, in the first intervention from the Opposition Front Bench, says, "Spend more, spend more." It is about time that there was some consistency among Opposition Members.

Mr. Blair: Before the right hon. and learned Gentleman gets too carried away, does he accept that he started the TECs with a cut in funding? Has the funding been cut—yes or no?

Mr. Howard: I have explained to the hon. Gentleman and to the House on countless occasions that we have provided TECs with the resources that they need to do the job that I have asked them to do. We carefully considered —I explained how we did so—how best to help unemployed people back to work. Survey evidence showed that although training is an important and effective way of helping some unemployed people back to work, it is not the only way or always the best way. We adjusted our provision to take that into account. I hope that the hon. Member for Sedgefield will not tell the House that he gives the Government credit for having set up the TECs. Will the hon. Gentleman, just this once, give us an ounce of credit for that?

Mr. Blair: I would understand it if the Minister were saying merely that he is reorganising the same amount of resources, but he has cut resources. Does he accept that there has been a cut in the TEC's budgets and that many are expressing concern about meeting his guarantees as a result? Will he accept that or not?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman has been exceptionally churlish this afternoon. He has talked about TECs and has risen three times to intervene, but has declined to give the Government an ounce of credit for having established the TECs and for having taken that most imaginative step. One thing is clear from the hon. Gentleman's attitude: were there ever a Labour Government, there would be no review of programmes and there would be no assessment of the way in which help is given to ensure that it is cost effective or of how Government resources are deployed to ensure that the taxpayer gets the best value for money. According to the hon. Member for Sedgefield, once a programme is introduced it must carry on for ever, regardless of whether it is the most effective way of achieving those aims.

The Government's job creation record is remarkably successful. There are now more than 800,000 more jobs in our economy than in 1979 and 2,600,000 more than in 1983. The key to job creation lies in productivity and competitiveness. In the 1980s, Britain achieved the fastest growth in productivity of any major industrialised country. We had been bottom of the league in the 1960s and 1970s, but our GDP, business investment and manufacturing productivity grew faster during the 1980s than in Germany, France or many other countries. That was the best relative performance by Britain in any decade since the second world war.

The new competitiveness of British industry has been sharply shown by the increase in our share of world trade for two years running, halting and reversing decades of decline. The attractiveness of Britain today for new business and job creation has ensured that we have consistently secured more Japanese and American investment than any other member state of the European Community.

One of the most important factors in the creation of jobs during the lifetime of the Government has been the sharp reduction that we have achieved in the number of strikes. Few people will dispute that that is largely a result of the legislation that we passed to reform industrial relations. That legislation was passed in the teeth of the unflinching opposition of the Labour party and of the hon. Member for Sedgefield in particular. He described the introduction of trade union ballots as "a scandalous and undemocratic measure against the trade union movement."

The reduction in strikes has been overwhelmingly important in attracting foreign investment to this country on a scale for which there is no precedent. That observation is not just my unsupported assessment; an independent survey conducted by the Invest in Britain Bureau which was published in July showed that 96 per cent. of foreign firms believed that Britain's industrial relations improved significantly in the 1980s.

Those are some of the achievements for which the Government can take substantial credit. I am prepared to wait until the hon. Member for Sedgefield makes his speech for some sign of acknowlegment of that progress.

But what of the future? On training, we plan to take forward the dynamic of the TEC movement. The enthusiasm and excitement that TECs have generated are without parallel in our past. They will harness those qualities to ensure that we continue to make progress. Employers and, indeed, trade unions have committed themselves to the CBI's testing and challenging education and training targets. Those targets will sharply improve the qualifications of the British work force.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): The Government did not adopt them.

Mr. Howard: The Government supported them. I was on the platform with the general secretary of the TUC and the president of the CBI when the targets were announced.

Building blocks of the training revolution are being put in place—this country's first national system of job-related qualifications—with new qualifications being produced, recognised and attained every month. Three hundred vocational qualifications are now accredited. By the end of next year, about 800 will have been accredited, covering 80 per cent. of the work force. That means that over the next 14 months new national vocational qualifications will be accredited and put in place at a rate of well over one a day. Perhaps the hon. Member for Sedgefield will tell us whether he approves of that development. Perhaps he will at least acknowledge the progress that is being made.

Last month, I presented the first Investors in People awards. The companies that received them had achieved tough, testing and challenging targets of commitment to training. I presented 29 awards and was able to announce that a further 500 companies are committed to meeting this standard. I believe that that standard has an important part to play in enhancing employer recognition of the importance of training and career development for the whole of a company's work force. Investors in People is a standard designed by business, which will be met by business, because it is in the interests of business. That is why it will succeed.

From next April, tax relief will be available for the first time for individual training expenses—encouraging a further increase in the commitment of individuals to train to improve their future career prospects. Career development loans—about whose future the hon. Member for Sedgefield registered such heartfelt concern a couple of weeks ago—are being taken up with increasing enthusiasm. Well over 20,000 people have already been encouraged to invest some £53 million in their own training with the benefit of those loans.

Other new measures are foreshadowed in the White Paper "Education and Training for the 21st Century." Some of them were included in the Gracious Speech:

removal of the artificial divide, imposed by a Labour Government, between universities and polytechnics; independence for further education colleges; and more information for parents, leading to higher standards of education in our schools. I have no doubt that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science will have more to say about those matters later in the debate.

Progress is also being made on the other matters referred to in the White Paper. I refer in particular to the expansion of training credits. Training for young people is being revolutionised by the phased introduction of training vouchers across the country. Already, one school leaver in 10 is offered a training voucher—a means to encourage a sharp improvement in the quality and quantity of training available to that age group while increasing the choice and opportunity open to young people. By the end of the next Parliament, every 16 and 17-year-old school leaver will be offered a training voucher —perhaps the biggest single leap forward of individual choice since the introduction of the right to buy.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): As the Secretary of State knows, training vouchers are being piloted in Devon and Cornwall and other areas. I have had many meetings with those involved. There is a problem with training vouchers, just as there is without them. Because of the economic climate, it does not look as though training places will be available. That is the guarantee for which people are looking and which the Government appear to be failing to deliver.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. The guarantee is in place. We are committed to it and we shall continue to deliver it.

The hon. Member for Sedgefield has been uncharacteristically coy about the Labour party's attitude to training credits. Is the hon. Gentleman in favour of them, or is he not? Perhaps this afternoon he will tell us the Labour party's attitude to this imaginative development.

I referred to the Government's record on job creation. Despite that record, it is, of course, the case that unemployment has risen in this recession, as it has in all other recessions. Of course, the problem is not unique to this country. In fact, unemployment is rising in every member state of the European Community except Spain —where it is already nearly double our level—and in every member country of the European Free Trade Association, and it is higher today than it was a year ago in every G7 country.

The response of government to rising unemployment must have two elements. We must strive to create the economic framework in which record numbers of jobs will once again become available. I have already referred to the progress that we have made in increasing productivity and competitiveness. Competitiveness is the key to job creation and the key to competitiveness is the control of inflation. Clearly, we have made great progress in bringing inflation under control and we shall soon have a lower rate of inflation than Germany for the first time in a generation.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): Will the Secretary of State reconsider his answer to the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor)? The truth is that the youth training guarantee is not being delivered by Devon training and enterprise council. Those are the facts. Does he not know what the facts are? Is he telling me that every young person in Devon who does not have a job has a YT place? If he is, I am telling him that he is wrong.

Mr. Howard: The guarantee will be met in Devon and Cornwall as in every other training and enterprise council, and every young person of the relevant age who leaves school and cannot get a job will be offered a training place. That is a commitment which the Government will deliver. That will be the case and I can give the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) that undertaking.

When the hon. Member for Newham, North-East mentioned that important matter I was referring to the progress that we have made in bringing inflation under control. That is already improving our competitiveness and we shall see its effects on job creation before much longer. A reduction in the rate of inflation is the only route to reduction in unemployment. Of course, unemployment brings great difficulties in its train and no one regrets that more than I. That is why in recent months we have put in place the widest range of measures that we have ever had to help unemployed people get back to work. I have described them to the House on many previous occasions and, although he is no longer in the Chamber, I do not wish to incur the wrath of the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) by repeating them.

Mr. Haynes: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am here.

Mr. Howard: I beg the hon. Gentleman's pardon. I had not appreciated that he had moved in the Chamber. He has changed his position and perhaps there is still time for him to cross the Floor before he leaves the House at the end of this Parliament.

Those measures provide practical positive help to unemployed people. This year, I have set the Employment Service the task of placing 1·3 million people in jobs—5,000 every working day—and it is achieving that target.

What is the Opposition's attitude towards job creation? They support a whole range of policies, the inevitable result of which would be to make unemployment higher than would otherwise be the case.

Every Labour Government since 1929 have increased unemployment. Putting Labour in charge of reducing unemployment would be like sending a fire fighter to tackle a blaze with his hoses full of petrol. Their unpicking of our trade union law reforms, which would deliberately make strikes easier, longer and more frequent, their support for every last dot and comma of the European Commission's social action programme, just one directive of which could add £5 billion to the costs of British employers——

Mr. Blair: For the sake of clarification, could the Secretary of State say whether his position has changed on maternity leave and the pregnant women at work directive of the EC? A few weeks ago, he told us that that would ruin employment opportunities for women. We understand from the Sunday papers that he will not now dissent from it. Is that correct?

Mr. Howard: The Commission's original proposal on maternity leave would have added £0·5 billion to the costs or either employers or taxpayers in this country. We have been negotiating steadily and patiently—and I hope successfully—to reduce that burden. The attitude that the United Kingdom Government will take to that directive

[Mr. Howard]

will depend upon its final form. We do not yet know what that will be, as the negotiations are continuing. I should like to know whether the Opposition welcome the reduction of that £0·5 billion burden on British employers or taxpayers or whether they regret it and I am happy to give way now to the hon. Member for Sedgefield if he will answer that question.

Mr. Blair: We do not believe that the proposal would add significantly to costs. We believe that it would be good for work in Britain. As the Secretary of State was never coy about telling us that he opposed the directive, will he tell us—as there is a meeting on Wednesday, I assume that he has made up his mind about whether he will agree to that part of the social charter—whether he has changed his mind or whether the Prime Minister has changed it for him?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman does not seem to have the first idea of what happens at Social Affairs Councils. What happens is that negotiations take place. I cannot tell the hon. Gentleman now what my attitude will be at the end of a meeting that is due to take place on Wednesday because the whole purpose of that meeting is for negotiations to take place.

I am sure that the House will have noted the hon. Gentleman's invention of a new doctrine—cost-free pay. He says that he does not accept that the new regulations, which will have the substantial effect of increasing pay, will lead to any costs. The Labour party approaches all economic matters on the basis of the new wonderful world of cost-free pay. That is the world inhabited by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): Does my right hon. and learned Friend at least give the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) the benefit of consistency? He says the same thing about a range of measures, including the measures advocated by the Labour party, which would put many part-time women employees out of work.

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is entirely right. That is the kind of consequence to which Labour Members are characteristically blind, as they are blind in their continued support for the national statutory minimum wage.

Last month, the hon. Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson), perhaps aware—given her shadow portfolio—of the immense damage that the proposal would do to jobs for women, told Channel 4 news that if the minimum wage caused job losses, "We'll look at it". She may wish to look at it, but the shadow Chancellor has made it plain that he will not, telling readers of the *Morning Star*, the only newspaper to support the minimum wage, that he regards it as

"an unwavering commitment not open to negotiation."

I want to put to the hon. Member for Sedgefield some important and fundamental questions relating to his party's attitude to training and I hope that he will do the House the honour of answering them. While the hon. Gentleman has been travelling up and down the country assuring the training and enterprise councils of his support, the hon. Member for Fife, Central, his fellow Front-Bench spokesman on these matters, has been singing a somewhat different tune. He wrote an article in the magazine *Training Tomorrow* which he entitled, unequivocally if rather presumptuously, "Labour's Approach to Tecs". I have a copy of the magazine and the hon. Member for Sedgefield may like to read it. Perhaps the first thing that he will tell us is whether his hon. Friend cleared that article with him in advance. Do the views expressed in it represent his views and the views of the whole of his party, or the views of only one part of his Front-Bench team?

Let us examine the views of the hon. Member for Fife, Central on the subject of TECs. The hon. Gentleman thinks that TECs are a symbol

"of deep rooted mistakes of political philosophy".

Does the hon. Member for Sedgefield agree?

Hon. Members: Answer.

Mr. Blair: When the Secretary of State last raised the point in debate in the House, he was told unequivocally by my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) that he fully supported the TECs. I do not know what the Secretary of State is doing now to an article.

Mr. Howard: I have never raised the point before. It is a rather recent article in this publication and was drawn to my attention only a week or so ago. I hope that the hon. Member for Sedgefield will do the House and the TECs the credit of taking these matters seriously.

The hon. Member for Fife, Central says that TECs have been set up

"at breakneck speed with scant regard to the complex and interrelated problems underpinning Britain's skills crisis."

He says that there are

"fundamental differences between the Labour party and the Government"

on

"the philosophy behind the TEC initiative."

Does the hon. Member for Sedgefield agree?

Mr. Blair *indicated assent.*

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman agrees with that—I am grateful. Does he also agree, then, that the philosophy behind the TECs is, in the words of the hon. Member for Fife, Central,

"deeply damaging to the long-term need of this country"?

Those are important questions and I hope that the hon. Member for Sedgefield will deal with them specifically. As he knows, we have given the TECs, at their request, increased flexibilities. The hon. Member for Fife, Central thinks that those flexibilities have produced

"a distortion of both priorities and policies at local level."

I hope that the hon. Member for Sedgefield will say whether he agrees with that.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The Minister has now been on his feet for about 40 minutes. During that time more than 100 people outside this place have lost their jobs. My constituents want to know what the Government will do about unemployment. The main employer in Creswell—the pit—has just shut and all the other villages are losing their pits, representing 600 or 700 jobs, yet the Minister just waffles on making jokes. The only thing that the Government know about jobs is how to hand them out to their friends, as in today's announcement that the spouses of three Tory Members will be given spiv jobs in the national health service. In the meantime, millions of people are out there without jobs. Why does not the Minister take his hook with the rest of them?

Mr. Howard: Labour Front-Bench Members constantly tell us that training is vital in reducing unemployment and helping people to get jobs. That is why it is so important that we should know what the Labour party's policy towards training and unemployment really is.

The hon. Member for Fife, Central says that TECs cannot be trusted to provide training for people with special needs and that such training should be provided directly by the Department, bypassing TECs entirely. Does the hon. Member for Sedgefield agree with that? Does he also endorse the view expressed by his hon. Friend that TECs should not have the status of private companies and should be subject to much tighter controls over their expenditure? Does he agree with his hon. Friend that TECs under Labour would

"not necessarily be the most important part"

of training policy?

Those vital questions go to the heart of the future of training. I hope that the hon. Member for Sedgefield will now tell us in clear and unequivocal terms whether the views expressed in that article by the hon. Member for Fife, Central are views which he shares or views which he disowns.

Our education and training policies will ensure that Britain in the 1990s will remain one of the most competitive countries in Europe and the world. During the years ahead, we shall continue to make considerable increases in the number of our young people who attain qualifications at 16, are in education or training at 17, and who enter higher education at 18. We shall expand individual choice and incentives with individual tax relief and with training vouchers. We shall build on the most dynamic training framework in Europe, centred on the training and enterprise councils.

These policies will make our industries more competitive, our young people better qualified and our economy more dynamic than ever before. They sharply contrast with those of Labour, which will destroy jobs, burden industry and take us back to the failed approaches of the 1960s and 1970s. Our policies will secure victory for us at the next election and a stronger Britain in the years beyond it.

3.48 pm

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): When the Secretary of State spoke today, not once did he accept responsibility for the 1 million more people made unemployed since he took office. Not once did he show understanding of the pain and anxiety of the men in their fifties who have been made redundant and who will never work again, of the women who want to return to work but cannot find it, or of the young people whose first taste of adult life will be the dole queue. Not once did he express concern for the thousands of small businesses that are struggling under the burden of high bank charges and interest rates and now going bankrupt in record numbers. Not once did he mention the growing skills deficit between Britain and its competitors or announce any new Government measures to tackle that. In other words, nowhere in his entire speech did the right hon. and learned Gentleman accept either that the Government bear responsibility for creating some of the problems or, more fundamentally, that they at least share responsibility for solving them.

With 2·5 million people now unemployed—even on the Government's figures—with increases in the numbers out of work in every sector of industry and in every type of occupation at the workplace, the Queen's speech should have had at its core measures to reduce unemployment. Instead, the text of that speech did not mention unemployment once. If the Government really believed that they had something to offer the country on unemployment or anything else, we would not have had a Queen's Speech but a general election campaign.

The price for unemployment is paid in the families that lose their breadwinners and now live in poverty. It is paid by those whose homes are now repossessed in record numbers when the mortgage can no longer be afforded. The price is paid in the stress and mental anguish caused by ever greater numbers of people chasing ever fewer jobs. However, that cost is paid not only by those people, but by the whole nation, financially as well as morally.

In terms of benefits paid and taxes lost, unemployment now costs the country some £20 billion a year—£1,000 for every taxpayer in Britain. Unemployment now affects every part of Britain, not just London and the south-east where unemployment has risen by 360,000 and where business failures are up by more than 60 per cent. In the south-west, there are now 89,000 more unemployed, and business failures are up 90 per cent. In the midlands, 125,000 more people have been put out of work. In the north, unemployment is up by 30,000 and business failures are up by 50 per cent. In Wales unemployment has increased by 37,000, and in Scotland it has increased by 30,000. Yet still we have had no response from the Government.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): Inward investment creates jobs. Therefore, will the hon. Gentleman take this opportunity to condemn the Trades Union Congress for describing Japanese inward investment as alien?

Mr. Blair: As I said when I was asked that question before, we fully support inward investment in this country. What is more, the single biggest inward investment project from Japan is situated in my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster). It was brought there with the full participation of the local Labour councils.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): It is surprising to find that there is opposition to inward investment in this country, particularly by the Japanese. However, my constituency benefited from the establishment of a Sony factory, and that happened under a Labour Government in 1974.

Mr. Blair: My hon. Friend is right, and that practice has been replicated around the country. What is most worrying——

Mr. Howard: In the light of the hon. Gentleman's protestations and those of his hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell), why will the hon. Gentleman not respond directly to the question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) and condemn the TUC?

Mr. Blair: I have made it absolutely clear that we support inward investment, and I have told the House about the biggest inward investment project that was supported by Labour councils.

What is most worrying is the sharp rise in youth unemployment. In the south-east, it has almost tripled, so that there are now 95,000 young people unemployed——

Mr. Batiste *rose*——

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock) *rose*——

Mr. Blair: I shall give way in a moment.

In the south-west, youth unemployment has doubled, as it has in London. In the north, it has increased by 32 per cent., in Wales by 52 per cent. and in the midlands by 70 per cent. In Britain as a whole, almost 300,000 more young people have been made unemployed since this recession began—720,000 in the nation. That is what should have concerned Ministers when it came to the Queen's Speech.

Mr. Batiste *rose*——

Mr. Janman *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am not quite sure to whom the hon. Gentleman is giving way.

Mr. Blair: There are so many of them, Mr. Speaker —it is nice of them to give me a choice. I give way first to the hon. Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste).

Mr. Batiste: If the hon. Gentleman could be persuaded that a statutory minimum wage would significantly increase unemployment, would he withdraw his support from it and oppose the relevant aspects of the social charter?

Mr. Blair: It will not—*[Laughter.]* As I shall inform the hon. Gentleman later, the Opposition do not believe that poverty pay is the answer to rising unemployment.

Mr. Janman: Germany and France have much higher youth unemployment than we do. Most independent experts ascribe that to the existence of a minimum wage in those countries, so why does the hon. Gentleman wish to bring the thing to Britain?

Mr. Blair: The hon. Gentleman is talking nonsense— [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] I have been asked a question and then I am shouted at when I try to give answers. Youth unemployment in Germany is below ours, and a recent OECD study showed that the minimum wage did not have the impact that the hon. Gentleman describes.

We would expect that, as unemployment rises in the regions, regional aid would be sustained; that, as more young people face unemployment, expenditure on youth training would be maintained; that, as the adult dole queues lengthen, so would the urgency of the Government's response increase. Instead, regional aid in Great Britain has been cut by £1 billion: Scotland has lost more than £200 million a year, Wales £180 million, the north-west £220 million and the north more than £200 million—despite high levels of unemployment. The Government are refusing even to back the idea of a northern development agency, an idea now supported by the CBI as well as by others in the region.

Mr. Howard: I see that the shadow Chancellor is sitting just three places away from the hon. Gentleman. Is the hon. Gentleman telling the House and the nation that his party will increase expenditure on regional aid? Is that one of his party's spending priorities? If it is not, why is he wasting the time of the House by prattling on about it?

Mr. Blair: We would not have cut regional aid as the right hon. and learned Gentleman has and as the Government have every year in the past 12 years. Not only have they cut regional aid, but youth training has been cut, in the past four years, by £420 million in real terms. As unemployment has risen, there has not been a single initiative, new policy or fresh idea, except employment action, which, after 18 months of recession had not until a few weeks ago created a single job and which is due to be wound down after the election. At its peak, the scheme will employ up to 30,000 people—50 in every constituency, some of which have unemployment totals of 5,000, 6,000 or 7,000 to deal with. That is not the best of employment action: it is the worst of unemployment inaction.

Not only have the Government given up on the prospect of anything new to help the unemployed but they are even undermining the little that is already in place. The Secretary of State said today that the guarantees to young people and the unemployed were being met in full, and that there was no difficulty. He said that in answer to me, to the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) and to the Chairman of the Select Committee on Employment.

Mr. Howard: I did not say that there was no difficulty. We must be realistic about this. Of course in a recession it is more difficult to secure employer placements for youth training than it would be in a different economic context. What I said—I repeat it—was that the Government are committed to this guarantee, and that the guarantee will be met by the Devon and Cornwall training and enterprise council mentioned by the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) and by every other training and enterprise council in the country.

Mr. Blair: I am not sure whether that was an admission or not. In the House about 10 days ago, when challenged by me and by the Chairman of the Select Committee, the right hon. and learned Gentleman said:

"On the subject of training guarantees, we are delivering and are committed to those guarantees."

He went on to say:

"Those guarantees are being delivered."—*[Official Report,* 22 October 1991; Vol. 196, c. 1782-84.]

We have the answers from the TECs to the letter sent out by the Employment Select Committee on whether those guarantees are being met. There are 70 of them; they were in the Library for seven or eight days before the right hon. and learned Gentleman made his categorical statement that the Government were delivering on the guarantees to young people and the unemployed. I should like to know whether he knew about those letters before he gave us the undertaking.

Mr. Howard *indicated assent.*

Mr. Blair: The Secretary of State did know. For the sake of the House, let me compare what he said with reality. He told us that the Government were committed to and were delivering the training guarantees. I shall read out a small sample of those letters. Milton Keynes and North Bucks TEC stated:

"The short response to the question of meeting the YT guarantee is NO."

Northamptonshire TEC stated:

"It became clear to us in the early summer that we would not be fulfilling our YT guarantee."

Calderdale TEC stated:

"I am grateful for the opportunity to explain the serious problems in meeting the YT guarantee."

CENTEC stated:

"I know that we are not alone in our concern about our ability to meet the ET and YT guarantees, given current levels of funding."

Central England TEC stated:

"In budgetary terms we, in common with all TECs, maintain that, if we are forced to continue with the present

system, funding must be commensurate with the Government's guarantee. This has not been the case so far . . . with several results. a. Government credibility has been severely tarnished."

South Thames TEC stated:

"I would argue that YT in London is underfunded. I do not believe we are fulfilling the YT guarantee."

Lincolnshire TEC stated:

"We have had to reduce provision to 900 places."

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Blair: Just a moment. Let me read out what the chief executive of Staffordshire TEC wrote. These are all replies that the Secretary of State has accepted he had in his possession before making that statement. The chief executive said:

"Since my assumption of the appointment of Chief Executive of Staffordshire TEC in May an inordinate amount of time has been spent discussing with TEED"—

that is the training part of the Department of Employment—

"ways to resolve a range of problems relating to our meeting of aim and guarantee obligations in both the ET and YT programmes."

Manchester TEC stated:

"2,000 people in the guarantee group are waiting a place."

How does the Secretary of State square those facts with his statement?

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to intervene. The answer is quite simply that those letters are out of date. The facts of the matter, if the hon. Gentleman is interested in the facts, are that officials in my Department have been examining with every TEC in the country the position in relation to the youth training guarantee, what that TEC needs to deliver the guarantee and whether it needs extra resources to deliver the guarantee. We have reached agreement with 78 of the 82 TECs that they have what they need to deliver the youth training guarantee. The hon. Gentleman has had his fun reading out those letters, but they are out of date. The youth training guarantee will be delivered.

Mr. Blair: The right hon. and learned Gentleman said weeks ago that the guarantee was being delivered. Before any resolution of this problem, let me tell him that the letter, for example, from Milton Keynes TEC is dated 11 October—a few days before he raised the matter—and another is dated 17 October.

The National Association of Information Technology Centres in a letter dated 22 October—the day that the Secretary of State spoke—states:

"Although we have suffered steady funding reductions before the introduction of the TECs, under the new policies ITECs as a whole have suffered two successive years of swingeing cuts. The majority of ITEC closures have taken place over these last 18 months. 20 have closed as real TECs."

How can the Secretary of State tell us that this problem has been resolved when TECs are saying that they are having to close their centres as a result of these funding cuts?

Mr. Howard: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not trying to mislead the House. He knows perfectly well that the last letter that he read out is not from a TEC. It is not from a body that has responsibility for delivering the youth training guarantee. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not taking the view that there must never ever be any adjustment affecting any single training provider. The TECs have responsibility for deciding which training provider can provide training most efficiently and cost-effectively. The TECs have the resources they need to deliver the youth training guarantee. The hon. Gentleman should not confuse the matter by referring to a document that does not even come from a TEC.

Mr. Blair: It is not me who is trying to mislead the House. I accept that the ITECs are not TECs. I have said what they are. However, they are funded directly through the TECs and they were saying, on the day that the Secretary of State denied that there was any problem, that these guarantees were not being met. The Secretary of State has said for weeks, not merely today, that the guarantees have been met. He did not say three weeks ago that there were major problems but he hoped to be able to resolve them. He said that they were resolved then, but they were not.

Furthermore, the figures reveal that between March and June this year, 45,000 people dropped off Government training programmes. The only explanation for that, as we forecast at the time, is Government cuts in funding. For months, we warned that, as a result of the cuts, unemployed young people would suffer. We were right, and that has happened. The Secretary of State has nothing of substance to say on the chief concern of the present and nothing new on the major issue of the future.

We were told today that all is well in training, that nothing more needs to be done and that we are on course. Let us examine that claim.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blair: No, I have to get on.

It is true that many employers are taking training more seriously, and I welcome that. It is also true that the numbers receiving training have increased from where they were and that many of the TECs are embarking on valuable initiatives. My criticism arises not when the Secretary of State says that more employers are training but when he refuses to acknowledge the gulf that remains between where we are and where we need to be in order to compete successfully—in other words, the difference between the absolute level of training in Britain and the still enormous gap between training in Britain and that in our main competitors.

The Secretary of State based his argument primarily on the training statistics recently published by the Training Agency. It is true that, since 1984, there has been an increase in the number of those receiving training. The Secretary of State called it an 85 per cent. increase. The figures are a rise from 9 to 15 per cent. of the work force. I understand how that can be described as an 85 per cent. rise, but such a description is slightly misleading. Only one quarter of the 16 to 19-year-olds and one fifth of the 20 to 24-year-olds are receiving training.

The number of young people in education and training, even comparing our 1989 position with that of our competitors in 1986 is less in Britain than in any other OECD country except Spain. The numbers on YT have been falling. Half of all 16 to 19-year-olds are neither in full-time education nor on YTS. They are unemployed, in employment with training or in employment without it, but our previous estimate that over 100,000 young people leave school every year and go into work without training is probably an underestimate. There may well be more.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Is it not the case that, in a large number of our competitor countries, the statistics show that many young people entering education drop out of it again very swiftly? The number of young people who complete the education courses to which they submit themselves is much lower than it is here. I would not wish the hon. Gentleman's statistics to mislead us.

Mr. Blair: I do not think that that is right. At virtually every stage we are behind our main competitors.

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): I am all in favour of the use of international comparisons to exhort us to do better, but they must not be taken to a ludicrous extent. Does the hon. Gentleman appreciate that, of our 16-year-olds, 60 per cent. stay on in full-time education and training and about 30 per cent. stay on in part-time education and training? The figures that the hon. Gentleman has just used do not compare like with like, and are so highly selective that they are ludicrous. Not only is the position much better than it was before the Government took over, but it is not true that we lag as far behind our European competitors as he claims.

Mr. Blair: I am informed that the figures that were pulished by the right hon. and learned Gentleman's Department in July show that we lag behind our main competitors. Fewer than half those on employment training obtain a job after completing the course. The right hon. and learned Gentleman says that more firms are spending on training, but what is the position in manufacturing industry? The figures were published by the Department last week. It is true that, in this recession, some categories of firms still plan to spend more, but there has been dramatic shrinkage over the past couple of years. Among large firms that employ more than 5,000, there is now a negative balance of over 20 per cent. of those who want to spend more rather than less.

Even worse, as again the Department's survey shows, we suffer vast skill shortages even at a time of recession and rising unemployment. With skill shortages of up to 40 per cent. in some of our manufacturing and technology sectors, there are no grounds for the complacency that the Secretary of State exhibited today. If he reads the most authoritative study of comparisons of vocational training, which was published only last week, he will find that there are poor comparisons with Japan and Germany and even with some aspects of the training system in Hong Kong. He will find that the gap between vocational qualifications for young people in Germany and in England has been widening over the past few years.

Mr. Howard: Where is that from?

Mr. Blair: I refer to Professor Rose's study. I shall read exactly what it states in that connection, and perhaps the right hon. and learned Gentleman will tell us whether he agrees or disagrees with it. The passage reads:

"If all that one were to concentrate upon were trends within Britain, it would be possible to regard present achievements as encouraging for the number of unqualified persons is falling rapidly. Whereas 63 per cent. of older British workers have neither an academic nor a vocational qualification, only 35 per cent. of younger Britains are without either qualification. But comparison shows a very different picture. The vocational qualifications gap between younger Germans and younger Britains is actually greater than in the older generation."

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Did the hon. Gentleman read the recent study which was published by the Anglo-German Foundation, in which people from both countries tried to compare the preparedness of young people in Britain and in Germany for work and found that the British cohort was better prepared for employment and better trained for it than its German equivalent?

Mr. Blair: I refrained from correcting the right hon. and learned Gentleman when he was speaking. I have, however, the study to which he referred. I shall read a passage to show what a biased account he has given. It states:

"Good YTS training is probably as good as that on offer in a comparable scheme in Germany. Bad YTS training, because of its lack of regulation and paucity of education content, is probably much worse. Such behaviour gives a clear signal that in Britain training is not accorded anything resembling the status that it enjoys in Germany."

Mr. Clarke: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on having the study. It is a large tome and he has flagged only one passage, which he has quoted, which is a criticism of only one part of YTS. It is the conclusion of the study to which I drew his attention. It deals with overall policy and the overall education and training of our young people. He will know that the conclusion is the one to which I referred.

Mr. Blair: I am sure that we shall be able to enter into interesting correspondence. It is rather odd to suggest that such—*[Interruption.]* With all due respect, I think that I should get on.

Faced with the twin evils of the waste of those who are unemployed and the poor education of those who are in employment, surely the Secretary of State for Employment should act and announce not employment action but a proper work creation programme in which people will be paid on a rate-for-the-job basis. Secondly, he should ensure that all young people who leave school are employed with a training contract that guarantees high-quality training for them. The scandal of hundreds of thousands of young people leaving school and going into work without any training would be unthinkable abroad and it should be stopped here.

Thirdly, the right hon. and learned Gentleman should adopt our proposal for a minimum training investment contribution to be made by all companies. He should drop the absurd notion, which is still the declared policy of the Government, that the system of national qualifications should be self-financing without Government support. Fourthly, he should provide the funding necessary to meet in full the Government's guarantees to young people and the unemployed. He should accept our proposal for a programme targeted on the unskilled——

Mr. Howard: Which of the spending commitments that the hon. Gentleman has just identified are among the priorities identified by his right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), the shadow Chancellor?

Mr. Blair: That is all set out in our Budget submissions, and I tell the right hon. and learned Gentleman that every time we have a debate. Every one of those suggestions, could be implemented, but none has been. If the Government were serious about meeting the long-term challenges facing this country, rather than being engaged in short-term tricks to get them through the election, in the

autumn statement they would rule out tax cuts until the problems with health, education, training and transport had been properly resolved.

What did we hear today? We heard nothing new and nothing positive. We heard an attack on the social charter, which all other EC countries have agreed upon. If the Government continue with their narrow, blinkered and isolationist attacks on the European Community out of fear of their own right wing, so that we are excluded from effective participation in Europe, the only losers in the long term will be Britain and the British people.

Of course, we also heard the usual attack on the minimum wage. So successful has the Secretary of State been on that subject, that six months after he began his campaign, the most recent opinion poll evidence shows that even 70 per cent. of Tory voters are now in favour of a minimum wage. The problem with the right hon. and learned Gentleman is that he is immensely persistent, but not always persuasive, and I can tell him why. It is not just because the British people have a basic sense of fairness, it is because of the contrast between the Government's failure to defend those on miserable rates of pay and their failure to act on privatised boardrooms awarding themselves exorbitant increases.

Let us compare and contrast the Government's behaviour. What did they do when British Telecom announced a £64,000 rise for Mr. Iain Vallance? They did nothing. What did they do when National Power announced a £150,000 rise for Mr. John Baker? They did nothing. What did they do when Scottish Hydro-Electric announced a rise of almost £100,000 for its chairman? They did nothing. What did they do about the £25,000 rise for the chairman of Thames Water, the £12,000 rise for the chairman of Welsh Water, the £30,000 rise for the chairman of Wessex Water or the £20,000 for the chairman of Anglia Water? They did nothing. However, when it comes to the hairdresser on £1·50 an hour, the cleaner on £2 an hour or the porter on £2·50 an hour, the Government will fight to the finish against a decent living wage.

During the current by-election campaign for the Langbaurgh constituency, we noted an advertisement in Guisborough jobcentre for a security guard at £2 an hour —"must supply own dog". That is what Conservative Members are defending when they attack our proposals. After the general election, those Tory Members who have lost their seats could apply to be that security guard, or even to do a job share with the dog.

Is it not strange that those at the top, the highest paid, require share options, five-year contracts, golden handcuffs, golden handshakes and golden goodbyes—all the stimuli of greater prosperity—while the broad mass of people require only the spur of poverty? The right hon. and learned Gentleman is right to say that the choice between the parties could not be clearer. It is between the low-wage, low-tech, low-skill economy favoured by the right hon. and learned Gentleman, and the high-wage, high-tech, high-skill economy favoured by the Opposition. It is between a labour market that changes through deregulation and fear under the Conservative party, and a labour market that adapts through education and confidence under the Labour party.

In the Prime Minister's speech to the Tory party conference, in trying to set out his vision of Britain he dealt with the freedom and choice of people at work. What did he say? Did he promise freedom from unemployment, from poor training, from arbitrary management, from exploitation or from low pay? He did not. He said that freedom was

"freedom from the destructive dictatorship of union militancy."

Twelve years after the Government said that they had solved all those problems, and 12 years after which unions in Britain have fewer freedoms than practically anywhere else in the western world, the Government still blame anyone and everyone for Britain's problems—but now there is no one to blame but themselves.

If the Government had confidence in their vision, we would not be in the third day of a debate on a Queen's Speech from a Government who have nothing left to do, but in the third day of a general election campaign to change the government of this country.

The Government attack the minimum wage because they have no answer to unemployment. They attack trade unions because they have no policies to beat the skills gap. They attack the social charter because they have nothing positive to offer the Europe of the 1990s.

After this debate, with each day that passes, the Government resemble more closely the Opposition that they will become. They should make good use of the next few months to learn the art of opposition, because after the next general election, they will need it.

4.20 pm

Mr. Keith Speed (Ashford): I hope that the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) will forgive me if I do not follow the line that he pursued, except that I note from his penultimate remarks that a future Labour Government would reintroduce the concept of prices and incomes control legislation. Many people will find that particularly interesting. Such a policy did not work before, and I assure the hon. Gentleman that it would not work in future.

I warmly welcome the provisions in the Gracious Speech, which shows that the Government's programme is by no means running out of steam. There is still much to do, and the Government are doing it. The citizens charter is a fine new concept. I welcome the provision of rights and remedies for customers of various utilities, both private and public. However, rights should be matched by responsibilities and duties. The Government have specific duties, and they ought not to shirk them.

I make no apology for referring in today's employment and education debate to a topic that, although it does not fall directly into either of those categories, has considerable implications for employment and the quality of life.

I hope that the transport proposals in the Gracious Speech, and those about which we will hear in a couple of days, in my right hon. Friend's autumn statement, will address what I and others consider to be a wrong policy and priority, in terms of parts of our infrastructure investment programme. I refer particularly to public transport and specifically to rail investment.

I declare an interest as a parliamentary consultant to the InterCity division of British Rail, but that has no relevance to the remarks that I shall make, and I have not discussed them with anyone at British Rail.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) knows, the Dartford bridge project was completed on time and to budget. It is a key part of the M25 orbital system around London, and has considerably increased its capacity at a major pinch point. The Dartford tunnel was

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partly financed by low-interest European loans, and Eurotunnel is certainly running to schedule, if not to budget—although many of its budget increases are the result of the public sectors, in their various forms in both England and France, hindering that project.

I give those examples—there are many others—to show that private money, or a combination of private and public money, can be and is being used effectively in important infrastructure projects, so that they can be completed in a timely way and we may all benefit from them.

When it comes to rail investment, we are in a different situation. The Government and Treasury policy is that finance must be provided in one of a number of different ways, including by direct grant from the Treasury—and every spending Department knows how difficult it is to obtain such grants—by tightly controlled Treasury external financing limits, by revenues from customers—that means extremely high fares and charges for goods and freight—or, finally, by capital help through the sale of surplus property assets.

In a recession, revenue does not flow in so freely, or to such a large extent, for passengers or goods. We find that the screw has been tightened by the Treasury—the external financial limits are certainly being restricted; we also find that the value of property is depressed, even if that property can be sold, so the money will not be available from that source, either. None the less, new wagons, track, infrastructure and locomotives are needed. In fact, if the best value for money is to be obtained we need reasonably uninterrupted production lines, rather than stop-go ordering of railway equipment.

When the country emerges from recession—as it is doing now—the screws may be loosened from rail investment, but the expense will then be greater, and the railways will have to compete with many other concerns as industrial expansion gets under way.

What is the solution? If a project meets the tight financial criteria of both British Rail and the Treasury—basically, a 9 per cent. rate of return in real terms—I think that the railway authorities should be able to borrow commercially from the United Kingdom, from Europe or, indeed, from anywhere else in the world that will lend them money. Alternatively, they should be able to enter into leasing arrangements for specific items of equipment: I am thinking especially of rolling stock—trucks and locomotives. Airlines and shipping, car and lorry companies have been doing that for many years.

The security for leasing arrangements can be provided either by the equipment itself, or—as with financial borrowing—by the various capital properties invested in railway and other transport undertakings. This could apply, for instance, to projects involving freight stock for the channel tunnel and the current transformation in rail freight arrangements. The economic implications are considerable. The largest United Kingdom freight wagon manufacturer, Powell Duffryn, which has plants in various parts of the United Kingdom, has just announced a major redundancy programme at its factories in Cardiff and Heywood, Lancashire, because of the lack of, and delay in, orders for its advanced high-technology wagons.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Will the hon. Gentleman pay tribute to British Rail Engineering Ltd., which has had precisely the same problem? BREL now suspects that political blocks are being placed in its way within British Rail management. It is perfectly capable of producing new rolling stock, but it is not being given the opportunity to do so.

Mr. Speed: I was going to mention BREL in connection with the manufacture of passenger wagons. There may be something in what the hon. Lady says; however, I do not wish to become involved in the inner politics of British Rail. My point is that, if items of equipment that are needed and can pay their way—such items would certainly be of considerable use to both passenger and goods companies—could be provided now, employment prospects would be much improved in BREL, Powell Duffryn and the rest of the rail industry.

The Networker train is very relevant to the comments made by the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody). It is needed to replace 35-year-old stock; it can pay its way financially, producing a positive rate of return; successive Transport Ministers have made commitments to the Networker 471 in Kent; and there is no doubt that it could substantially improve the finances of Network SouthEast, and the quality of life for my constituents and many others throughout the region.

The Heathrow rail link project has been going backwards and forwards for a long time. In the meantime, in competitive international terms Heathrow is falling behind Amsterdam, Paris and Frankfurt, where huge investment is being made in airport infrastructure. Another example is British Rail's major upgrading of the west coast main line. A parochial point is that Ashford international station, which is vital to the future of the channel tunnel when it opens, is located in my constituency. Financially, it more than pays its way, yet it is caught up in this awful catch-22 when it comes to investment in the railways.

I stress that I am not asking for, and that I do not believe in, subsidies for these and many other schemes that are economically viable. If, however, the private sector where to be involved in the financing of such projects, there would be benefits to the operator and the supplier, whether it be British Rail Engineering Ltd., Powell Duffryn, or Westinghouse. Customers would be able to enjoy the benefits of such investment very quickly, instead of having to wait for a very long time. For example, the Networker is expected to be operational by 1995 at the earliest, but it may not be operational for some considerable time after that. By then, the rolling stock on the relevant lines will be over 40 years old. I am afraid that life does not being at 40 for Network SouthEast's rolling stock.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): My hon. Friend refers to the Networker rolling stock. It is not necessary to differentiate between the supply of rolling stock coming on stream later this year for the north Kent loop line and the rolling stock needed elsewhere? We should congratulate both the Government and British Rail on the supply of new rolling stock on the north Kent and Dartford loop lines, which will make a great deal of difference to the users of those lines.

Mr. Speed: My hon. Friend is right, but that is the Networker 465, not the Networker 471. The Networker 471 travels longer distances down the Kent coastline. I congratulate my hon. Friend and the people of north Kent. However, if there had been a proper investment

regime along the lines that I have postulated, there could have been a smooth flow from the Networker 465 to the Networker 471. British Rail told me some time ago, as did the Minister, that we could have had these vehicles in position and providing a much better quality of journey for passengers in 1993. Now it is to be 1995, or beyond. No one in British Rail or the Department of Transport can tell me when it will be operational. People may even be laid off production lines and then laid on again when production starts for the new Networker 471. That would be total nonsense, and extremely expensive.

I hope that we can make this fundamental change. It has both employment and infrastructure connotations. A more efficient passenger and freight transport system will be better for Britain's economic future. It would bring us more into line with what our European Community partners are doing. This form of rail project financing has been adopted by them for many years. Such a change would not bring about an apocalyptic crisis of economic confidence. The Treasury would not like it, but since 1945 the Treasury's track record on transport projects makes me believe that, if it is against a project, that project merits serious consideration.

The Gracious Speech referred to measures that would be taken to prepare for the privatisation of British Rail. In his party conference speech at Blackpool, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport referred to the initiatives that could be taken between now and the election to prepare for the privatisation of British Rail. This would be an excellent way of doing both. It would ensure that investment projects were coming forward, that employment was being generated and that a better quality of service was being provided for British Rail customers. Apart from making economic sense, it would be politically popular.

I hope that those who sit on the Treasury Bench will grasp this nettle and ensure that, at long last, there is an investment regime for our transport industries that is up to date and that can compete with what is happening in the rest of the Community.

4.34 pm

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): I happily concur with the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Speed) about the general conduct of the Treasury. It seemed that his remarks commanded the assent of the whole House. I hope that his message will be properly conveyed to those concerned.

I should like to join in the debate on employment, but so little is left of the Minister after he has been torn apart by my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) —I have witnessed a few such occasions—that it is almost an act of sadism for anybody else to join in. My hon. Friend, with his customary fairness, included the Secretary of State for Education and Science in his attacks. The right hon. and learned Gentleman retired severely hurt after two interventions, so I do not suppose he will try to intervene again today. He showed considerable courage by intervening a second time after he had been flattened only a few minutes previously.

I hope that the House will permit me to make a few comments on the subject that was discussed last Friday. If I had been present, I would have sought to raise the subject of Yugoslavia. The events on the Yugoslav coastline, which I know fairly well, are deeply tragic for the people who live there and for all the peoples of the area. However, the British Government and other Governments that are concerned have not yet done anything like enough to try to deal with the problem. I hope that they hear the representations that are being made by myself and others.

When events began some months ago, it was clear that the real aggressors were the Serbian authorities in the Army and the Government, who had almost 98 per cent. of the military strength on their side. I am not saying that there was no provocation from the Croatians, but when the assaults were launched, everybody in the area knew that the overwhelming military force was in the hands of the Serbian authorities. The world therefore should have warned them of the consequences of unleashing those mammoth attacks. There are no Serbian enclaves along that coastline and there are no Serbians hiding or seeking protection in Dubrovnik or Cavtat, which was almost destroyed the other day.

We are witnessing an act of barbarism on a horrific scale—the worst since the second world war. Not only are innocent people being killed by an overwhelming military force being let loose against them, but the Serbs are seeking to grab territories and areas by acts of aggression. If they hang on to those areas, it will reflect disgracefully on the whole world.

In the light of those terrible developments, the Government and some European Governments have sought to intervene. My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) put the case for such intervention more forcefully than the Government have.

When we reach the deadline next Tuesday or Wednesday, I hope that the full authority of the British Government will be thrown behind those who have resisted the aggression, and that they will not reward the aggressors. If that were to happen, the consequences not merely for Yugoslavia but the world at large would be serious. I have many friends from different parts of Yugoslavia—Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. What is happening there is a tragedy of the first order: I do not believe that the House or the country has yet seen its true nature. Action must be taken. I am sure that Lord Carrington is aware of most of the facts that I have recited and that he is seeking to ensure that the members of the European Community rally together. I just wanted to spend a few minutes underlining my views.

Conservative party spokesmen have fiercely denounced international employment arrangements, but they hold a short-sighted view. I suppose that I am one of the few Members of Parliament who remembers one of the ways in which decent Governments in the 1930s wanted to secure new approaches to deal with unemployment and to provide better conditions in the workplace. International action was needed, and that was largely why the International Labour Organisation was set up.

One aspect that inhibited intelligent action to deal with unemployment and workers' problems was the lack of international machinery. It was thought that a Government who wanted to deal separately with a problem would have no chance of succeeding, because their actions would be sabotaged by other countries that were not willing to join in.

I should have thought that any Government who seriously wanted to improve working conditions or to deal with the worldwide unemployment problem would welcome international action. Instead, whenever the Secretary of State for Employment opens his mouth, he

[Mr. Michael Foot]

tries to sabotage any plan—great or small—to deal with the problem. I am proud of the fact that, when I was Secretary of State for Employment, I introduced legislation to provide maternity leave—I was probably the first Minister in this country's history to do so. One of the first mean-minded actions of the Conservative Government in 1979 and 1980 was to diminish the effect of the maternity leave provisions that we had introduced, even those that were not far reaching. Our measures were just the beginning of reasonable, intelligent, humane legislation.

The Government object to extending maternity leave legislation. I do not know which countries have a worse or better record than Britain, but in the main this country lags behind most other western European countries in introducing such legislation.

Mr. Howard *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Foot: The right hon. and learned Gentleman shakes his head. We shall see. He is not always right in these matters.

If we are not lagging behind, why do we not lead the way, as we started to do under the Labour Government? Some countries are now well ahead of us. We should try to catch up. If the Government are so mean-minded as to think that we do not need modern legislation to provide proper maternity leave, that is a shameful state of affairs, particularly as they said recently that they were in favour of doing something for women. However, I saw no reference in the Prime Minister's statement the other day to this latest mean-minded approach.

Many of us—not only in the Labour party but throughout Europe—believe that shorter working hours may help to deal with long-term unemployment. Good employers in this country are eager to have shorter hours. Indeed, most of the best employers have always been ready to discuss such measures and many have discovered that, if there is decent control over working hours, they will get a much better response from their workers.

I believe that the Government are even contemplating doing away with the restrictions on miners' working hours. We shall tear the Government apart on that plan, just as on everything else. I do not know whether they dare go ahead. Miners led the way in calling for a shorter working week. The limit on miners' hours was one of the great triumphs of legislation secured by the trade union movement. As engineers and others know, similar rules and similarly intelligent provisions apply to other trades.

Are the Government seriously saying that it is a good idea not to have such an agreement on working hours? If it is a good idea to have some agreements, most of the arguments that the Secretary of State for Employment constantly uses about the minimum wage are blown out of the water. His first lot of figures were torn to tatters by Mr. Peter Kellner in an article in *The Independent*. Many hon. Members will have read that article and I am sure that I have advertised it well for those who did not. I plead with hon. Members to read the article and the reply by the Secretary of State, which virtually confirms Mr. Kellner's case. The Secretary of State seems to think that the purpose of the debate is to extract apologies. He would have to apologise non-stop if he had to tell the House the truth about the minimum wage, rather than distorting the argument as he goes around the country.

Unemployment is a worldwide problem. One way to deal with part of the problem is to have policies in Europe and further afield, including regional policies. The Secretary of State taunted the Opposition, asking whether we had any plans for the money that was to be allocated to restore regional policies. I believe that such policies should be promoted over the proper period. I come from an area where unemployment problems were grossly intensified by the Government's removing almost every regional advantage that it ever had.

The Secretary of State does not seem to understand some of the main policies which were built up by the Labour Government after 1945—regional policies that made comparative advantages possible for the most heavily hit areas in Scotland, Wales and the north-east. The Labour Government introduced effective regional policies which played a major part in ensuring the full employment that generally existed in the country between 1945 and 1970. Without such policies, maintaining full employment would have been inconceivable. Those policies were generally sustained until the first of the great recessions for which the Conservative Government have been responsible.

The Government started to remove regional policies that had worked effectively. They distributed some of the money in income tax reductions, but, whatever they did with it, they took huge sums from areas which had received funds before. Each time they did so in Wales, we put the case to the relevant Secretary of State for Employment. Each of them said, "You'll find our new regional policy will be just as good as the one you had. We know what we're doing. Don't worry too much." What happened? The bitter, harsh experience is that 12 per cent. unemployment has been translated to 14 or 15 per cent. and male unemployment is again back to more than 20 per cent.

Not only are we afflicted by the general atmosphere of the Government's economic policy, but we are being hit even more by the way in which the Government are withdrawing any sensible regional policies.

When the Secretary of State charges our Front-Bench spokesmen, asking what amount of money we will devote to regional policy, I hope that he will get an answer from a Government in power who understand that it is essential for the well-being of the United Kingdom, including Scotland, Wales, the north-east and the rest, that a full-scale regional policy be properly restored.

I hope that the Secretary of State will never again jeer about that as he has done today. If he thinks that this is prejudice, he need only read the front page of the *Western Mail* today. It used to be called the "Conservative Party Advertiser" but it is not quite like that now—the party does not have much to advertise. In an article headlined "Factories lying idle" it states:

"More than 1,000 factories are now lying idle across Wales as massive amounts of industrial space fall vacant every week, it has been revealed.

In go-ahead Gwent"—

that is my county, which is go-ahead, as we seek every advantage in trying to assist our people and to provide jobs—

"alone there are more than 400 units waiting for occupation, and top of the list in the county which has attracted more businesses than most is an 80,000 sq ft. building in Tredegar."

Tredegar is in my constituency, but there are 400 units vacant throughout Gwent.

I am not sure whether the Secretary of State voted against the programme that we wisely introduced—the Welsh Development Agency—but I think that the Secretary of State for Education and Science, who is sitting beside him, must have voted against it. He remembers everything in his past so well. Indeed, I had a debate with him in Oxford the other day when he thought that he had invented the national health service. We had to put him right about such simple historical facts and I hope that, he will have the chance to correct that.

That Government have not invented any good regional policies. All that they have done is demolish the good policies that we introduced. I hope that, when we get that new Labour Government, a regional policy will be one of the major measures introduced. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), who will be Chancellor of the Exchequer, knows about these matters very well, because he has spoken about them. I am sure that one of the ways in which we can tackle deep-seated mass unemployment is through an intelligent regional policy.

Mr. Janman: I certainly do not doubt the sincerity of the right hon. Gentleman's remarks, but throughout modern economic history, when any Government have sought to misdirect national resources in a manner that goes completely against the grain of the marketplace, has not the result of such a regional policy been exactly the opposite to what the right hon. Gentleman has sought to achieve? There is no better example than the fact that every Labour Government since the war have increased unemployment.

Mr. Foot: I am glad to be able to enlighten the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman), especially when he talks in terms of what has happened to the numbers of unemployed during Labour Governments. There has never been a Labour Government who have had to face unemployment on this scale. Never in the history of recorded figures have a Labour Government tolerated unemployment on this scale, whether in the United Kingdom as a whole or in Wales, Scotland or anywhere else. So I hope that that lie will never be preached again.

The hon. Member for Thurrock asked whether I did not know that if one took economic resources from one area and instilled them into others that was merely a way of upsetting the ordinary economic mechanism and that it did not result in any advances. The last time that I heard that argument so brazenly presented was by Mr. Neville Chamberlain's spokesman before the war. That is what they said in the 1930s. They said that one could not solve unemployment on such a scale and that if one invested £1 million in one area, having taken it away from profitable Birmingham or wherever, it would leave us worse off in the end. It is partly because of that false economics that the Conservatives have never had a regional policy. That policy does not work and if one applies it in that way one can only deepen slumps—just as the Government are doing now.

Every time the Secretary of State comes to the Dispatch Box to reaffirm that laissez-faire doctrine, about 100,000 people are added to the unemployment figures.

We can deal with mass unemployment on this scale only if we have a Government who are determined to do so, and we can deal with it better if, internationally, Governments are determined to do so. I hope a new Labour Government will not only apply those policies but will lead the rest of Europe instead of squabbling behind them or relinquishing the whole of the case. We have the chance to do that.

The idea that one cannot do anything about unemployment is the real gospel of despair. This country is not prepared to accept the gospel of despair in mass unemployment, which is returning on such a scale today.

4.56 pm

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): I am always interested to listen to the long-extending memory of the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot). His memory goes back further than I could possibly hope to remember.

I was interested in his reiteration of the value of regional policies, because the criteria on which such a policy would be administered is of interest to one who comes from a county which is probably being hit by a more rapidly rising rate of unemployment than almost anywhere else. One must ask whether, in those circumstances, if a regional policy of the kind that the right hon. Gentleman had in mind were in place Kent would be a prime recipient of assistance.

Such questions have become much harder to answer as a consequence of the Government's astonishing success in closing the north-south divide, which was thought to be wholly irremediable when they came to office. The Government have seen an increase in prosperity throughout the United Kingdom and a sharing of both good times and bad.

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the rate of male unemployment in Glasgow is 20 per cent.? What is it in his constituency?

Mr. Rowe: The rate of unemployment in Glasgow has been very high for a long time, and I accept that that is unfortunate. However, the truth of the matter is that the Scottish economy is in a better state now than it has been for many years and is continuing to thrive. I realise that it is constantly in the interests of the Opposition to belittle the Government's successes, but that is certainly one. Two things were said when the Government took office. It was said, first, that the country was ungovernable, and secondly, that there was an unbridgeable north-south gap. Neither of those points is true after the years in which we have been in office.

I especially welcome the sentence in the Queen's Speech which points to the privatisation of British Rail. This is not the occasion for a detailed analysis for the evaluation of the alternative proposals for a high-speed rail link to the channel tunnel. As some hon. Members may know, I have some interest in that subject, and I hope that I shall be able to have an Adjournment debate in which to discuss the process by which we arrived at the present stage of the project. The confusion, the inappropriate pressure by British Rail, the flawed methodology of the evaluation and other defects in the system merit a debate, but that is not appropriate in the context of the Queen's Speech.

It is essential to draw to the Government's attention the extraordinary misery of some of my constituents who are still in complete confusion about where the route is to go. The changes in alignment which will be necessary to meet

[Mr. Rowe]

the new criteria leave those constituents wholly confused and able neither to buy nor sell their properties, or to do anything that they should be able to do.

It is appropriate to this debate to raise two general points. The first is the need for a serious rail freight strategy. It is incomprehensible to me that I should have gone on Thursday last to a seminar at which the chairman of British Rail, a man for whom I have considerable admiration, was able to tell us that British Rail had great difficulty in competing in the freight market because all that rail freight was really equipped to do was to carry aggregates, heavy metals and traditional Victorian freight cargoes. He must be almost alone in that belief.

It certainly is not a belief shared by the freight manager of SNCF who is busy setting up and running a freight operation for carrying highly sensitive cargoes, such as chilled foods, at great speed around France. It is not a view shared by the managing director of Charter Rail, a company in which British Rail has a 20 per cent. holding. He told me that he has an operation that would be able to deliver chilled foods to the centre of town at 3 am in time for them to be on the supermarket shelves if only British Rail did not think that it would be more satisfactory to carry gravel. That will not be a tenable position for much longer in any circumstances.

Switzerland and Austria have insisted on having a major investment project because they believe that their ecology is too sensitive to be battered constantly by heavy lorries. Does any hon. Member seriously believe that Switzerland and Austria will be the only two countries in Europe to take that view about their environment in the next few years?

Mrs. Dunwoody: Does it not occur to the hon. Gentleman that the difference is in investment? No one doubts for a moment that British Rail is perfectly capable of running high-quality services. However, at present the freight division is turning in a considerable loss. It is the Government whom the hon. Gentleman supports who do not want British Rail to invest.

Mr. Rowe: I have considerable doubt about British Rail's capacity to run a profitable freight strategy, because it has no interest in doing so. The chairman of British Rail has just said that it is not the kind of operation in which he wants to be. As he said last Thursday, he is willing to have the operation taken off his hands. I believe that it will be taken off his hands by private entrepreneurs such as Robin Macleod of Thamesport, who is already interested in running his own freight services because he cannot get the service that he wants from British Rail.

If my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport were here, I would say to him that one does not have to be a Daniel to interpret the writing on the wall. The writing is that the heavy lorry will no longer be the darling of all Secretaries of State for Transport. The day of the heavy lorry as the principal mover of long-distance freight is under threat because people think that it is environmentally unsound. It will gradually find itself taxed to a point at which the railways will become wholly competitive—and high time too.

We should get British Rail out of the lead position on the channel tunnel link. It is extraordinary that British Rail should once more be given the lead role in developing a link in which it has no confidence and which it fought against with unmitigated ferocity. I am not being hostile to British Rail in particular, but I believe that British Rail is in the wrong place to take such a role.

British Rail is bound to look at the issue with its interests in mind. We need someone to look at the issue with the interests of the country as a whole in mind. I know that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport believes that, too. If we could find a private consortium to take the lead role and to run with it, we should do so. I find it extraordinary that Ove Arup, whose project is to be worked up, is somehow relegated to being a company with which British Rail sometimes has conversations. That is an extraordinary position.

I turn now to the main topics of today's debate. We have achieved a remarkable turnaround in training and in education. There has been an extraordinary change from a system under which we had time-linked apprenticeships which meant that no matter how clever one was or how well one did, one had to take the whole time, to a system under which people will be assessed on what they can do and not on how long it has taken them.

The coming decade will see a considerable acceleration of the involved society. Like all developed industrialised countries, we have somehow managed to fragment our society far more than is good for it. The number of broken homes, the number of single parents and the number of people living on their own has grown disproportionately large. It is time to start changing that, and we are beginning to do so.

I draw the House's attention to, for example, the charitable activities of the Lord Mayor of London. This year, he has chosen to support tutoring in schools. The project involves students from colleges, universities and polytechnics chosing to spend some of their time working in schools that welcome them with pupils who are either in need of special educational help or who are well ahead of the rest of the class. What is so striking about that is that not only do the children who are helped do better in their exams, as one might expect, but it is becoming increasingly clear that the students who help them also do better in theirs. That is a consequence of an increase in their self-esteem and their understanding of how to teach and relate to other young people. I should like a tremendous acceleration of that programme.

The days are over when the professionals believed that, if only they had enough resources, if only there were enough of them and if only they were sufficiently well trained, they could solve all society's problems. It is beginning to be understood that such volunteers can extend the professional's reach and be of real assistance to them. In that respect, I draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment to the enormous reservoir of people who are leaving full-time paid employment with another 30 years of active life ahead of them? What a tremendous resource that is. We have only started to scratch the surface of what such people could do to help, if they so chose.

For example, one has only to think of the number of young, isolated mothers with a child or children. They are often terrified of their babies and unclear about how to bring them up, thinking that every time the baby cries it is their fault and feeling that they have no one to whom to relate. If they could be assisted and befriended by someone who has brought up her own child—someone who would read to and play with the child—in most cases that work

would be welcomed and better done purely by volunteers. However, in many parts of the country volunteers receive expenses and some receive slightly more than their expenses, which helps them if they have a limited income —*[Interruption.]* I dimly perceive a muttering that suggests that there is a protagonist of the old belief that everything should be left to the professionals. That is fair enough, but I think that that belief is outmoded.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Rowe: I am delighted to give way to someone who is at last standing up.

Mrs. Dunwoody: As a mother and grandmother, I should prefer any support to be given to young mothers who do not know how to bring up children to be professional, qualified and paid. I am afraid that that marks me out from the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Rowe: It not only marks the hon. Lady out as someone who has a tremendous belief in professionals but, uncharacteristically, as someone who is unrealistic, because there is no possibility of the numbers that we are talking about being reached by the medicine which she prescribes.

We must pay tribute to the Government for the development of the national vocational qualification. It is an innovative and valuable method of validating the experience of large numbers of people. I am slightly anxious that the original reason for its introduction—to validate experience in ways that could then be assessed, compared and used as building blocks for further advancement in a professional career—seems to have taken second place to the creation of NVQs as an alternative qualification ab initio.

In the health service, which seems to have a strange reluctance to embrace NVQs with the enthusiasm that they deserve, the value of NVQs is that someone who has been caring for an elderly relation for many years and who has learnt all kinds of practical skills, such as bathing and feeding, could have those skills validated when the relative dies and could be accepted on the first rung of the professional development ladder. I hope that that will not be lost.

The Government's actions in the polytechnic and university sectors are long overdue and very valuable. Having been a teacher at university for a while, I well understand the anxiety of some university staff that amalgamating the polytechnic and university sectors could result in a dilution of quality. But most people in the universities understand that the polytechnics have won for themselves a place in the education system that makes such anxieties out of place. Provided that quality assurance for courses is kept in place—it is vital that is—we shall be safe. Many university courses seem to be extremely poor and I hope that they will be subject to a more effective peer audit than the external examiner sometimes achieves.

In a debate that spans employment and education, it is valuable to say that, if we are to have more people entering engineering, science and mathematics as opposed to the arts, we must move on both sides of the equation. We are doing our best to make recruitment to those courses as attractive as possible, but the disparity between the amount of work required of students on arts courses in many colleges and universities, compared with that required of students on engineering or technical courses, is so huge that any student who is ambivalent about which side of the divide to fall is bound to choose the arts course, which leaves students endless time to enjoy themselves in other ways. That needs to be looked at seriously.

With only 4 per cent. of the population entering retirement with any form of pre-retirement education, the difficulties of adjusting to that long period without a framework of work or a regular income have been greatly underestimated. Retirement is one of the peak moments for divorce and many people need assistance with what to do with their money, how to handle the extra time and how to cope with changing family relationships. I suggest that, on the day of their retirement, as part of a retirement package, retired people should receive a voucher entitling them to go to a recognised one or two-day course—however much we could afford—on pre-retirement or retirement education. Thus they could learn about the opportunities as well as the challenges ahead of them.

5.18 pm

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): Britain is an open market—we are open to western Europe, the United States, Japan and many other countries—which means that we must have world-class industry, technology, investment and an educated population trained to world-class standards. Without that, we can neither compete nor survive. We shall lose not only our markets overseas but also our domestic markets to foreign imports. Our factories and industries will close and we shall have long-term mass unemployment.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury has written a letter to the Department of Employment in which he states that there is no connection between training and unemployment. How wrong can one be? How cynical can one get? In public, the Government pay lip service to training, but in private they do not believe that one should waste money on it.

The Government have been in power for 12 years but they have still not got it right. They have not tackled the problem adequately. We are still falling behind our competitors, and the skills gap between ourselves and overseas countries is still widening.

Over those 12 years, the Government have chopped and changed their policy. We have had the youth opportunities programme, the training and opportunities programme, the youth training scheme, the job training scheme and the community programme. All those programmes were lauded on their introduction and subject to much hype, but many of them have since been scrapped. In the past 12 years, the Manpower Services Commission has been replaced by the Training Agency, and now we have the training and enterprise councils.

Now, when we ask questions about training, the Government hide behind the TECs. We cannot get any answers from the Government, because they say that everything has been handed over to the TECs. They are now responsible for running the Government's programmes for the unemployed and, perhaps more importantly, for stimulating enterprise, regenerating local economies and increasing the skills levels of the employed work force. They are supposed to bring about the so-called training revolution. That is the raison d'etre of the TEC movement —it does not exist solely to run programmes for the unemployed.

[Mr. Ron Leighton]

Although the Government have given the TECs the responsibility, they have not given them the tools to do the job. In fact they have taken those tools away and, as a result, the TECs are being strangled in their first year of operation. A year ago, the launch of the TECs was accompanied by swingeing cuts in their budgets. What a way to launch them. The Secretary of State is well aware that the reduced the expenditure on employment training by £365 million.

The employment training programme was always underfunded, it was a penny-pinching scheme. The Government did replace one third of that cut. We do not hear much about that programme nowadays, but the previous Secretary of State never stopped hyping its benefits. We used to read all the advertisements about "training the workers without jobs for the jobs without workers",
but we do not hear much about that now.

We were told that the ET programme was the greatest retraining scheme ever attempted, but it was underfunded and the training offered was of poor quality. Now, we are told that it had a 70 per cent. drop-out rate and that, of those who completed their training, fewer than 50 per cent. got a job. However, instead of increasing the funding to improve the quality of training, the Government propose to reduce such funding even further.

The Government claim that all those aged between 18 and 25 who have been unemployed for six months are guaranteed a training place on ET. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) has pointed out that the Select Committee on Employment has already received about 60 letters from local TECs about the problems with those guarantees. It is absurd and preposterous for the Secretary of State to claim that those letters are out of date. Those letters are only a few days old. Many of the TECs have written to say that they are unable to implement the guarantee that the Government have given.

When it comes to youth training, the Government also hide behind the TECs. They pretend that every young person without a job is guaranteed a youth training place, but that is not true. There are hundreds and hundreds of young people across the country to whom that guarantee is not being delivered. In my borough, 615 people are without such a place. Hundreds of young people are now left in limbo and thrown on the scrap heap at 16 and 17. They are told that there is no chance of a job, but now there is not even the chance of a place on YT.

It is not long ago that we used to hear about the demographic time bomb. We were told that employers would be fighting one another to get young people. Perhaps that is why the Government made large cuts in the amount of money available per place on the youth training scheme. Perhaps that is why they expected the employers to pay more. Many employers do not want to know, because they are now suffering from the Conservative-induced recession. Many have gone out of business and the rest are struggling to survive. They have made many redundant, and they are not taking on young people. It is therefore becoming impossible for the TECs and trainers to find employer placements for young people.

The employers who are supposed to pay more towards training are making no contribution at all. Many trainers are now trying to provide project places, which are often more expensive, with no contribution from employers. The sums do not add up. As a result, the quality of training is suffering because such project programmes are cheaper and inferior in comparison with employer placements. It is all to do with getting more bums on seats and lectures. It has nothing to do with quality training. Young people are also unable to attain NVQs because of insufficient employer placements.

I have paid the Secretary of State a great compliment by listening to what he says. He stands up regularly in the House and says that the Government are committed to the guarantee of training, but what do those weasel words mean? What the right hon. and learned Gentleman says sounds good, and one imagines that that guarantee will be delivered, but not so. The Government say that all the responsibility rests with the TECs, but they do not give them the necessary resources.

The Select Committee on Employment has received letters from those responsible for the TEC in Dorset to say that it is not delivering the employment training guarantee. The same is true of YT and ET guarantees, judging from letters received from the TECs in greater Nottingham, the heart of England, Lincolnshire, Manchester, Milton Keynes, north-east Wales, north Nottinghamshire, south-east Cheshire, Teesside, west London, and central London. In east London, where I come from, they are unable to deliver the guarantee. What sort of commitment is that?

The Secretary of State may stand up and say that the Government are committed to the guarantee but someone else must deliver. However, those responsible have had to admit that they are not delivering the goods.

Before this debate, I got in touch with the careers service office in my borough and asked about the latest figures on employment placements. The latest figures available cover September and October. In September, in Newham, 615 people had no YT place. In Redbridge, the fiture was 537, in Tower Hamlets, 724 and in Barking 443. In the October count, there were 820 young people awaiting a placement in Havering and 577 in Waltham Forest. What sort of guarantee is that? Those young people do not have a YT place because the local TEC does not have the placements and it does not have the resources to find them.

I do not know whether the Secretary of State is aware that he has given extra resources to the east London TEC for 1,000 more places, but that is not nearly enough. However, the east London TEC has had to tell the careers service that it does not have the resources to find those placements. It has said that it is up to the careers service to find those placements.

The Secretary of State is allegedly committed to guaranteeing placements—whatever that means—but he has put the responsibility on the TECs. In my borough, that means that, when the careers service produces the bodies, the same TEC says that it cannot do anything about it, because it does not have the resources to find the placements. It has turned to the careers service and said that it is up to it to canvass for those placements. It has undertaken to canvass for 1,000 places.

In the vain struggle by the TECs to deliver the guarantees, all their time is being monopolised—so are all their efforts and all their money. They have had to raid all their other budgets in an attempt to implement the guarantees to the unemployed. They have had to abandon their business plans and their other key projects. They

have had to restrict themselves to reacting in the short term, to wrestling with the Government's programmes for the unemployed. They have been failing in the attempt. But this was not the job for which they were set up. The Training Agency could have done it. The job could have been left to that agency if these Government unemployment projects were all that were at stake.

Business people from the private sector were called in to perform the other tasks—meeting the needs of the local economy, developing enterprise and regenerating the local economy. That was the raison d'etre of the TECs—but it has all had to be abandoned, with a consequent loss of morale and growth of cynicism in the TEC movement.

Over the past year, unemployment has risen by more than 750,000, but the money for the TECs has not increased commensurately, so they are trying to cope with demand-led programmes on cash-limited budgets. That cannnot be done.

The Secretary of State's predecessor, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) set up the TECs; this Secretary of State is strangling them.

I believe that we are about to have a public expenditure statement. Last year, the Secretary of State acquiesced while the Treasury stamped all over him. There were major cuts. The right hon. and learned Gentleman let his Department down; he let the TECs down and he let the work force down. What about this year? There has been a phenomenal increase in unemployment, an increase that continues with the loss of 5,000 manufacturing jobs every week.

The TECs are virtually overwhelmed by the recession. If there is not to be a major collapse of morale—I hope that the Secretary of State takes what I am saying seriously, because I intend to keep in close contact with the TECs—the right hon. and learned Gentleman must obtain a very substantial increase in the funding for his Department and for the TECs. I do not expect him to tell me now whether he has got such an increase, but unless he obtains one, morale will collapse.

There could be no better use of public money in a recession than counter-cyclical expenditure on training. We should spend the money on training instead of wasting £20 billion on dole queues. We should take £1 billion of that money and use it to put people back at work, so that we do not have to pay them unemployment benefit and they can begin paying taxes. That is what the Secretary of State for Employment must do. Unless he does, the TECs will be overwhelmed by this recession and he will do great damage to them and to the country.

5.33 pm

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): I hope that the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) will forgive me if I do not follow his line of argument. I should like to concentrate on education today.

I welcome the Gracious Speech, particularly the part about the introduction of the parents charter. I also welcome the part referring to making more information about schools generally available.

Just as war is too important to be left to the generals, so education is too important to be left to the educationists. I firmly believe that most parents know best what is right for their children. We need to provide them with a vehicle that they can use to improve school standards, and the charter provides the engine for parental ambitions.

One of the main thrusts of Government policy has been to involve parents in the education of their children. Grant-maintained schools are an example of greater parental involvement. The requirement for better school records is another. The charter brings together a number of differing strands and helps to weave a policy formalising parental involvement.

Since knowledge is power, according to Chairman Mao, the charter puts power firmly into the hands of parents by giving them, perhaps for the first time, real knowledge about their children's educational progress and about the schools that their children attend.

I welcome the new inspection arrangements——

Mr. Dunn: Hear, hear.

Mr. Pawsey: I am delighted to have the support of my hon. Friend and I am not at all surprised that he, as a former Education Minister, joins me in welcoming the new arrangements. They will ensure that schools are inspected a great deal more frequently. Regular school inspections lift standards and show teachers where things are going wrong. Because the inspections will be frequent, they will ensure that standards do not slip too far.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Does my hon. Friend agree that another great advantage will be that reports will no longer be written in jargon, so that parents will be able to understand what is going on?

Mr. Pawsey: I endorse my hon. Friend's wise words.

A new organisation headed by the chief inspector of schools will be set up. The new inspectorate will be wholly independent of Government and will be able to discharge its new role without, as Opposition Members would say, interference from Ministers. The independent inspection teams will be chosen by governors from a list approved by Her Majesty's inspectorate. There will therefore be no soft options for schools, no comfortable inspections by a friend of the headmaster or even by a friend of the school—*[Interruption.]* Inspectors will be approved and will be required to undertake a rigorous and thorough inspection —*[Interruption.]* Perhaps the hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong) finds the issue of school inspections a laughing matter. Most of the nation's parents think it a matter of the utmost seriousness and will support the Government's proposals.

The principal difference under the new system will be the frequency of inspections. I have no doubt that the new arrangements will bring with them great benefits as compared with the present system, under which full inspections occur infrequently, if at all. We know that some schools have never had a full inspection. Local education authorities can organise their own inspections, which are much less rigorous than full HMI inspections —a point emphasised by the fact that they are usually undertaken by staff known as advisers, not inspectors.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): The hon. Gentleman said a moment ago that the new HMI would be completely independent of Government. How is that complete independence to be assured, and who is to appoint the new inspectors?

Mr. Pawsey: The new inspectorate will be far less dependent on the Secretary of State than it was before. I know that my right hon. and learned Friend will be able to ask inspectors to undertake inspections of specific schools, but the fact remains that they will enjoy far more independence. I hope that, when the hon. Gentleman has reflected on the new arrangements, he will join us in welcoming them, because they will help to improve the quality and standards of the state education in which most of the nation's children are educated.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: My hon. Friend is giving an extremely eloquent and accurate description of the parents charter policy. As he will know, the Bill foreshadowed in the Gracious Speech will ensure that Her Majesty's chief inspector will have his own statutory powers and duties laid down by this House. At the moment he exercises powers and duties on behalf of the Secretary of State. That is the legalism behind the policies that my hon. Friend has accurately described. Her Majesty's chief inspector will be given greater independence than that position has ever held in its 150 years.

Mr. Pawsey: I am obliged to my right hon. and learned Friend for that detailed explanation.

Mr. Haynes: I hope that, as the hon. Gentleman supports giving more teeth to inspectors, he will also support giving a number of extra teeth to the Parliamentary Commissioner. But that is not my argument. My argument is that Ministers and Secretaries of State are ducking their responsibilities, and giving responsibility to somebody else. They have done it on social security——

Mr. Pawsey: No.

Mr. Haynes: Oh, yes. In social security they set up an agency. When a constituent writes to a Minister, the Minister passes the case back to the agency, so the constituent never has access to the Minister. Ministers are ducking their responsibilities, and the sooner the general election comes, the better.

Mr. Pawsey: The hon. Gentleman and I serve on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration Select Committee, where we frequently are in agreement, but I must tell him frankly that across the Floor of the House today we are in complete disagreement. The new measures will not in any way reduce the responsibility of Ministers to this House. Indeed, they will do much to improve the quality of state education. */Interruption./* If I am allowed an opportunity to develop my speech, I shall explain why the measures will do so much to improve the quality of state education.

To return to LEA advisers. They are called advisers, not inspectors, because that more accurately reflects their role. In an LEA that recruits its advisers from its own teacher force, there is a distinct possibility and a decided risk of friends doing the business of inspection. That is why the hon. Member for Durham, North-West is wrong to regard the new inspection arrangements as in any way inferior to what has gone before. They will be a substantial improvement.

Inspectors will be trained, and HMI will monitor the standards of that training. HMI will keep a register of those able to lead the trained inspection teams and will set the standards of inspection. Those on the register will be inspected as they carry out their work and will be removed from the register if they fail to meet the rigorous standards demanded by HMI. The Secretary of State will still have powers to request HMI to undertake the inspection of specific schools.

Inspectors will also be called upon to advise the Secretary of State about the quality of the education service generally. They will draw their main evidence from their inspection of 6,000 schools every year. What an improvement that figure represents on the current position.

Inspectors will also be drawn from outside the world of mainstream education, so they will have a wider perspective than otherwise. I am certain that that will result in a positive input from those with business and industrial experience. That will help to answer the criticism that British education is too divorced from the realities of earning one's living. A broader-based inspection service has positive advantages and will help reconcile and bridge the gap between what goes on in school and in industry.

Mr. Janman: In the real world.

Mr. Pawsey: I am obliged to my hon. Friend, who rightly describes it as the real world.

Earlier I said that every year 6,000 schools would be examined. That will require a full-scale inspection of every school by HMI at least every four years. That will provide a good, up-to-date report on each school. The inspectorate will also have the opportunity of discussing matters with parents; of meeting parents and hearing their views. That brings me back to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman). She said that in the past reports on schools were regarded as almost confidential.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: As incomprehensible.

Mr. Pawsey: I acknowledge the words of my hon. Friend. Certainly the reports were seen as the prerogative of only those who needed to know. So often that was the education machine and so often it excluded parents. A light will be focussed on an area that is usually shrouded in darkness. I hope that those who want less secrecy will support this initiative.

The new system will result in more information becoming available on what goes on in the nation's schools. That will be invaluable in helping to formulate action that can be taken to improve the nation's schools. It will replace guesswork with facts. It will identify shortcomings to the benefit of our children.

Under the terms of the parents charter, parents will receive as of right five key documents. The first will be an annual written report of their child's progress. The second will be a performance table providing detailed information on all schools within a specific area. It will not matter whether those schools are controlled by the LEA or whether they are grant maintained. Thirdly, parents will be provided with a precis of the last inspection report produced by Her Majesty's inspectorate. Fourthly, parents will receive an action plan from the governing body saying how it is intended to improve any shortcomings identified by Her Majesty's inspectorate at the last inspection. Fifthly, parents will get an annual report from the school's governors. The document will provide valuable information about examination results and rates of truancy, all of which are of critical importance

to any school and the children attending it. The parents charter is a genuinely imaginative step forward designed to improve the quality and standard of state education.

Mr. Worthington: I am struck by the thinking behind the hon. Gentleman's approach to the need to make local education authorities answerable. Would he want to transfer the same rigorous approach to the training and enterprise councils to see whether the Secretary of State's undertaking that the guarantees are being met is true? Alternatively, will the TECs continue to be shrouded in commercial confidentiality?

Mr. Pawsey: I am not sure whether I should interpret that as general support for the proposals that I have been advancing, but by implication it seems that the hon. Gentleman supports the proposals. I am concentrating my remarks on education. It may well be that some of my right hon. and hon. Friends will respond to that specific point. I welcome the hon. Gentleman's support, albeit somewhat guarded, for what is going on in education.

Even Opposition Members have discovered parental involvement. Indeed, they have introduced proposals for a contract between parents and schools, whereby schools would be obliged to provide information, for example, on academic performance. There is a turn-up for the books. Labour Members are promoting for the first time the principle of excellence.

Mr. Dunn: Can my hon. Friend believe it?

Mr. Pawsey: No, I cannot.

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman is feigning surprise at what we said. I should like to know where he has been in the three years since we first made these proposals.

Mr. Pawsey: If the hon. Gentleman is serious in what he says, and if he wants to see an improvement in academic performance, why does he persist in plans to scrap the remaining grammar schools, which are centres of excellence? As usual, the hon. Gentleman speaks with forked tongue.

Mr. Dunn: Surely the answer to my hon. Friend is, by their fruits shall ye know them. Both he and I have served on the Committees examining the various Education Bills which have gone through the House since 1979. Why is it that, on every crucial measure of reform, radical though each has been, both the Liberal Democrats and the Labour party have voted against us? Surely their record is more significant than their change of heart over the past weekend or the words of the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), who we know is under orders from Mr. Mandelson to present policies better.

Mr. Pawsey: I put a slightly different interpretation on what has happened. I suspect that there is nothing like the prospect of a general election to sharpen the mind—even that of the hon. Member for Blackburn.

It is a pity that the contract that the hon. Gentleman has outlined is not legally binding. He does not say what effective redress a parent would have if a school failed a child. I suspect that the problem for Labour Members is that they have difficulty in reconciling their obligations to the great teacher unions, which still pay the Labour party's bills, with the need of average parents, who want better education for their children, and want to be more involved in the running of their children's schools. That is the dilemma facing Labour Members.

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman should address our policies rather than those that he has invented. Our parents charter, like the document that we published recently, called "Raising the Standard", addresses in detail the powers of redress that parents would have if they thought that a school was failing their children.

Mr. Pawsey: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Some of the parents in my constituency knew that the Lancashire education authority was failing their children, because cruelty was being perpetrated against them. The authority declined to take the matter to the police, so a parent did so and three teachers or teacher assistants have been convicted in the courts. That was Lancashire failing to do its duty by the parents and the children.

Mr. Pawsey: I suspect that yet another problem faces Labour Members—how to persuade parents that they believe in the principle of choice in schools. After all, they still believe that the only good state education is local authority education, that the only good form of secondary school is the neighbourhood comprehensive.

Ms. Hilary Armstrong (Durham, North-West) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Pawsey: They have resolutely opposed the emergence of grant-maintained schools, even though those schools enjoy the support of a majority of parents, as expressed through a secret ballot. What reliance can be placed on their conversion to the principle of parental power and choice when they still deny the right of parents to establish a grant-maintained school?

The Labour party remains the party of the bureaucrat and of the trade unions. Labour Members will defend the vested interest of the LEAs and of the teacher unions before those of parents or pupils. It is worth remembering that, if elected, the Labour party will abolish grammar schools, grant-maintained schools, city technology colleges and the assisted places scheme. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Hon. Members make my case for me. The Labour party has become the abolitionist party, and there is not much choice in what it advocates if all it will do is abolish the centres of excellence that we have set up.

Labour Members opposed the emergence of grant-maintained schools and see them as a threat to local authority empires. I sometimes wonder whether they understand that, for choice to have any significance, there has to be a choice between different systems and different schools. If the LEA has a monopoly, the only choice that a parent has is take it or leave it. That is one of the reasons why the grant-maintained school is genuinely important in the struggle to maintain standards. Those schools will come under the same scrutiny from the HMI as schools run by the LEA.

I look forward to the proposals advanced in the Queen's Speech being brought before the House in a Bill. I hope that the House will support a genuine effort to improve the quality and standard of state education, where the overwhelming majority of the nation's children are educated.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I was hoping that we might not have to implement Mr. Speaker's proposal to invoke the 10-minute rule from 7 to 9 o'clock but if speeches continue to be as long as they have been, we may have no alternative but to do so.

5.56 pm

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): I came here expecting debate about the Government's detailed proposals and of the Labour party's alternative proposals. I was not altogether surprised that there was more heat than light in the two opening speeches, which were directed more towards the general election campaign than the discussion of details. Sadly, I suspect that this is what we can expect for the next six months.

However, I was surprised by the way that the following speeches, with the exception of that from the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey), ignored the details of the Government's proposals. His was an interesting speech, and although wrong, it at least addressed the Government's controversial proposals, about which I hope that we shall hear in more detail in the winding-up speeches.

I hope that education as an issue, and training, which should be included with education in one Department, will be debated. More specifically, I hope that all the parties committed to it will make a reality of the rhetoric about putting education at the centre of what they want to achieve. There is no question but that, if we are to resolve the recurrent problems of the country, of which this latest recession is one of the deepest and worst examples, we must get education and training right from the start.

The Government's legislative programme has missed an opportunity. The Government have taken a delight in changing the detail of education policy, but more than that, they have missed the wider issues that face us. In a programme that looks to the past rather than to the future and is substantially irrelevant to the main issues, the policy that I most welcome is that on the abolition of the binary divide. I do so not simply because that is a long-standing Liberal Democrat policy and a reform that will be welcomed on both sides of the House but because it is a mark of the wider changes on which we need to embark.

The Government propose to abolish the artificial division between an academic elite and the rest. The division is artificial because it pays no real attention to the quality of what happens in polytechnics as compared with universities, but it has existed for as long as the different titles have been with us. The division is artificial also because it has reflected, to an extent, the different attitudes that exist between technical and academic and vocational routes in education. It is not true that polytechnics have provided a purely vocational route. Similarly it is not true that universities have provided a purely academic route. In the distinctions between the two, however, there is a reflection of the different historical past and the paths that they have trodden to reach the position that they now occupy.

There is also a reflection of the division in attitudes towards different qualifications and the different routes of learning. That is something that still marks too much the attitudes that exist outside education, and especially in the political debate. I welcome the proposed reform more as a marker for the wider reforms that are needed than as an enormous breakthrough in itself.

We must remember the financial changes that are hitting higher education, which will bring about a revolution in what is delivered at that level and the means by which it is delivered. It is a revolution that is virtually unplanned and undebated, and it has not been outlined in detail by the Government. They have set up a mechanism but they have not explained in any real detail where they believe it will take us. That is why the higher education institutions are worried about the Government's reforms. They are concerned that there is a risk to the quality of what is delivered. They are worried that there is a risk to the research base across all higher education institutions. Above all, there is concern that these risks have been taken without proper analysis and debate.

In the other reforms with which we have been presented, we see a reflection of Tory rhetoric and gut feeling about what the party believes "used to be" and not a real look to the future. The so-called parents charter has been brought about with little consultation, other than possibly with the Centre for Policy Studies.

There are plans to publish truancy figures and examination results in crude league tables, which even the Government do not use for comparisons between schools. It is proposed to privatise the schools inspectorate. That is one of the most ill-considered and impractical proposals that the House has had to debate in the education arena. It will confuse information rather than extend it; it will risk undermining standards rather than improving them. How can an inspection be independent and rigorous if the institution that is to be inspected is able to choose its own team of inspectors? The truth is as it has always been; he who pays the piper plays the tune.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have been following the hon. Gentleman's remarks with interest because his party, unlike the Labour party, has supported many of the reforms that we, the Government, have introduced, this year. On other proposals, it has reserved its position. I was startled when I heard him talk about "privatising" Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools. That is a silly term that I thought was being used only by one or two Labour Members. As, at the moment, Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools remains a public office, as we shall strengthen powers by means of the Bill that we propose and as there will be responsibility for monitoring the quality of all the registered inspectors carrying out inspections of schools, what definition of "privatising" is the hon. Gentleman using in respect of the inspectorate that he thinks justifies his strange assertion?

Mr. Taylor: If the Secretary of State checks the record —I am open to correction if I am wrong—he will find that I said that he was privatising the inspectorate, not HMI. The fact is that inspections that take place in schools are to be privatised. There is no question about that, for that is the right hon. and learned Gentleman's proposal, by any definition that he or anyone else is likely to use. He is to do so in the name of competition.

If there is to be competition between companies and choice for schools in determining who carries out the inspections, on what basis can that competition and choice exist if decisions are not based on the company that will carry out the cheapest inspection while being most likely to guarantee a good report? In what else does a school's interest lie?

The scheme has therefore received virtually no backing in the education world. That is not because it is felt that standards would improve. Educationists want improved standards and they feel that the Government's scheme risks undermining standards. They have no other reason to object to it.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to intervene again. I think that we should debate the issue now rather than later, because I shall not be able to do justice when I reply because of the limited time that will be available to me.

Surely governors will want to choose inspectors whose reports will carry clout with parents, who will have credibility and who will provide a straightforward account of a school's performance that is known to come from a good quality inspectorate. In any event, governors will be able to choose only from those inspectors who have themselves been monitored by HMI, a public agency. HMI will declare each inspector a suitably trained and qualified person for the purpose of carrying out an inspection.

Mr. Taylor: It is interesting that the Secretary of State says that governors will choose inspectors who will carry the greatest clout. It must be said that the Secretary of State has considerable clout in making appointments in his own sector. Bearing in mind those he selects, he seems to appoint those who will deliver the "best" report and provide the greatest support for his policies. He does not choose those who will carry the greatest clout in analysing what his party has achieved.

A party of the right cannot seriously believe that human nature is such that those who are responsible for the delivery of education and the maintenance of a school—their jobs will depend on being popular with parents—will choose companies that will carry out rigorous inspection before those who will produce a good report for the school. that is not realistic and that is not what will happen. I have no doubt that we shall debate these matters in further detail when we examine the Bill.

I am concerned that the changes that are taking place will have an especially bad impact on children with special needs. Currently there are specialist members of HMI who are able to offer advice to schools on the delivery of help to children with special needs. Under the Government's proposals, those individuals will lose their jobs or they will be restricted to monitoring the privatised inspection services. That means that their specialist expertise will be lost to schools.

The Government propose that the results of individual schools should be published, but we do not know how they plan to take account of the special needs that some children have within some schools. Are the raw tables of schools' examination results to reflect the intakes of those schools, including children with special needs? I am not talking only about children who have been statemented. I am talking particularly about the 20 per cent. who are not the subject of statements and who have special needs. If there is no means of compensating schools for children with special needs, there will be a direct incentive for schools not to accept these children.

I make no apology for taking up these matters, because they are surely fundamental to the very principle that is being introduced.

I have been asking in correspondence—I have not yet had a satisfactory answer—what will happen to those in sixth form colleges who have had the protection of a statement and who will not have it when they go into the new opted-out sector of further education. It is clear in my constituency and in many others that many children—young people with special needs—do not want to take up specialist courses for people with special needs. They want to embark on mainstream courses. They will not be able to take up places if they are not resourced to do so and if, similarly, the college is not resourced to do so. If the proposed changes are to take place, children with special needs must be protected. That goes across party boundaries, although, as I have said, I disagree too with the broader changes that are proposed. Nothing that the Government have said will achieve that protection.

The parents and teachers to whom I speak do not seek raw data in league tables. Indeed, Cornwall could not make far-reaching practical use of such league tables because alternative schools are not generally available to parents. All that will happen is that the morale of schools will be lowered because they will be beaten by the press that use the raw data in crude ways. The schools will have no response from the Secretary of State on how they are to improve, to obtain the necessary resources and training and so on.

Mr. Dunn: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point about the lack of alternative schools in country areas. However, that should not penalise the urban areas, where there is manifestly more choice. The point of the changes that we intend to implement is that although parents may not have alternative schools available to them, they can at least put pressure on a school for failing to deliver. Surely that is the lesson that must be learned.

Mr. Taylor: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, but there are two fundamental problems with it. First, it assumes that parents are not aware of the quality of their local schools. My experience shows that they are all too well aware of the quality, be that good or bad. Secondly, it assumes that the raw data of exam results will give some indication of the quality of a school. However, it is absolutely clear that, depending on the intake into a school, it could be a good school with relatively poor exam results or a bad school with relatively good exam results. What counts is where the child comes from and how well a school meets his or her potential, not the level that a particular child reaches compared to another child elsewhere.

We are arguing for a specific series of vital key reforms. We want provision for three and four-year-olds, which the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) promised when she was Secretary of State but failed to deliver as Prime Minister. We would guarantee a relevant vocational and academic examination system that would abolish the divisions for 16 to 19-year-olds, and which would guarantee the equivalent of two days a week education provision for all those who enter work at 16. We would also guarantee provision for adults. All sides of the House now accept that the education system has failed our young people in the past. Therefore, we must not forget the delivery of adult education to those already in work, especially in view of the current changes in society and technology.

What have the Government offered? They are going in the opposite direction to the private sector. The best employers, such as Ford and Rover, are developing

[Mr. Taylor]

programmes to deliver adult education opportunities to their work forces, irrespective of vocational relevance, yet the Government want to divide the adult education system and place priority on courses that they believe have vocational relevance. Not only are the Government prepared to compromise our record on adult education provision—which is one of the best in Europe—but they are doing so at a time when the private sector is moving in the opposite direction.

However, we cannot allow the Labour party to get away with those points, because it falls flat on its face as soon as we ask a simple question. It rightly claims that Britain will not get its economy right until the education and training system is right, but when asked where the money for that will come from, it says that it will be available only when the economy comes right. That achieves nothing. The Labour party has made it clear that on training and education it offers nothing because it dare not utter the political "F-word"—the possibility of increased taxation.

The Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives can argue rationally, but the Labour party will not increase taxation to find the extra money needed. Therefore, it cannot possibly do what is necessary. The Liberal Democrats are clear that if, to get it right, that means an increase in taxation, so be it. The Labour party is incapable of delivering on its promises. The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) talks at length about how the Labour party will transform education for the better, but until the shadow Chancellor commits the money, the hon. Gentleman is promising everything but guaranteeing nothing. The leader of the Labour party has said during the Langbaurgh by-election campaign that £2·6 billion is needed to improve educational provision, but the shadow Chancellor refuses to commit a penny to that. The only financial commitment from the Labour party is a transfer of resources within the education budget, not any addition to it.

The debate has missed valuable opportunities to outline the wider changes that are needed. It has missed the opportunity to put to Ministers the real weaknesses in their proposals. Once again, the Labour party has missed the opportunity to show the courage of its principles—its education team understands this, but is not allowed to do anything about it—and to put up front the financial wherewithal to tackle the problems. The Liberal Democrats are facing up to the political downside of being prepared to increase taxation, and we are proud to do so. We believe that parents and grandparents, as they go into crumbling schools and as they see students who cannot afford to go to college, will agree with the principled stand that we are taking.

6.17 pm

Mr. Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): I had hoped to have had the privilege of catching your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on the first day of this debate, when it is acknowledged to be a free-for-all and any subject can follow another. Thereafter, it is slightly intimidating when subjects are set down for each day's debate, and we feel a little restricted in moving beyond the sphere of the Ministers on the Front Bench. However, as my hon. Friends the Members for Ashford (Mr. Speed) and for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) have strayed into the area of transport, and as the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) got as far as Yugoslavia, I feel that I, too, can stray a little from the main theme of the debate without attracting too much criticism.

I shall pay particular attention to that part of the Gracious Speech in which the Government say that they will promote enterprise and training, attach the highest priority to improving public services, improve quality and choice in education, and improve the effectiveness of the NHS. I derive the greatest satisfaction from the fact that the Government, through the Gracious Speech, are saying that the highest priority will be given to the improvement of public services. Indeed, that statement might be described almost as "outing". The Government have put large sums of money into the public services for many years, but have not proclaimed it as a great virtue. Now, it appears that they are to take great pride in the fact that we are spending more on public services, and it is right to acknowledge that.

Health and education are probably the most basic of the public services that deserve the highest priority. Certainly, they are the services that will receive the most attention between now and the general election, and during the election campaign itself.

It is clearly stated in the Gracious Speech that the highest priority will be attached to health. That is on the Government's agenda for the final Session of this Parliament—not privatisation. While my right hon. and hon. Friends will be talking about priorities for health, no doubt we will hear again and again from Labour about privatisation, privatisation, and nothing but privatisation.

The word "privatisation" is redefined by Labour as it suits it, as is the case with so much else in the Labour party. The Government are no longer accused of actual privatisation but of creeping privatisation. How does Labour define that? On 13 October, the Leader of the Opposition described it in three different ways—which is typical of him. One was

"the grim reality of paying or waiting."

Presumably he meant an individual's inability to have a national health service operation on demand. I wonder when that has ever been possible during the lifetime of the NHS. Does Labour pledge that, if it is elected to government, no one will wait any length of time for an operation?

The Government's patients charter suggests that a waiting period of two years is a realistic target, beyond which no individual should have to wait. It is realistic when one considers the number of new operations developed as a consequence of medical research. A few weeks ago, a lady interviewed on television complained about her wait for a hip replacement operation. One naturally sympathised with her discomfort and pain. She asked, "What is the NHS coming to, that I should have to wait in pain, discomfort and distress for my operation?" The riposte must be that what it is coming to is that it is now technically possible to perform that operation, and naturally a huge demand for it has developed. The same situation arises time and time again, as new medical techniques are developed and demand for them rises. One must be realistic in one's promises to patients in respect of their admission to hospital for non-life threatening operations.

There are many vulnerable people—such as the lady whom I mentioned—who are waiting for treatment, and

whose fears and emotions can be exploited. I suspect that the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) will skulk around the back alleys of the national health service scavenging for distress stories with which to regale us between now and the general election.

Every Government have an uphill task in persuading the public that their stewardship of the NHS is adequate. When Mrs. Jones or Mrs. Robinson has a daughter who has to wait 12 months for an operation, it is no use telling her that 10, 20, or 25 years ago the situation was similar or much worse, because Mrs. Jones or Mrs. Robinson will still consider that the NHS is unsatisfactory today, and will naturally blame the Government.

If Labour has a policy to eliminate that kind of wait, it should make it explicit, say how much it will cost, and explain how it will be paid for. I suspect that, instead of doing so, Labour will simply play on the emotions of those people who are kept waiting for operations. I hope that the debate in the coming months will concentrate on the difference between a Government who are implementing a plan to manage the health service better and an Opposition who hiss and spit but fight shy of explaining how they will deliver a better performance.

Returning to the theme of today's debate, I am delighted that the Gracious Speech commits the Government to giving the highest priority to education. If in the health service that means not just spending more money, it is even more true of education. It is a question of what we expect to happen in our schools, encouraging study, and creating a demand for training.

Two speeches made at the weekend have further opened up the debate about the form that primary school education should take. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Education, the Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon), drew attention to the prominence that topic work now has in many primary schools. He may have a point. Discovery is important in the education process, but it can be taken too far—almost to the exclusion of the acquisition of basic facts and skills.

Recently, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry visited Japan and no doubt will have learnt certain lessons from that country. Japan enjoys a high standard of education because it places special emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge. I do not suggest that the Japanese example should be transplanted to our education system, but it offers certain advantages. We should work towards a better balance between the acquisition of facts and their relation to topic work.

Expression is also important, but not at the total expense of attention to detail. It is important that emphasis is placed on that aspect in the teaching of English. When I was taught French at school, I regret that too much attention was paid to detail, so that, although I was able to read works of French literature such as "Madame de Staël" tolerably well, I still have a total inability to communicate effectively in the French language. Therefore, I do not believe that my French language education was to the greatest effect.

In the teaching of English, it is important that attention should be paid to grammar and spelling. When a parent-teacher association circulated a newsletter in my constituency recently, I was surprised to discover that a contribution by a child that appeared on its front page contained two palpable spelling errors. It may have been a great thing for the child to have contributed the article, but if it was meant as an advertisement for the school, it should have been corrected—lest it set a standard that would be followed.

The general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, David Hart, has questioned whether setting and streaming should be reintroduced into our primary schools. That matter also demands attention, even though it has resource implications.

As to the role of parents in our education system, we must welcome the trend to present them with more data about school performance. League tables may not be wholly sophisticated, but they serve as a counterbalance to the generalities that are sometimes brandished before parents. It is possible to produce league tables that have proper footnotes to highlight important differences that need to be read into any interpretation of them. That will help parents to ask more of the right questions, rather than have them feed on rumour. The hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) said that parents know whether a school is good or bad—but they often draw their conclusions on the basis of the worst possible information, which has reached them by word of mouth and has no factual basis. Parents should be empowered to ask the right questions and make the right choices.

I am glad that the staying-on rate in our schools is improving, but that may create its own debate about whether greater variety needs to be offered in the A-level curriculum. It is a controversial subject. I do not believe that one needs to concede a dilution of A-level standards in offering alternatives in order to attract more pupils to stay on at school beyond the age of 16. One of our objectives should be to inculcate more desire for training in addition to what has been learned at school. I believe that training should become universal and that the training and enterprise councils are an important step towards that. I do not denigrate the TECs, as did the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton); I think that this is the start of an important new adventure and that the TECs can deliver, flexibly and sensibly, the universal training that we need.

I am delighted that the Government have nailed their colours to the mast in regard to improving public services. In my view, both health and education have achieved significant boosts under the Government's stewardship over the past 12 years, and I look forward to further substantial progress during the coming Session.

6.30 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): When the record of the past 12 years of Conservative government comes to be written, one interesting comment that will be made is that many of the major changes that have been introduced were not the result of research, consultation and a clear view of how services—particularly in the public sector—needed to be improved and funded. In many cases, they were the result of the straightforward prejudices of people who did not themselves use public services.

The saddest aspect of this debate on the Gracious Speech is the fact that many of those prejudices are now being trotted out in the guise of a discussion of the education system. Today, even more prejudices have been aired in the guise of a discussion of the future of training. In my constituency, such remarks strike a sad and hollow note; more young people there have been unable to obtain

[Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody]

proper training than has been the case at any time in the past 50 or 60 years. More young people leaving school cannot find jobs, enter the traditional apprenticeships so lightly dismissed today by Conservative Members, or move on to any form of further education than could do so even 20 years ago.

Far from seeing any improvement in public services, many young men and women in my constituency are going straight from school into the dole queue. At the beginning of a period when they should be starting to gain some understanding of the world of work, they are unable to use the abilities that they possess and unable to train so that they can take up a proper job or launch a future career.

It is interesting to note that, after 12 years of Conservative government, Rolls-Royce—a firm which, to many, represents quality in British manufacturing—is behaving more and more like a Victorian management, incapable of understanding that the quality of its product is due largely to the ability and training of the men and women who produce it. In the past 12 months, Rolls-Royce has lost some 600 people from its job list, which represents, in monetary terms, a gain of some £30 million overall. The firm is quite able to see not only that the work force has been prepared to talk to management about new working practices, but that it has accepted new agreements, short-term working and changes that have been brought in following very little consultation. The work force has been prepared to establish how best it can protect the company's viability.

What has happened is extremely instructive, and I believe that it represents the real state of manufacturing industry under the present Government. Rolls-Royce now intends to impose many more changes. It wanted a single-union agreement, and the unions said that they were prepared to provide that; they added, however, that they would ask for differentiation between those who were craft workers and those who were not. Rolls-Royce said that that was not to be negotiated. It then announced the introduction of a new system for the appointing of shop stewards: they would be elected on a constituency basis, but those who were elected might well be non-union, and might not represent, in proportion, their own groups of workers. They could be removed if evidence of any sort was produced that the company considered relevant.

That is not consultation; nor is it imaginative management. It is the imposition of work conditions that will not improve either the quality of the product or the stability of the work force. The Government's attitude to industrial relations is largely answerable for the present position.

When Rolls-Royce faced real problems in one of its firms, it moved a good deal of work to Crewe—where it was welcome, and where a stable and committed work force was in place. Over the years, Rolls-Royce has begun to believe that, because that work force has been pliable and helpful, it can now impose whatever work conditions it chooses. It also believes that, if need be, it can further reduce the work force—that it can have so-called discussion with shop stewards and then announce redundancies on a Monday morning, immediately before the convening of a meeting—and somehow represent that as the future of manufacturing industry in Great Britain.

That is outrageous and unacceptable and it will be reflected in the quality of the product. Anyone who seeks to out-source large amounts of engineering work in a product like a Rolls-Royce motor car will have to answer to the customer when that is seen not to be in the best interests of British products, or in those of the industry as a whole.

It would be different if it were possible, in Crewe and Nantwich, to point to an imaginative training programme. It would be different if we could expect our youngsters —although the existing apprenticeships have been ended —to be given high-tech training, and to benefit from the work that the local authority is doing to attract new industries. If that were so, we could accept, with sanguine happiness, the fact that traditional work patterns are being replaced—replaced by something better.

What is really happening, however, is that traditional training is going. Women in the rag trade and men in manufacturing industry benefited from such training; many of the women who made Rolls-Royce upholstery were trained by means of proper industrial schemes. Their children, who would normally have followed them in the trade, will not have that opportunity. Many will not be able to find training places and will experience what is already being experienced in some instances—over a year without a place.

All that is utterly destructive. It destroys the human spirit and of the skills of young people. It is beginning to undermine their belief in, and understanding of, their own abilities and future. Worse, it is a condemnation of a Conservative Government who for too long have coasted on a reputation: the reputation of being those who improved and rejigged, privatised and brought about a much higher standard of production and a much higher level of investment.

Let me tell the House what privatisation means in my constituency. It means the sale of assets for which no one but the taxpayer paid, to any firm, anywhere, that will buy them under any conditions. In the case of British Rail Engineering Ltd., it means the sale of many jobs. To Rolls-Royce it means, immediately, the same problems as ever for young people—the abandoning of apprenticeships, and men and women walking out of the door until the work force does not know how many jobs will finally be left. It means that, whichever firm is privatised, assets accumulated by means of taxpayers' money—sometimes over many years—will immediately be sold off.

Moreover, it means that, without fail, the administrators, at the time that they make many people unemployed, immediately improve their own conditions. They also say to the work force, "You may not ask for reasonable increases. You may not even negotiate with the assistance of the trade unions," even though they are supposed to represent the interests of the work force. That is what privatisation means.

If British Rail is privatised after the next election, God help us. Privatisation will not improve conditions for the customers; it will not improve investment in new rolling stock; it will not lead to better freight services. However, what can be absolutely guaranteed is that privatisation will improve the rate of pay of a certain privileged group at the top of the industry.

This Government, after having been in office for 12 years, present a Gracious Speech that represents a total lack of imagination and commitment. Above all, the cynicism that the Government display in the Queen's

Speech is outrageous. We are destroying our industrial manufacturing base, cheating the people of this country and offering them no alternative. My only consolation is that the sooner we get rid of the Government the more hope we have of offering a genuine future to young unemployed people in my constituency.

6.41 pm

Sir Giles Shaw (Pudsey): According to the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) there is a perfect case for suggesting that the British taxpayer would prefer billions of pounds to be written off each year as a result of losses by discredited nationalised undertakings and that the British taxpayer would dislike those loads to be taken off his or her back. I cannot believe that. Frankly, I do not believe that the hon. Lady believes it, either.

Attention has already been drawn by my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst) to this statement in the Queen's Speech:

"My Government attach the highest priority to improving public services."

That provides some answer to the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich. It is a priority of this Government and I am delighted that the Queen's Speech makes it clear for all to see. The public services are important for the massive contribution that they make. Our highest priority—it is right to put the superlative adjective before the word "priority"—is to improve our public services. I suspect that all of us who are here today would say that education is the most important public service.

I intend to refer to a few matters that cause me concern and my remarks may go slightly wider than education.

There are three key ingredients for improving public services. First, we must establish higher and better standards. Secondly, we must create a sense of professionalism among those on whom we rely to run the public services. Thirdly, we must ensure that there is a commitment by the citizen, whether parent or patient, to take his or her share of the responsibility for the process. If services to the public are to be improved, the public, as recipients of those services, must play a large part in determining the progress towards improvement.

It is relatively easy to talk about education standards and identify them and to devise methods by means of which those standards can be measured and the targets that will lead to higher attainment. I have a relatively open mind on whether that is the be-all and end-all of the operation. I doubt whether it is. Nevertheless, it is crucial to ensure that the quality of education can be measured so that improvements can be made. How one improves the flexibility and sensitivity of the means by which the quality of education is measured, as well as the acceptability of those methods, has to be related to the importance of establishing a mechanism by which standards can rise and be measured.

During the recess, I visited what I believe is the best primary school in the area. The head teacher—a fine lady who had been in her post for a long time—was in distress about the seven-plus attainment tests that had recently been applied. Her problem, and that of her staff in that dedicated school in Pudsey, was how to measure progress without numbers on a board that moved up from 10 to 15 to 20. As she put it, if boys and girls come to her school who are minus five or minus 10 below zero and they are brought up to minus three or minus eight below zero, that is attainment; it represents measurable progress and is something that must be encouraged. I hate to think that schools which experience great difficulties in their catchment areas will be compared with what is achieved in the plusher parts of my constituency. There must therefore be a means by which one can measure standards that are both attainable and acceptable.

As for standards as a whole, we owe it to the education establishment to recognise that standards must be broadly based. It is not a question of the establishment having a quiet look at education and doing things the way that it would like. The education establishment must be accountable and must be seen to be accountable by parents. In turn, the education establishment would argue with us that there are other influences on the standard of education over which they have no control.

I suggest that the broadcasting media have a role in determining whether certain standards of behaviour, language and "entertainment" are wholly beneficial, or whether it is their duty simply to pander purely to the lowest common denominator—entertainment. If it is possible to sell a bar of KitKat in 30 seconds, which I did for about 18 years in a previous job, I reckon that it is possible to suggest that to rush around in motor cars is something to be emulated. That philosophy has played its part in creating our problems.

Standards must be seen to be reciprocated in other parts of the public domain. I cannot accept Lord Rees-Mogg's suggestion that bad language has reached the point where the F-word has been debased by common usage and is no longer a word that should not be used.

I believe that the teaching profession must be encouraged. Teachers must not be regarded simply as people who carry out their duties between 8 am and 5 pm. Their lack of reputation directly reflects their lack of morale, which is due to the belief that they are no longer treated as professionals. We encountered that problem when we reformed the national health service. In the beginning doctors felt that they were not being treated as true professionals. That problem was overcome.

The teaching profession faces many pressures, due to the number of changes that it has experienced. It has overcome and surmounted the difficulties and problems that have come its way. The profession should be treated with greater sincerity than it has been in recent years. I am sure that it welcomes the independent review procedure that the Secretary of State for Education has introduced. I am also sure that it welcomes the additional investment in education.

Professionals cannot regard themselves as professionals if there is inadequate investment in them. They need investment in buildings, equipment and technology. They will enable the professionals of the 1990s to exercise their full potential as teachers. That is quite apart from what goes in the classroom. I very much hope that, in the autumn statement, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will be able to translate the words "highest priority" into a determination to back the education profession with an investment programme that will make it stand out and feel confident of its future.

More or less, it has been taken as read that parents will combine to assist with education reforms and will carry through the duties that the new legislation imposes on them. I very much hope that that will prove to be true, but we may be loading rather too much on less experienced

[Sir Giles Shaw]

backs. We must ensure that governors receive as much assistance as possible in carrying out their duties which, compared with former years, are now considerable.

Parents take much pride from the progress that their communities make and are prepared to do their bit to ensure that their child's school, which I suspect they regard as the most important influence in their community, is better under their tutelage. They must be given time and some training to enable them to act as school governors.

When we consider attainments in class, the question of truancy arises and with it the question of juvenile crime. I am glad that truancy will now be reflected in published figures, but my hon. Friend the Minister must recognise that truancy soon leads to juvenile crime and from that perhaps to drugs. The rise in juvenile crime is so immense that we must act quickly to try to contain it. Like most other Conservative Members, I was astonished that legislation on auto crime and so-called joyriding, which should be called death riding, had been omitted from the Gracious Speech. I am not clear how it will eventually reach the statute book, but perhaps my hon. Friend will ensure that we are given a satisfactory response.

There is no doubt that in my constituency, as in others, it is common for juveniles to be engaged in criminal activity on Friday, Saturday and some other nights. The so-called joyriding, or death riding, is absurd. Defendants have appeared before the courts for 20 or more cases of taking cars. In a well-known case, an individual pinched a car and for about 58 minutes led three police cars and a helicopter of the pressed West Yorkshire police on a chase, before, having gone through south Leeds, returning to Pudsey police station and throwing the keys at the coppers.

That was an extraordinary abuse not only of police time but of the law. Such individuals could not care less about the scale of the problem, yet someone is a parent to that child. If we are to get to the bottom of juvenile behaviour, raise standards in schools and involve parents in the process, we must ensure that parents fulfil their responsibilities in looking after their own children. The youngest child recently arrested in Pudsey was an eight-year-old at 2 am. Where were the parents who should have been looking after the child at that time of night? It is ludicrous that that should be happening in the 1990s. Either some parents do not bother or they are doing other things, but we cannot attribute that to problems associated with unemployment or social conditions. There are people who have close, deep and devoted connections to children, whatever their circumstances, and there are some who apparently do not care.

If we are to achieve high standards in schools and make parents take responsibility for governing schools, we must ensure that parental responsibility lasts and is deeply embedded in helping children to become citizens and to abide by the law as well as attaining the standards that they richly deserve under the education system.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. At the beginning of the debate, Mr. Speaker announced a precautionary 10-minute limit on speeches. Given the progress that we are making, he has decided that it will not be necessary to impose the limit. None the less, many hon. Members still wish to speak, so we need short speeches.

6.55 pm

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for that warning.

It is slightly bizarre that this debate should open with employment and close with education, because there is next to nothing in the Queen's Speech about employment, important though that is, and hon. Members would have liked to test many aspects of education against an opening ministerial speech.

Hon. Members agree with some of the points that the hon. Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) made. He stressed the need for a new deal for education, and although many hon. Members may doubt whether that new deal will be forthcoming under the legislation before us, some of the points that he made were important.

Many hon. Members agreed with the hon. Member for Pudsey about whether schools will be properly assessed by a points ranking system. We should be seeking a measure of "education added value" whereby the measure of a school's achievement is what it can do against the circumstances in which it is working rather than some absolute approach of a ranking points system. That is very important.

The hon. Member for Pudsey made a further important point about the need for education resources. I am glad to hear such comments from Conservative Members, and to note that the message has got home. Without more resources for education, teachers will not be able to do the work that is necessary. More resources are needed for our dilapidated school buildings, which are a disgrace. No wonder children have been brought up in an atmosphere in which it is difficult to respect property. More resources are needed for textbooks and for teachers' salaries. Teachers should not have to take a second job to pay their mortgage or to sustain their families.

Many university students are experiencing enormous difficulties, such as the lack of beds in halls of residence, particularly in their first year. If they cannot get a place in a hostel, they can find themselves in most inappropriate circumstances for starting a university career. Some students find it difficult to live on their grants, particularly when they are unable to get jobs in the summer. That is true of students from poor backgrounds, whose parents are unemployed and can offer no resources. I have seen such difficult cases at the University college of north Wales in Bangor.

We in Wales feel that there should be democratic control over the Further Education Funding Council, which was mentioned in the context of this year's legislative programme. We are glad that we will have our own council, but how will it be answerable, and how can we be sure that it responds to what people in Wales want? As the House knows, special educational needs are a subject close to my heart. I am a little worried about some developments. I am afraid that, under the structure which the Government are considering, some schools may see students with education problems as a liability and may believe that the cost of taking them through to further education level is not warranted. That would be a tragedy.

There must be an assurance that places will not be denied to disabled students because of the concept that it

is uneconomic to take them on. There must be an adequate choice of places to study. People should not say that students with disabilities must go to one particular place which deals with such students. Young people with disabilities seeking further education should be as integrated as younger children.

We must ensure that there is adequate financial support for people beyond the age of 19. Some people with educational problems may need to attend beyond that age to achieve their maximum potential. People who suffer a disability at a later stage in life, because of an accident or disease, and who want education or retraining opportunities, should have support.

Unemployment problems persist in Wales, as they do in Scotland, Merseyside and other parts of northern England. Unemployment in Wales is often lower in August than at other times of the year, but this year unemployment was 12·8 per cent. in Aberdare, 12·6 per cent. in Merthyr—where I lived before I became a Member—12·5 per cent. in Holyhead, 11·4 per cent. in Llanelli and 11·4 per cent. in Blaenau Gwent.

Those unemployment levels are unacceptable. No Government can pretend that their policies are working when unemployment is so high. I am glad that unemployment is 3·2 per cent. in Penrith, 2·8 per cent. in Settle and 3·6 per cent. in Winchester, but I wish that there were opportunities in our area to have such rates.

Unemployment in some parts of Wales will mushroom to a worrying level. The royal naval armaments depot at Trecwn, in north Pembrokeshire, is about to close; jobs associated with the Stena-Sealink services at Fishguard are threatened; and the Royal Air Force base at Brawdy is in jeopardy. In Pembrokeshire, unemployment is 10·4 per cent. in Haverfordwest and 11·4 per cent. in south Pembrokeshire. *The Department of Employment Gazette* said that narrow base unemployment at Fishguard was 17·2 per cent. Those are the unemployment percentages before the closures take place, when hundreds of jobs will be lost. Unemployment in the area will be phenomenal. If there is a defence dividend because of the cuts in expenditure on armaments—which I would welcome—areas that may suffer from the defence base closures should have a high call on any resources that are released because of the cuts.

I wish to reinforce a point made by the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) about the lack of regional policy. Unemployment black spots such as those I have mentioned need a much better, fine-tuned policy to overcome their problems. I wish that the Government would find a new way of dealing with additionality in order to ensure that any resources that are available from Brussels and Strasbourg go to those black spots to create employment.

The present training initiatives and schemes are not working as they should. Unemployment is high in my constituency, particularly seasonal unemployment when the tourist season is over. The training schemes depend on the availability of jobs in the private sector. Employers must be able to take on young people and, at the end of the training period, to retain them. It is sad that that does not usually happen in our area.

Permanent jobs are not available and, even if jobs for 16 and 17-year-olds are guaranteed, by the time those young people are looking for permanent jobs, there is no work. If young people see their predecessors' training leading to the dole queue, that is not a good advertisement for training schemes. One must look for a much more positive way of dealing with the problem.

Obviously, the council tax will be an improvement on the poll tax—but that is no great achievement. My party and I believe that the only fair system is one of local income tax, and I regret the fact that the Government are not moving towards such an approach. The danger in the Government's scheme is that the value of a property will be the basis on which people are asked to pay local rates. In areas such as mine, the value of a house is determined not by the local economy but by people moving in from other regions to buy up houses.

In the Dwyfor half of my constituency, more than 20 per cent. of the housing stock consists of second homes, and house prices are significantly higher than in Cardiff, although wages are significantly lower. If that is the basis on which property is valued for the purposes of local taxation, people in my area will be asked to pay taxes that their incomes cannot justify. That will not be acceptable. A local income tax system would have overcome that difficulty. The Government must find a way to ensure that the valuation system does not lead to anomalies.

In my area, the idea of rates levied on second homes at perhaps only 50 per cent. of the normal level is greeted with horror and incredulity. There is a shortage of housing stock for people looking for first homes, and a system that is seen to encourage people to have second homes cannot be justified, socially or economically. If there were a different tax rate for second homes, we in our part of Wales would prefer a higher rather than lower level, in order to release second homes to meet local needs.

There are two major omissions from the Gracious Speech, the first of which involves local government structures in Wales. Reference is made to legislation for England, which will presumably pave the way for a royal commission. The Government's proposals for local government change have not picked up the main thread running through debate in Wales. All parties in Wales, apart from the Conservative party, believe that there should be an all-Wales elected body, taking over responsibility for quangos and some of the work of the Welsh Office, and having democratic oversight of some of the functions which belonged to local government and which have since been centralised—for example, education. The Committee of Welsh District Councils and the Assembly of Welsh Counties have forcefully pressed that point.

I regret the fact that the Government did not see fit in the Gracious Speech to make provision for a permanent, elected, all-Wales body. At the very least, they could have provided for an elected forum, perhaps similar to the conventions that existed in Scotland, whereby people in Wales can determine the form of local government and the form of democratic oversight of government structures that they want, and report to central Government, so that legislation is enacted in accordance with their wishes. That is preferable to having a form of local government imposed on us by a Secretary of State who does not even represent a Welsh constituency.

In most of the Welsh-speaking parts of Wales, there is amazement at the fact that there was no provision in the Gracious Speech for a Welsh language Bill. In 1986, I presented a ten-minute Bill with the support of members of all parties. Since that time, there has been consultation—for five years. On the first round of consultation, 2,000

[Mr. Dafydd Wigley]

pieces of evidence were in support of the Bill and only 40 against, so the Government decided to set up a Welsh Language Board to look into the matter. When the board recommended a new Welsh Language Act, it was sent away to consult again. When it came back unanimously recommending and having drafted a new Welsh Language Bill, the Government started to think about it. That thinking has continued throughout this year.

In July, we were told by the chairman of the board, Mr. Ioan Elfed Jones, that he had every confidence that there would be legislation by the spring. If that was the case, it should have been included in the Queen's Speech, and as it is not, clearly the Government are once again avoiding that issue.

After five years of virtual unanimity in Wales on the need for such legislation, we get nothing. Is it any surprise to any hon. Member that the patience of young people in Wales gets as short as it does? Treating the issue in the way that the Government have done is letting down the democratic process. I urge the Secretary of State for Wales to think again and to find time during this legislative year for such a Bill. Otherwise, members of the Welsh Language Board must seriously consider their position: it is untenable unless the Secretary of State listens to their recommendations.

7.10 pm

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): Like the former Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), who introduced the subject of Yugoslavia into the debate, I wish to introduce a subject which is not the general matter for debate.

Before I do so, I wish to follow directly on from the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley). I can well understand his grave concern about employment in Wales coming as I do from Northern Ireland. In some of our constituencies, unemployment is between 40 and 50 per cent., and it is of real concern in Northern Ireland. I would have hoped to see a bit more in the paragraph on Northern Ireland in the Gracious Speech than the same old cant that we have seen in previous Queen's Speeches, which has produced that degree of unemployment there.

Education is one area where I am in favour of the Government's proposals, as it makes good sound common sense for parents to have some assessment of the worth of various schools in the area available to them. I do not agree with the view that parents generally know how good or bad a school is. By and large, the education system has changed so much since they were at school that they find it difficult to make such an assessment on their own. If they can make an assessment, it is of their own education experience against the school that their children go to rather than one that compares that school with others in the area.

The proposal has real merit only if there is flexibility for parents—parental choice—if parents are able to move children to a school with a better batting average. I suspect that that may not be so easy as the Government may imagine.

However, that is an academic argument, because unfortunately the measure does not yet apply to Northern Ireland and if it is to do so, we do not know in what shape it will be presented to the people of Northern Ireland because of our unique education system in which the Roman Catholics have their own school system.

As regards the subject of Northern Ireland in relation to the Gracious Speech, I took upon myself the task of looking with a divining rod and magnifying glass to see if there had been any marked change in Government policy. Some people in Northern Ireland have been telling us in past weeks that the Government have had something of a Damascus road experience: that they have recognised the folly of their ways and that the Province could hope for some change in the way that Government treat Northern Ireland.

Naturally, the people of Northern Ireland will have been inspecting closely to discover the Government's attitude towards the Province in terms of their programme for this parliamentary term. I found that the reference to Northern Ireland was almost among the last words in the Gracious Speech—a paragraph just before praying to Almighty God to bless our "counsels". When I compared it with the paragraph the previous year, I could not detect any new or advantageous shift of policy which might encourage the Unionist community of that war-torn part of the kingdom. I could not detect a grain of virgin thought in Government policy. I could not locate even the most meagre or microscopic change in the Government's thinking.

The significant part of that paragraph of the Gracious Speech states:

"My Government will resolutely seek to defeat terrorism".

Last year's Gracious Speeech said:

"My Government will be resolute in their efforts to defeat terrorism".

Yet during that time there has been the highest degree of terrorism since the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985.

As regards the constitutional issue, let us consider the attitude towards the Irish Republic. This Gracious Speech says that the Government

"will maintain positive relations with the Republic of Ireland."

Last year they said that they would

"maintain positive relations with the Republic of Ireland."

In 1985, the year that the Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed, they said that they would

"maintain good relations with the Republic of Ireland."

This year's Gracious Speech says that the Government will "strengthen the economy". Last year's Gracious Speech said that they would "strengthen the economy".

Mr. Dunn: They are consistent.

Mr. Robinson: The hon. Gentleman may think that the repetition of those phrases shows some consistency but I rather suspect that it shows merely common or garden lack of thought—indeed, bankruptcy of thought—about the situation in Northern Ireland on the part of the Government.

The jargon in the Gracious Speech has not changed in the past year. The same sort of statements were being made when I entered the House in 1979. Meanwhile, unemployment has increased, the terrorists' role has increased and the Republic of Ireland has a greater role in the internal affairs of that part of the United Kingdom.

The hopes and expectations of some of our friends in Northern Ireland have therefore been dashed. There is no manifestation of a desire on the part of the Government to do away with the Anglo-Irish Agreement or to right the

wrongs that they have done, and there is no hint of any adjustment in the Government's attitude towards Ulster, or the slightest signal of any move to strengthen the Union.

In truth, I had not expected that, but anyone who did would have been brought abruptly down to ground, if not by the Government's rancid programme, by the out-working of that programme. In terms of the constitutional relationship between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom, we have seen the Irish Republic Minister strutting around Ulster like a Minister-in-waiting, as if he owned the Province. We have seen it in the out-working of security policy, in the present upsurge in IRA terrorism.

However, the message of which I want to unburden myself today is very serious. If I seem to falter before I give my analysis to the House it is because of a fear that I may be in some way misunderstood. I am not so worried, although I recognise that there will be those who will seek —because of the inability to answer the issue concerned —to say that I am attempting to involve myself in scaremongering or, worse still, electioneering.

The reality is that there is a serious new situation in terms of security in Northern Ireland. We have all become accustomed to the Provisional IRA activity which accounts for the greater part of the violence that takes place in Northern Ireland. Over the past 20 years, given that the Provisional IRA's tactics will change from time to time, the rate of attrition in which it has become involved has remained much the same. It is much the same this year. The scope of what it calls legitimate targets may change, but by and large it includes the whole of the Protestant and Unionist community.

The new factor is loyalist so-called terrorism. Although it has always been there to some extent, it is clear that it has considerably expanded and increased during this year. For a long time I have recognised a degree of disenchantment, almost despair and hopelessness, within the Unionist community in Northern Ireland. The community has seen every constitutional change since the 1960s as disadvantaging it. It has seen a campaign of terrorism which has taken away the lives of thousands of people, young, old, male, female, Protestant and Roman Catholic throughout the community. It has seen about 30,000 people maimed and mutilated and it sees nothing in the Government's activities which is likely to stop that terrorist campaign.

What has gone to the kernel of the issue is that the Provisional IRA has been rewarded for its activities. When a Minister says, after the events of last Saturday, that the Government will not give in one millimetre to terrorism, it is hard for people in Northern Ireland to swallow when they see that Governments have given in miles to terrorism. The Government shape their policies around what they believe the reaction of the terrorists may be. Even if one wants to put the matter in the best context, the Government make concessions to those who have the same pursuits as the terrorists in the hope that, by giving life to the constitutional politicians, they will in some way damage the IRA and the terrorists. By and large, the IRA has been seen by the Unionist community as having gained concessions through its violence.

When the Government take the advice of the leader of the Social Democratic and Labour party to lance the Unionist boil, they should not be surprised if something very ugly seeps out. What we see now in the Protestant community is the kind of alienation as a result of which the Government signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement. They believed that there was alienation in the Roman Catholic community with which they needed to deal. By signing the agreement and, in their view, doing away with the alienation of the Catholic community, the Government have in effect brought about the alienation of the Protestant community in Northern Ireland.

That community sees that it can win elections, but that they do not change anything. It seems that its politicians can win arguments, but that this does not change anything because, at the end of the day, it is terrorism that causes the Government to make changes in their policies. That is a sad reality, and it is the lesson that the Government have taught the people of Northern Ireland. In the Protestant community, that is the lesson that is being learned by those who would engage in this form of terrorism.

Let me make it abundantly clear, so that there can be no doubt about it, that I condemn terrorism whether it comes from the IRA or from any loyalist organisation. The pedigree of the terrorist does not make the act right. If the terrorist is a Protestant, the crime is as much murder as if the terrorist were a Roman Catholic. If the victim is a Protestant, it is the same as if the victim were a Roman Catholic. I make no distinction in terms of terrorism. It is evil and wicked, and it must be put down.

However, I must tell the Government that the rise in terrorism on the Unionist side of the fence is clearly seen by the security forces as being far better organised than ever before. There is real concern in the security forces that they cannot put their finger on the people who are involved in this campaign. As the Member of Parliament for Belfast, East over the past 20 years, I could have named easily the leading players in each of the loyalist paramilitary organisations. Indeed, the Secretary of State and any Minister involved in Northern Ireland would have been able to list names. But I guarantee that there are few people in Northern Ireland, except those at a high level within those paramilitary organisations, who now know who those people are. The whole structure of the organisation has changed.

There is almost a cockiness within the organisations about their ability not to be penetrated by the security forces. Everything that I have heard from people who are close to those organisations—I especially asked councillors in my constituency to give me a feedback on what they understood to be the situation from those who are close to those organisations—suggests that there is a confidence in those organisations to the extent that they say that they will take the battle to the Provos and that they will take the battle to the Irish Republic. One would not have seen that before from the Protestant paramilitary organisations. In past years, they were almost something of a joke in the community because they were never able to carry out operations successfully. They always botched them and they were rather amateurish organisations. That does not appear to be the case at present and there is grave concern in the security forces as a result of the new and disturbing trend.

What I have said about the alienation of the Unionist community is not a political statement that requires a response from the Government in terms of defending their policy. I simply state it as the perception of the Unionist community. It is a real and growing perception within that community, and unless the Government deal with it, and

[Mr. Robinson]

unless there are wise and healing counsels from the Government, we are, I suspect, in for what could be one of the bloodiest winters that our Province has ever seen.

I recognise that some may think that what I have said is dangerous talk. I had to weigh that in the balance before I spoke at all. I have to tell the Government that, unless they act, the situation will be much worse. Few powers repose in Unionist Members of Parliament for Northern Ireland, but the one trust that is left with them is the power to speak on behalf of those whom they represent and to alert those who have the ability to act to do so. I ask the Government—indeed, I plead with them—to act at this time. If the Government are playing straight with the people of Northern Ireland, they will not fail to act. If the Government have the least vision, they will act. If there is no vision, the people will perish.

7.28 pm

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): I am aware that the balance of the debate is drawn towards education, but having sat here since 3 pm, I am determined to concentrate on employment.

When the Secretary of State for Employment opened the debate, he compared my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) to Private Fraser of the television series "Dad's Army", who ran around shouting, "Doom, doom." The more I watch the Secretary of State, the more he puts me in mind of a character from the same television series called Corporal Jones, who ran around shouting, "Don't panic, don't panic." As the unemployment figures get higher and higher, the Secretary of State for unemployment seems to shout, "Don't panic, don't panic." The final analogy from the television series is to compare the Secretary of State to the youngest member of Captain Mainwaring's troop. Captain Mainwaring always ended up admonishing the young recruit by calling him a "stupid, stupid boy". Perhaps that cap fits the Secretary of State for Employment.

I shall concentrate on unemployment in Strathclyde. In recent months, evidence suggests that Strathclyde has been seriously affected by the recession that has been apparent in the rest of Britain. Notified vacancies have fallen by 5 per cent. in the past year and are at their lowest level since 1984. Unemployment has risen by 11·4 per cent. in the past year, but is still below the increase that has been experienced in Britain as a whole. Total unemployment is estimated to have declined by 1·4 per cent. in the past year after increases over the 1978-88 and 1988-89 periods.

In manufacturing, employment is estimated to have declined by 4·8 per cent. in the past year, compared with a fall of 4·1 per cent. in Britain. Thus manufacturing unemployment represents a continual erosion in Strathclyde's base. The clothing and textile sector in Strathclyde has experienced significant job losses in past months. A firm called Meritina has closed its operations in Castlemilk, which is an unemployment black spot. The regional and district councils are co-operating with the Government and the Castlemilk initiative to try to raise standards for Castlemilk people. However, without employment as the final part of the jigsaw puzzle, there is a danger that all those measures will come to naught.

British Steel has announced plans to close its Dalzell plate mill and build a new plate mill facility at Teesside. That will result in the loss of 600 jobs. In response to growing concern about the impact of the rundown of steel on the Lanarkshire economy, the Secretary of State for Scotland established a Lanarkshire working group, of which Strathclyde regional council is a member. The working group is carrying out valuable work, but requires between £200 million and £300 million to fund development in Lanarkshire. Included within that sum is a bid by the regional council for £15 million to £20 million to enable it to finance various infrastructure projects. To date, however, only the Lanarkshire Development Agency has received additional funding totalling £15 million, which must be spent this financial year. It is all right to identify a need, but it must be followed up by making major resources available.

In March 1991, total employment in Strathclyde was estimated to be 778,000—a decrease over the year of 11,000, or 1·4 per cent, which is the second straight year-on-year employment decline for Strathclyde. In August 1991, 7,646 vacancies were notified in Strathclyde —a decrease of 2,617 over August 1990, which represents a continual decline in the employment base. Such figures are always complicated because of the Government's fiddles. It has been estimated that if the unregistered unemployed—those on special measures—were taken into account, unemployment in July 1991 was about 194,700 or 17·7 per cent.

In August 1991, Strathclyde had the second highest total unemployment rate in Scotland and in July 1991, it had the seventh highest total unemployment rate in Britain as a whole. A series of figures show that the decline in Strathclyde is accelerating. One of the guides is the ratio between unemployed people and vacancies, which shows the state of the local labour market. In August 1991, the ratio was 17:1, which means that there were 17 unemployed people for each vacancy notified to Strathclyde jobcentres and career offices.

The television advertisements which show unemployed people saying, "I am going to get a job; I will get a job; I will get a job on Monday," are a disgrace and an insult to unemployed people. They are much resented, because thousands of people in Strathclyde cannot do that.

Many figures for male unemployment are bandied about. The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) mentioned 7 per cent. and 11 per cent. In Strathclyde, unemployed people claiming benefit represented 15·3 per cent. of the region's male work force, compared with male unemployment rates of 12 per cent. in Scotland and 11 per cent. in Great Britain as a whole. In August 1991, the unemployment rate for women stood at 6·8 per cent., with 31,743 women unemployed and claiming benefit. In Scotland as a whole, female unemployment stood at 5·7 per cent. and in Britain as a whole it was 4·9 per cent. If we include those involved in the Government's employment training initiatives, the figure comes to 19,200. The figures for Strathclyde show that 49,000 people were unemployed but were ineligible for benefit or had given up looking for jobs. That puts the figure up to 68,200 more than the official one. Again, the figures have been fiddled to hide the true position from the public.

Britain has been affected in that way since 1979. That is what happens when manufacturing and investment collapse. British manufacturing and investment have plummeted and are now below their 1979 level. If investment does not take place, the capacity of the

economy is reduced, which means that, when an economic recovery takes place, imports will rise fast and inflation will be pushed up.

Between 1979 and 1981—the first two years of this Conservative Administration—manufacturing investment collapsed to 30 per cent. It took until 1988 to recover to its 1979 level. As a proportion of GDP, it has fallen from 3·4 per cent. to 2·5 per cent. No hopeful signs are reaching us, because manufacturing and investment have fallen by 20 per cent. in the past 12 months and are now below their 1979 level. The consequence is that capacity is slashed, the balance of payments becomes vulnerable and inflationary pressures re-emerge. But the Conservatives still pursue their policies—they learn nothing and forget nothing. They talk about cleaning each other's windows, washing each other's cars and polishing each other's shoes. We cannot survive if we make nothing. This nation has always been a manufacturing nation and that is how we have survived.

Interest rates should be kept at sustainably low levels. That has particular relevance to the biggest private employer in my constituency—the Hoover factory in Cambuslang. The sale of such consumer goods depends on how people feel economically—whether they have money in their pockets. Not only do high interest rates cause unemployment but they make hire purchase more expensive. Again, those factors badly affect my constituency.

In 1990, the manufacturing deficit was £10·9 billion, whereas in 1979, there was a surplus of £2·7 billion. Some Conservative Members need reminding that there was a surplus every year between 1974 and 1979. That needs to be said increasingly so that the record is put straight.

As for the Conservative party's record on industrial research and development, that alone is a precondition to a firm's ability to innovate and to capture and retain new markets. Britain is lagging behind because the Government have consistently failed to support innovation in industry, which our major industrial competitors take for granted. Time and again, the CBI—not exactly a friend of the Labour party, even these days—criticises the Government for their unhelpful attitude to industry.

One particular criticism levelled at us by the Conservative Government relates to our proposals for a minimum wage. All the kerfuffle, the shouting and the fuss from them amounts to one thing—they are trying to cover up their record. The Tory tactic is to attack the minimum wage proposal to divert attention from the massive rise in unemployment caused by their policies—more than 500,000 people have been made unemployed in the past year alone.

Even if the introduction of a minimum wage caused unemployment to rise—and that is disputed—it has been estimated that that increase would be as little as 4,000 after three years. Compare that with the record of the Conservative Government, who have presided over 500,000 people being made unemployed in this past year alone. They have the cheek to criticise a minor proposal that would raise people from poverty, which is the height of hyprocrisy.

Unemployment, along with the national health service, are the most desperate issues in my constituency. We await the next election eagerly because it will give us the chance to avenge ourselves on the people who have caused so much misery. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) will do very well to hang on to his seat because his constituents will soon sort him out for supporting the policies that have caused their unemployment.

7.40 pm

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): It is particularly fitting that we should have the debates on education and employment on the same day, because education is a continuing process throughout life upon which employment is heavily dependent. What is more, any forecast about the way in which industry will develop within the United Kingdom and the European Community in the remainder of this century suggests that national prosperity will depend to an increasing extent on the successful skilling up of the national work force to meet the new demands that will be made by industry, technology, the professions and academia.

Anyone who studies academic standards in our schools over the past 20 years must recognise that there have been considerable improvements. International comparisons are of relatively little value because they tend to highlight the different priorities and practices of different countries. We are better than other countries in some things and they are better than us in others.

Mr. Worthington: Like what?

Mr. Batiste: That sedentary intervention illustrates how the Opposition always look for the things that damage Britain most. Not unnaturally, we always look at the things in which we do rather well.

We must not undermine our centres of excellence when we try to improve the system as a whole. I believe that we have paid a heavy price for some of the flawed theories that were adopted by the educational establishment of the 1960s. Those theories have led to great under-achievement among our population.

The first of those flawed theories was the myth of parity of esteem between schools. The idea that every school produced a similar standard of education and that parents regarded every school in their area as equal was nonsense. It was also dangerous. If one could not identify the differences in the quality of education between schools, there was no incentive to put things right. If parents did not have reasonably objective information from which to make a judgment between schools, they made that judgment on whatever inaccurate information was available to them. That myth has caused us great harm.

The second flawed theory was the commitment to the objective of mixed-ability teaching. I accept that in some schools such teaching may be necessary—in village schools with a small number of pupils, it is inevitable. Those teachers engaged in mixed teaching tell me that it can work, to a degree, if one puts a great deal of effort into it. However, for the same effort, much better education could be provided if schools were to stream effectively on abilities where possible.

The third flawed theory was the idea that to encourage the competitive spirit among children and to get them used to competitive pressures was in some way undesirable.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Robert Atkins): Especially in sport.

Mr. Batiste: I know that my hon. Friend has a great interest in sport and that is the best example of why that

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crass theory fell down. However, just because its crassness was so obvious in sport does not mean that the theory has not caused equal damage throughout all subjects.

I strongly suspect that many able people drop out of university early in their careers because, as much as anything else, they have never been brought up to face competitive pressure in life. They find it difficult to make that adjustment. But once we leave the world of education, we must face such competitive pressures in almost every walk of life. Surely our educational system should encourage and train people to face up to them.

In the past 10 years, the Government have taken great steps to correct those flaws. We have introduced parental choice, the local management of schools, grant-maintained schools—there will be a flood of applications to become such schools after we have won the next election—the GCSE, the national curriculum and testing. All those changes are beginning to remove the bases of the flawed theories so that we can address the reality of education and put right existing problems.

The Queen's Speech maintains the momentum. We plan to enlarge the inspection of schools to a scale hitherto unknown. That is essential. Some Opposition Members have criticised the fact that the inspectors will not be Government officials, but I look upon such criticism with amazement. If the Opposition had a shred of justification for their attack it would mean that they would nationalise all chartered accountants. Surely the same logic should apply—no one could provide a fair and independent audit of a limited company unless he was a Government official. That is nonsense and it is just as much nonsense when one applies it to education.

Mr. Straw: What about the Bank of Credit and Commerce International?

Mr. Batiste: There we have it once again—the moment we have such discussions the Opposition start sniping at independent professions. The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) should note that chartered accountants display considerable commitment and dedication when it comes to providing a high standard of independent auditing. If the Opposition believe that nationalising the audit system and putting in paid civil servants to audit the industrial world would improve it, standards of integrity and the quality of accounting, that is laughable and beyond belief.

Mr. Straw: I can only cite to the hon. Gentleman the experience of local authorities when it comes to dealing with district auditors and auditors from the private sector. Most authorities would say that they get an easier ride from private sector auditors, for one good reason: private sector auditors depend on being retained by their local authority for their continuing profits.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): There is no proof of that.

Mr. Batiste: Methinks the hon. Member for Blackburn protests too much. Some local authorities may have a vested interest in trying to undermine independent auditors for the very reason that was obvious from the hon. Gentleman's intervention—because profit is involved. The new-look Labour party always slips back into its old ways. Profit is a dirty word whether in relation to industry or education. Whenever one probes beneath the surface of the Opposition one witnesses the same reflex reaction.

When the inspection of schools takes place on a wider scale it will provide the data upon which action can be taken to improve the quality of schools.

Another important piece of proposed legislation will allow further education colleges to float free from local authorities. That local authorities merely provide a straitjacket for such colleges was evident from the dramatic improvement in the quality and performance of polytechnics once they were freed from local authorities a few years ago. I strongly welcome the proposal to free further education colleges.

I also welcome the opportunity to remove the binary line as that will allow polytechnics to apply for university status. It will be particularly welcome in the context of European grants, because the term "polytechnic" as we use it is not well understood in Europe. I believe that, as a result, our polytechnics lose when it comes to the allocation of grant and when applying for research funding.

I make two suggestions for inclusion in the legislation on higher education. The first relates to the outrageous scandal of the delay by some local education authorities in paying students' grants. I am told that in Leeds, for instance, four to five weeks after the beginning of term, up to one third of students at universities and polytechnics have still not received their grant cheque. One can imagine the anxiety of a young person, possibly away from home for the first time and being called upon to pay the fees for a hall of residence and to buy books, who expects as of right to have received a cheque on the first day of term, but who finds that more than a month later it is still not there. If LEAs are not capable of living up to their statutory responsibilities, why not cut out the middle man altogether and let the money flow directly from the Government to the institutions? I can see no purpose in continuing this system.

The second issue that we will have to scrutinise in Committee will be how research and development funding is to be distributed after the binary line is removed. It is important that current overall levels of Government spend on R and D—which are consistent with best practice around the world—be maintained, even if the Ministry of Defence R and D spend is reduced. We must ensure that overall Government spending is maintained at the same levels, with defence spending moving over to the civil sector.

At the same time, we must encourage the links built up over the past 10 years between industry and higher education institutions. If this country falls down in any area, it is in the comparison between what is spent by private industry here on R and D and what is spent in countries such as Germany and Japan. So the questions that will have to be answered are how the R and D spend will be allocated and how companies will be encouraged to spend more on R and D once the binary line is gone.

Great progress has also been made on employment over the past 10 years: trade union reform, the creation of TECs, youth training, employment training and training credits were all innovative and imaginative steps forward. I am only sorry that the step-by-step approach to trade union reform did not continue in this Queen's Speech, because I thought that the Green Paper on further trade union reform was excellent. The right of people to join the

trade union of their choice, the restrictive practices of the Bridlington agreement notwithstanding, should be quickly implemented.

Compared with this array of novel, imaginative and successful measures, the Labour party's intentions with respect to employment present an entirely different picture. It is committed to a return to secondary picketing. How that will help industrial relations I do not know. The Opposition are committed to a statutory minimum wage which will wipe out about 1·5 million jobs. Earlier, I asked the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) where the evidence was for saying that no jobs will be lost as a result of the statutory minimum wage. His only response continues to be a flat denial of a fact which virtually every independent observer confirms. That is cold comfort for my constituents whose jobs would be at risk.

Shadow spending Ministers are promising £35 billion spending at the same time as shadow Treasury Ministers deny it. But the threat of that overspend will create inflationary pressures and put pressure on sterling. Within the exchange rate mechanism, those pressures would force up interest rates and put further pressure on employment.

The areas of spending that are not popular with the Labour party will come under increasing pressure, too. The Challenger tank is made in Leeds. A world-beating piece of defence equipment, it has won the competition to supply the British Army and it has a good chance of selling well overseas. With Labour in office, pressures to spend on health and education would build up and a Labour Government might ask whether they really needed any tanks. That would jeopardise the contracts that had been placed. The employees who work in the defence industry must feel a cold chill down their spines when they realise that the shadow defence spokesman is not even in the shadow Cabinet, so what weight can he exert on behalf of their interests or those of our defence? There will be a carve-up.

The contrast between our actions and the Labour party's promises is clear. The Queen's Speech is an excellent programme of legislation for the coming year, and I believe that our Green Paper on trade union reform will provide a necessary and successful ingredient of a winning manifesto at the next election.

7.54 pm

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): I had intended to concentrate on education, but I agreed with all but a couple of paragraphs in the speech of the hon. Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw), whose presentation was exceptionally good, so I shall concentrate more on unemployment, especially in the north.

Tonight's interesting debate has covered a wide range of subjects including Yugoslavia and Northern Ireland. Tomorrow, however, thousands of people in this country will be unable to learn about our discussions here, because many of them will be unable to afford a newspaper or a television licence. I refer to those who do not have jobs and whose priorities are to feed and clothe their children and keep a roof over their heads. Not all of them are succeeding in doing even that, but it remains their priority.

Problems of unemployment in the south-east have been mentioned, but concentrating on that area is to some extent illusory, although I sympathise with people who have lost their jobs in London and the south-east in recent times. In my part of the world, in the north, we have lived with unemployment generation after generation. We have suffered from it for 150 years, with three notable exceptions. Unemployment fell considerably during the first and second world wars, when most of the guys from my part of the world were in the trenches on the Somme and in the desert of El Alamein. Unemployment was fairly low just after the second world war, too, when there was a major programme of reconstruction and the mines were working flat out to produce coal for the power stations. They continued to do so until the mid-1970s.

In the 1970s, a number of mines closed in my constituency. There were 20 there in the 1960s: there are none left now. Most of them closed because they were exhausted, but both Labour and Tory Governments in the 1960s and 1970s applied regional policies that were fairly successful. We had industrial development certificates which advised industries of areas of the country where they could expand and of others where they could not.

Then came development area status and the various grants that went with it. That had a significant effect on my whole county. Many mines were replaced by new industries, many of them pharmaceutical industries of which no one in my area had any previous experience. An aluminium smelter was also built—until then, our only experience of aluminium had been with the pots and pans on the cooker. The smelter started operating and men were retrained to work in the industry. At the peak of its operations about 1,100 people were employed in it, supporting another 5,000 jobs outside the plant.

That was deliberate policy, and it worked extremely well. At that time, Glaxo and Searle came to my constituency, and Boots and Merke Sharp and Dome went to the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell). They are all pharaceutical companies. They are still there, well settled and doing a good job. The employees, who are predominantly ex-miners, have settled in well.

Since about 1975, no new industries have come to the county, only one or two small businesses. On Tyneside, which neighbours my constituency, the rapid decline in the shipbuilding and heavy engineering industries has affected employment prospects. That, too, has affected my area.

Since 1979, Government policies have been of no help whatever in my area. For example, development area status is given to the city of Newcastle and runs up the Tyne valley to the west—I can understand why Newcastle has that status—to the towns of Ponteland and Darras Hall, which is predominantly executive housing attached to an agricultural village. Its reason for having development area status is nil. The problems of the county run, not east-west, but north-south. That is recognised in the county structure plan, but not by the Government.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury has said that there is no link between unemployment and training. In 1965, the National Coal Board employed 500 apprentices in the two counties of Northumberland and Durham. Exactly 20 years later, in 1985, the figure was 50—one tenth of the number trained 20 years previously. As I understand it, now there is none. That reflects the changes that took place when a major industry disappeared from the county. There was no employer to create training opportunities for young people.

The NCB had an extremely good training programme, of which I was a product in my earlier life as an engineer. That has all gone, but the facilities remain. There is still an engineering workshop in my constituency which could

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take 60 or 70 young people and train them in engineering skills. British Coal cannot fund that. Funding should come from Government sources, but I am afraid that the training and enterprise council arrangements do not cover such a proposition.

We need proper regional policies in an area such as mine. The Labour party has advocated that. I have been involved in discussions on how that should evolve in the northern region. We should devolve powers and responsibilities to properly established regional assemblies, which would begin to overcome some problems in the north. There should be greater emphasis on retaining jobs and introducing new ones.

I am not against inward investment. Earlier, it was said that the TUC was against it. In my area, there is a factory that used to be owned by Glaxo and used to produce primary penicillin. Glaxo decided to dispose of the factory and sold it to a Taiwanese company, Synpac. In the past two or three months, it took over the factory and now produces primary penicillin—exactly what Glaxo produced. Somehow Synpac can find the market which Glaxo could not.

Another factory in my area produced power packs for television sets. It had various owners, including Gresham Lion and Dowty. Then there was a management takeover, but I cannot remember the name as it lasted such a short time. It, too, has been taken over by a Taiwanese company, Lite On. It is producing power packs for television sets. It has found the market which, again, British companies could not. I congratulate the Taiwanese on their marketing skills, which somehow we do not have.

I am not critical of foreign companies that come to this country, except in one or two cautious respects. British Alcan has a smelter in my constituency. Less than two weeks ago, it announced a further reduction of 300 jobs. It has already reduced its manpower little by little, but this time it is in one fell swoop. There are compulsory redundancies and people have to go. When I discussed the matter with the management, they claimed that there was a slump in the international market for aluminium and that stockpiles were increasing. I understand that, because it has been happening elsewhere.

The management also said that there were two major problems: first, the construction industry, which used tremendous amounts of aluminium, had been badly affected; secondly—this relates to some of our foreign policies—the Russians were dumping aluminium on the metal market to the tune of about 75,000 tonnes, which is equavalent to the output of four major smelters. Obviously, that affects the smelter in my constituency. The decision to get rid of 300 jobs was made not in London or Newcastle, but in Montreal. External influences determine what happens in my constituency.

Recently, Blyth power station, which is owned by National Power, decided to cut 250 jobs. It removed completely two generating sets. I suppose that that contributed to the increase in senior executive salaries. Both Alcan and the power station depend on coal for fuel, so what they do has a knock-on effect on the one colliery left in Northumberland. Now 190 jobs are to go there. In the past two months, more than 1,000 jobs have been lost in my constituency—they are all male jobs—and that is pushing the unemployment figure close to 20 per cent.

How do we overcome these problems? There is a way. Look at some of the policies that were applied in the 1960s and 1970s, adjust them for the 1990s and reintroduce them. I am sure that, come the general election, when we get a Labour Government, that is exactly what we shall do.

8.7 pm

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): I am grateful for this opportunity to speak on the Loyal Address tonight. I want to direct one small remark to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), who is not in his seat. He called for an all-Wales elected body—I presume that, by the same token, he would also want an all-Scotland elected body—which would have powers devolved from Westminster. If there were such a body, the over-representation of Scotland and Wales in this House could not be sustained. It will not escape the notice of Opposition Members that only twice since 1945 has the kingdom of England failed to have a Conservative majority. Therefore, the quid pro quo of devolution, if some future Parliament should so decide, must be a more equitable distribution of numbers and seats.

I also want to address some remarks to the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot). It has always been an ambition of mine to take part in a debate to which he has contributed. He is respected and held with affection on all sides of the House because he is a man of great principle at a time when we are deafened from within the parliamentary Labour party by the sound of principles crashing to the floor like so much glass. He has remained true to his principles. It has cost him—he has always been on the losing side—but he has kept true to them. The Conservative party pays tribute to the singular contribution that he made in 1983 to the successful re-election of the Conservative Government.

The right hon. Gentleman is big on style. He has a cultivated manner. He always ends a sentence on an upward inflection and bounces and rises like a disconcerted Harlem Globetrotter. However, the substance is nil. It is a bit like eating a Chinese meal—good at the time, but soon leaving one with an empty feeling. We note his progress, his contribution and the completely unprincipled stand of the party of which he is a senior member.

The right hon. Gentleman said that he did not see that a minimum wage would increase unemployment. That is his view. Ours is that a minimum wage would create unemployment. Interestingly, over the weekend, the Labour party candidate in the Langbaurgh by-election conceded in the *Sunday Times* that a minimum wage would increase unemployment. Who is right? Is it the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent or the Labour party candidate in the by-election? The latter at least has one advantage over many Labour Members in that he has worked in private industry, and he will do so again from Friday 8 November. I should like an answer on that point from the hon. Member for Blackburn.

I welcome the Queen's Speech; hon. Members may remember that, in 1982, I seconded the Loyal Address. The debate on the Gracious Speech not only enables the Government to enlarge upon their intentions for the parliamentary year that lies ahead but gives the Opposition an opportunity to lay out their stall of policies so that they can be seen, perhaps for the first time, in

public. The Conservative party knows that, if one wants to get hold of the policies of Labour, one does not ask their spokesmen. Mr. Mandelson has tied them up, dragged them along, put them in a cupboard and sanitised them. One gets the Labour party's policies from its minders who, like a heavenly chorus, come into play every now and again, especially for the media and the soundbites.

The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) has been criticised, despised and sat upon by Labour Members. His one compelling virtue is his honesty. No one can deny that, for all his wealth and connections, for all his aristocratic pedigree, the right hon. Gentleman always tells the truth. In an interview with Mr. Anthony Bevins in *The Independent* on 30 September, the right hon. Gentleman said:

"If we've changed our mind to win, we could change our mind when we've won. What's wrong with that? We could not talk about nuclear disarmament because we might not win. But we've won, so we change back again."

That position strikes a chord in the heart of every Labour Member. The shedding of principles like leaves in autumn is in pursuit of power. We know that, in the end, they will revert. As the right hon. Member for Chesterfield said, once

"we've won, so we change back again."

The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), who I hope will wind up the debate for the Opposition, made a speech over the weekend which was reported in an article in *The Independent on Sunday* yesterday, headed: "Labour 'fast track' for gifted children". It says:

"Mr. Straw said . . . 'We have to get away from the over-rigid application of age rules which may serve to trap a child in an educational environment which cannot adequately serve his or her needs'."

Mr. Janman: That sounds like a grammar school.

Mr. Dunn: Exactly so.

Later in the article by Ngaio Crequer, the hon. Member for Blackburn was reported to say:

"gifted children would not be helped by a return to selection, which had stamped many pupils of great ability as failures. The Labour Party would make education authorities abolish selection at 11."

There we have it—the Labour party wants to help but will help by abolition.

Significantly, the article also said that the hon. Member for Blackburn had said:

"master classes would be encouraged, to extend the brightest pupils; schools with strength in music, ballet and performing arts would be encouraged to develop specialist centres; teachers would be better trained to spot gifted children."

I could have said that—I probably did when I was a Minister in the Department of Education and Science. The point is that, within the comprehensive system where children are taught en bloc, where differentiation is not liked by the education establishment, the hon. Gentleman wants "master classes", although he has said also that

"gifted children would not be helped by a return to selection".

However, he is prepared to divide children between the bright and not-so-bright. This has more to do with a general election than with a genuine change in conviction.

Interestingly, that statement has come from an hon. Gentleman who wishes to help the more able child by abolishing grammar schools, the CTCs and the assisted places scheme which the Government brought into operation.

Mr. Janman: And grant-maintained schools.

Mr. Dunn: As my hon. Friend says, the hon. Gentleman wishes to abolish grant-maintained schools.

When my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) said that the Labour party wanted neighbourhood comprehensive schools, the hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong) said, "Hear, hear." She has now been packed off so that she cannot say anything more. I know that, if she were to speak at the Dispatch Box, we would have an honest statement of the Labour party's intentions.

Last December, the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) visited Gravesham, my neighbouring constituency, and said that selective schooling would end under a Labour Government. North-west Kent, which has grammar schools, high schools, 11-to-18 comprehensive schools and a CTC would find all those choices swept out by a Labour Government, although the Labour party has said that it is committed to helping the bright child. What utter nonsense to make that statement. Mandelson should be sacked for forcing the hon. Member for Blackburn, who is fundamentally a nice guy, to utter these contortions of the truth.

I especially welcome the following part of the Queen's Speech:

"Action will be taken to improve quality and choice in education . . . and to make information available about the performance of individual schools."

That is important to me. It is also important that we have a radical reform of Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools. I am probably the only hon. Member present who has worked with HMI. If every school were to be inspected by HMI on a cyclical basis, the cycle would be 20 years. That is totally inadequate for measuring the impetus of education reforms.

Furthermore, in the 1960s, the HMI was captured by the educational left and it has never let go. There is a self-perpetuating oligarchy which is a creature of its own making. That is why, a short while ago, I introduced a private Member's Bill dealing with this problem, which was voted against by the hon. Member for Blackburn and his colleagues. Therefore, I welcome the introduction of outside business men, people from commerce and perhaps even from some of the Churches, although not the Church of England, into the inspectorate. That will enable us to get a positive measurement of what education is about, what the product that has been created is like and what the world of work wants. The reforms of the way that schools are inspected are sensible.

I hope that, ultimately, the Government will abolish, once and for all, the Department of Education and Science and give all the responsibilities to the Department of Employment in the form of a department of training and education. This is my last political objective. Once it has been achieved, I can smile again.

I know that we have won the education ground, as it were, and have held it for the past decade. The Labour party is running behind us all the time. It is tied to the chariot wheels of radical education reform, and the important thing for Labour Members is not to get their feet squashed. The Labour party must come clean about what it wants for education. A simple but significant fact is that the Labour party and truth are becoming strangers. My constituents enjoy a choice, variety and range of schools that is second to none, and they know that support for what would become a Labour Government would be support for ending that choice. I ask my right hon. and

[Mr. Dunn]

hon. Friends to fight and fight again against the policy changes that have been adopted by the hon. Member for Blackburn.

8.20 pm

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): We cannot choose who we follow in the Chamber.

I shall talk mainly about the proposal in the Gracious Speech to introduce a Bill dealing with higher and further education in Scotland. The proposal provides my only chance to talk about the issue during the debate.

My hon. Friends and I welcome some parts of the proposed measure, such as the transfer of control of the universities of Scotland. It is a pity, however, that the transfer will take place as a matter of expediency and not on a principled basis. It will happen only because there was a decision to unify the control of polytechnics and universities within England and Wales, when it was realised that that would involve taking over control of the central institutions in Scotland and transferring it to Bristol. As that would have been unacceptable within Scotland, responsibilities for the Scottish universities had to be transferred to Scotland. It is better however, to do the right thing for the wrong reason than not to do the right thing. We hope that the proposed Scottish Higher Education Funding Council will be fairly formed and will be able to do a job that will unify the Scottish education system for the first time.

Having been told that the binary divide will be abolished, many of us have tried to think about what abolition will mean. The two key issues in the White Paper are differences in teaching practices and ratios in polytechnics and universities, and differences in research funding. When the Labour party submitted its proposals to abolish the divide—it has been doing so for some time—I hoped that we would be moving towards a common system of funding that would allow the colleges or polytechnics, which have been at a relative disadvantage in terms of funding, to move closer to the levels of funding that have been enjoyed by the universities. It was thought that abolishing the divide would mean that the status and resources of the college system would have to be strengthened if there was not to be a two-tier system in higher education.

We are concerned that there will be a two-tier system and that, in abolishing the binary divide, we shall be creating another divide. It is a pity that the proposals for Scotland amount to a thorough botch when it comes to abolition. For some months, colleges in Scotland were left in complete uncertainty about their future position. They did not know whether they were to be universities. Robert Gordon's college in Aberdeen, Paisley college and Dundee college, for example, had never been classified as polytechnics although they shared almost all their characteristics. That was for various reasons, many of them to do with the Scottish Office.

The White Paper was produced without thought for the colleges to which I have referred. Accordingly, they spent the summer in a difficult situation. They have to recruit students and be able to tell them at the end of the day whether they willl obtain a university degree or a polytechnic degree. I know that, last week, about 10 students who had enrolled at Robert Gordon's college left and went to a university because they could not be satisfied about the degree that they would be awarded, which means that the college has lost about £150,000. That happened because the White Paper was half-baked or half-finished. No English college was uncertain about its future status.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: But for the White Paper, the colleges in England and Scotland that are funded by the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council would have had no prospect of university status. The White Paper touched on whether degree-awarding powers should be given to colleges that are currently not designated as polytechnics under the PCFC. We have recently issued a consultative document on how we shall handle applications from these colleges. There are English colleges in that position. Bolton institute comes to mind immediately. The Government have made it clear how they will handle these matters, and the colleges have the same attractive prospects as face the polytechnics and colleges under the PCFC, so long as they can satisfy everybody of the quality of their awards. I have no doubt that Robert Napier college, for example, is confident that it will.

Mr. Worthington: Robert Napier seems to be an amalgam of two colleges—Napier and Robert Gordon's.

Mr. Clarke: I meant the two, Robert Gordon and Napier. It is no good the hon. Gentleman resorting to pedantry when faced with the answer to his question.

Mr. Worthington: I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for going into such detailed and wise consideration of these matters. It will come as something of a shock to a college in Aberdeen and another in Edinburgh to learn that tonight they have been amalgamated and now have university status. I thank the right hon. and learned Gentleman for the wisdom of his intervention.

There is real concern about the binary divide and what it means. We are told that we shall abolish it, and there are considerable fears not about a division between polytechnics and universities but about one between institutions that call themselves universities. What is in a name? What does it mean to call something a university? My definition—I think it is the definition of the majority—is that a university in this country is a place where research and teaching are inextricably mixed and part of the same institution.

If the Government have their way, it seems that many institutions that will be overwhelmingly teaching-oriented will call themselves universities. There is already a considerable concentration of university funding—that may be inevitable, but we need to debate where universities are going in future—and some figures suggest that about 70 per cent. of research funding from research councils and charities, for example, is going to 15 universities in this country. It appears that about 54 per cent. of science funding is going to 11 universities. There may be good reasons for that. For example, if we are to compete on a European or American scale, it may be necessary to have a concentration of funding.

Against that background, we should be not abolishing the binary divide but creating a framework in which all universities and colleges would be equal. We would be

seeking to create or ratify a super-league of universities that would be on one plane, while the remainder would be fundamentally teaching institutions.

What is disturbing about the Government's White Paper—and therefore their higher education policy—is that all those issues are not tackled. We need seriously to tackle the issue of whether sufficient money is going into basic research. We know that about one third of universities' income from the Universities Funding Council goes into basic research. However, it is a falling percentage, and there is a policy to transfer money to research councils. Britain's funding of research and development as a percentage of gross domestic product, lags behind that of Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United States. Therefore, we must ask whether this is the right time to be cutting the amount of research money going to higher education institutions.

The 1991 Cabinet Office annual review of Government funding for research and development shows that expenditure on civil research and development is at its lowest level, as a percentage of total Government expenditure, since 1984, and that the Government's funding for basic research lags behind that of Italy, France, Germany, Japan and Sweden. I hope that, in the discussions on the proposals for higher education, the Government will tell us what they think should be the level of funding for research in our universities. I fear that there will be further cuts in the money devoted to basic research and that there will be a further concentration of resources among particular universities. Until now, students at universities have had the benefit of a mix of teaching and research, but I fear that that will be denied to students attending the 90 universities of the future.

The funding of the higher education sector does not relate solely to research but extends to the basic facilities in our universities and colleges. There have been a number of disputes at Scottish institutions during the past few weeks because students feel that the facilities are not adequate. At Glasgow polytechnic, students have legitimately protested about the canteen facilities, which were built when the institution had 1,700 students, and which are not adequate to deal with the current 7,000 students. There have been protests about libraries. In Aberdeen, students are sleeping in tents because of a lack of accommodation. They no longer receive housing benefit, but they have to compete with oil workers for accommodation.

Any Government can stuff colleges full of students; it takes a wise Government to ensure that standards are not damaged and that students are educated in decent conditions. The Government's sudden conversion in 1984 to an expansion of higher education was welcome, but not if it means an underfunding of our universities and colleges. If the quality that has been built up is destroyed, it will take a long time to put that right.

The further education document is an appalling document that whittles away the role of local government. It is a foolish document because it does not attempt to put the case, to analyse or to rationalise. Mercifully, the Government have been driven back in one or two areas. They have withdrawn their proposals for the careers service. They wanted it to be taken over by employers, who naturally have their own interests at heart.

There is a fundamental philosophical divide between the Opposition and the Government on the further education proposals for both sides of the border. The Government quite literally refer to the customers of the colleges as the employers. If the word "customers" has to be used, it must surely mean the students. To say that further education colleges are about local employers is to diminish the role, status and vision of further education, so I hope that the Government will back away from that.

It is foolish even to think of transferring the control of further education colleges to Edinburgh. In many regions, links have been built between secondary education, community education and further education. It now appears that, in future, there will be the absurdity of schools having to charge colleges for the use of school facilities, and colleges having to charge schools for the use of college facilities. Colleges will have to have the support of architects, accountants and lawyers, independent of that which can be provided by the local education system.

There has been a foolish divide between vocational and non-vocational education, and that has led to the Government getting into a tangle in Scotland. In the first flush of the White Paper, the Secretary of State said that local authorities might be allowed to continue to provide some social recreational educational provision in their areas. After an uprising on both sides of the border, The Government had to back down and agree that more could be provided.

The Government are in a tangle because the Secretary of State for Scotland is causing a number of problems, and not just those relating to the highland regiments. He has now agreed that he might have to fund vocational training through education authorities if local employers leave gaps in the proposed management of the service. he also conceded that local government would still be allowed to provide vocational training, even after further education authorities had been taken out of their control. The right hon. Gentleman said that because his constituents wrote to him. School board members at the Douglas-Ewart school feared that the proposed new arrangements for business people to take over the running of their nearest further education colleges, 25 miles away in Stranraer, would leave them without the courses currently on offer.

We see complete muddle in the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Bill presented today, with its proposals for an inadequate further education sector dominated by "local" business men, many of whom will not be local to Scotland. They will provide an inadequate service that will not reflect or respect the further education needs of many people in Scotland. It will have to be supplemented by local education authorities, which, under the Bill, will be given powers to provide vocational education.

The Secretary of State says that that does not represent a change in the Government's original policy, but it does. Previously, it was proposed that only social and recreational education would be provided by local authorities at further education level. The Government realised where their half-baked proposals were leading, and backtracked.

We will back the transfer of the control of universities in Scotland, but we will want to ensure that the binary divide will genuinely be dispensed with and that further divides are not introduced. In addition, we promise outright opposition to the proposal to take colleges of further education out of local authority control.

8.40 pm

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): Sometimes it takes a change of administration to improve education——

Ms. Armstrong: Hear, hear.

Mr. Bowis: The hon. Lady says, "Hear, hear"—and just such a change occurred in inner London. With the departure of the not much lamented Inner London education authority, my borough of Wandsworth was able to improve standards. Under ILEA, Wandsworth's education costs were twice the national average, but produced half the national average results. It inherited a situation in which 40 per cent. of parents sought secondary education for their children in other than local schools.

The borough had 12,000 empty school places costing £8 million a year. Nineteen per cent. of pupils were leaving school at 16 with no GCSEs, and only 17 per cent. with five A to C grade GCSEs, against a national average of 8 per cent. Fifteen per cent. of secondary school pupils practised truancy.

Now that Wandsworth's teaching posts are being filled, the borough's secondary school enrolment has increased by 7 per cent., truancy has fallen to 10 per cent., and 20·5 per cent. of pupils leave with A to C grade GCSEs. The number staying on for sixth form education has increased by 10 per cent. to 42 per cent., and a further 20 per cent. of pupils go on to further education.

Those improvements have been achieved during a very short time under Conservative management of inner London education. They run alongside innovative moves to introduce two city technology colleges, two grant-maintained schools, a new Church of England school, and free nursery education for every child for whom it is wanted.

Labour offers little to the people of inner London—only the destruction of everything that is good in education. It would destroy the grammar schools that remain, grant-maintained schools, city technology colleges, the assisted places scheme for the less well-off in society, and even A-levels. I ask the Opposition to think again. Of course we want to bridge the gap between vocational and academic qualification, but A-levels lead to degree courses that are shorter, and that finish sooner, than their equivalents in other European countries. The system produces a much lower university drop-out rate of about one in six, compared with France or Germany, whose six or seven-year degree courses produce a 50 per cent. drop-out rate.

I welcome the pledges on higher education in the Gracious Speech and the bringing together of academic and vocational qualifications. I look forward to the establishment of the ordinary and advanced diplomas, provided that they are accompanied by flexibility in higher education in terms of admissions policy. I welcome also the expansion of training credits.

I must declare an interest as an adviser to the Association for College Management and the Association for Colleges for Further and Higher Education, in welcoming, with other right hon. and hon. Members, in the Further and Higher Education Bill, the ending of the binary divide, and the conferring of university status on polytechnics—which have proved their value in offering efficiency, quality, and student throughput at cheaper cost than universities.

Over the past few years, polytechnics have benefited from their independence and now lack only the status that would help them to attract funding and students from overseas in particular.

The views of the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington), who spoke and fled, are wholly opposed by the colleges themselves. The hon. Gentleman speaks only for certain Labour town hall bosses who want to keep control of further education. The colleges' representative bodies are much in favour of my right hon. and learned Friend's proposal to give them independence.

Any right hon. or hon. Member who has served on an education committee, as I have, will know what nonsense it was for local education authorities to take decisions on the priorities between capital equipment projects. The problem was also that colleges of further education had no ward councillors, whereas primary and secondary schools did. The funding that the Department sent down the line to further education rarely, if ever, reached the colleges. That can now be put right, which is why the colleges are so pleased with my right hon. and learned Friend's proposal.

I hope that the transfer of assets will be made through the Education Assets Board, which could resolve any disputes that might arise between colleges and LEAs. I hope also that planning blight can be avoided as LEAs, understandably, seek to protect their own budgets and colleges strive to plan for their futures. I hope that we will soon see the establishment of a shadow public funding council, to advise colleges on their plans.

I am pleased that my right hon. and learned Friend clarified the situation in respect of adult education, and hope that he will examine the role of adult education colleges in the provision of further education. AE colleges provide adult returners with the second opportunity that they need, but such students often cannot be full-time. I hope therefore that funding will be provided in terms of full-time equivalents, and not only for full-time FE students. If not, the only opportunity to provide adult education will be the crumbs from the rich man's table, by way of franchises from FE colleges.

I welcome also the change of criteria. Adult education provides access to the second chance that so many people need. One of my local adult education colleges ran a cake decoration class for 16 students. One might not consider such a course particularly vocational, but four of those students returned to take English as a second language, four to take BTEC courses, and four to participate in a business start-up scheme course. Only four of the 16 students used it as a leisure course, which shows the access to further education that adult education can provide.

I join forces with the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) in respect of students with special needs. Their interests should be examined and the cost of provision should not exclude such students from the opportunities that exist for others.

I ask my right hon. and learned Friend whether he will start to examine the funding system, in terms of support for students in further education. At present, only higher national diploma courses qualify for mandatory grants. Some BTEC courses qualify for discretionary grants while others do not, but, even if the courses qualify, local education authority policy often excludes them.

The fact that an applicant may have failed to complete a course in the past when he or she had a grant does not

necessarily mean that that failure was for academic reasons. It could have been for all sorts of personal reasons. Perhaps the original course was the wrong one; perhaps a second course is needed for the applicant to take up the existing job opportunities. In any event, such people should be given a second chance. The worst problem of all, especially in London, is that experienced by students whose parents have moved across LEA boundaries and are excluded by residence qualifications that they cannot meet.

I ask my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State to consider all those problems as he takes his excellent Bill through the House. There is a stark contrast between the educational opportunity provided in the Gracious Speech and the lack of opportunity, and ending of choice, proposed by the Opposition parties. I support my right hon. and learned Friend and his colleagues and hope that the Bill will soon be on the statute book.

8.50 pm

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): The Gracious Speech contains 504 words, and about three positive ideas. I have yet to find anything in it that will help St. Helens. I note that the Government intend to continue to prepare for the privatisation of British Rail and British Coal. When I first became a Member of Parliament, we had two pits and shared in a third; now we have nothing left. The sites are being taken away.

Similarly, when I first became Member of Parliament for St. Helens, South, we had between 10,000 and 12,000 employees in the glass industry. In the past two months, we have lost nearly 1,000 jobs, which has reduced the number to 5,000 or 6,000. Industry is dying away. Who is being trained to replace those employees? Where is retraining being carried out?

St. Helens has seen a marvellous example of privatisation. It is a pity that the Secretaries of State for Trade and Industry and for Employment are not present; they might have been able to explain. Eighteen months ago, the skill centres were privatised. The Government gave TICC £2 million, telling the employees to take this brand-new opportunity and assuring them that, as civil servants, they would be protected. Eighteen months later, TICC is bankrupt. What has happened to the 27 people who work in my skill centre? They are down the road, at 50-plus. Will they receive any compensation? No: they will receive the standard redundancy pay. If they had indeed gone down the road as civil servants, they would have received £40,000 or £50,000. Where is the morality of all that?

No one but the Government wants to privatise British Rail—not even its chairman. Of course, he knows something about British Rail. He is not stuck in the dogma of party politics, as Conservative Members are. He is not stuck in the "rat race" belief that, if a concern is sold off, it will do well.

The Government are saying, "Let us have a go at British Coal. At present there are about 40 pits." According to the Rothschild reports, there are 14, and 14 pits cannot supply our needs. The Government have closed all the good pits. Sutton Manor had 14 miles of seams, but the Government got rid of it, putting 400 or 500 people on the dole. Some of those people will never work again in St. Helens, because there are no jobs. The unemployment rate is rising, no new industry is coming in and there are no grants. The Government would not even back the European Coal and Steel Community's campaign so that we could get our fair share.

That is a disgrace in European terms. The Government are the pariah of Europe, but they cannot see it, because they are stuck in dogma and stupid beliefs. [HON. MEMBERS: "Order."] With great respect, those Conservative Members are stuck in the same stupid beliefs. *[Interruption.]* The children will play, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but their tenure on the Government Benches is very short. It is time that some of them grew up and entered the real world—for instance, the hon. Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn), who began his speech with four minutes of diatribe against my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot). Why? I notice that his recreations are American politics and canvassing. I hope that we shall not be introducing into our political system the black propaganda campaigns that we see in America. That would be a disgrace. [HON. MEMBERS: "It is happening in Langbaurgh."] Indeed, it is happening in a constituency not too many miles north of here.

Why can we not have some honesty in politics? Why not simply say that we have a moral duty to the employees at the skill centres. The Treasury says no, although I think that one or two Ministers would like to say yes. Why not give some help to St. Helens council by providing a rescue package? We need a skill centre and we need the education and training that come with it.

In St. Helens the other day, the central heating system in Bleak House school was so good that it collapsed on a child. We have not received enough money to provide the educational and property maintenance that we have needed for the past 10 to 15 years. We shall always be the poor relation. It is surprising what is received by those in Sefton, West Lancashire or other areas that happen to have Conservative Members of Parliament. It is different in Labour areas, however. We have the lowest proportion of beds for geriatrics—about five per 1,000, when it should be 10 per 1,000, as it is in Sefton and other such areas. That is not fair. Why are none of those evils rectified in the Gracious Speech?

Let us take the glass industry. Because the Government no longer provide grants for insulation and regeneration, the glass and insulation industries begin to go downhill. Once factories and skills are gone, the continentals come in to replace them when the grants start to come back, because our local industry has already gone. Why should we not invest? Where does the Gracious Speech tell me that the Government will invest? Where does it mention a single measure that will help St Helens?

As a practising lawyer, I am more than a little concerned about the proposals relating to refugees. When can we have an undertaking to help genuine asylum seekers? Like everyone else, I accept that economic migrants should not have the right to political asylum, or leave to remain for an indefinite time. However, no adequate proposals have been made to protect the real refugees.

I encountered a case—not professionally; I was approached as a Member of Parliament—of a man who was sent back to Zaire, possibly to imprisonment and possibly, as happens in some cases, to death. If we do not provide proper representation for them, on whose conscience does it lie? It lies not on the conscience of those who it on these Benches; it lies on the conscience of those who sit on the Conservative Benches. My only hope is that

[Mr. Gerald Bermingham]

the general election will take place long before this legislation passes into law. If, however, it is passed into law before the election, I am sure that we shall repeal it, simply because it transgresses international human rights. That has been done often enough during the past few years by this Conservative Government. The number of times that they have had to appear before the European Court of Human Rights is a disgrace. The Government have nothing to be proud of.

What, again, does the Gracious Speech contain for the vast majority of people? What does it contain for the millions of people who are out of work, for the millions on hospital waiting lists, for the poor and the elderly and for England, Ireland, Scotland or Wales? Nothing but trite doctrinaire rubbish. The Government's time is up. Go.

8.59 pm

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock): I intend to concentrate on the two subjects of today's debate, education and employment. I shall deal mainly with the latter subject, but I intend to spend just a few minutes on education.

Tremendous proposals are made in the Queen's Speech, in particular the proposal to provide information to parents. Without proper and relevant performance data about how a school is performing, it is not possible for parents to make an informed and therefore correct choice about a school. I welcome also the introduction of annual written reports, which I hope will contain grading for each child. Parents wish to see not just how their child is doing but how he or she is doing when related to a grading benchmark. I hope that the Minister will confirm that a child's performance will be measured by grading.

Probably the most important of our education reforms concerns grant-maintained status. It is essential that we should do all that we can to take as many schools as possible out of local education authority control and place them under the control of governors and parents.

My right hon. and learned Friend will be pleased to know that Torrells comprehensive school in Grays in my constituency is conducting a ballot. I hope that, at the end of that procedure, there will be a majority in favour of grant-maintained status. If that is the case, I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will approve the application. He will be even more interested to know that, through the grapevine, I have heard that one Labour county councillor in my constituency supports the application and that another Labour county councillor, who publicly opposes it, privately supports it because she has a child at Torrells comprehensive school.

The Minister will be pleased to know that unemployment in my constituency fell by 41 last month. Unemployment is still only just half of what it was seven years ago. It is important that we should evolve out of this recession and out of rising unemployment and that we should not create a false boom by lowering interest rates too quickly or by Government over-borrowing. Although the current rise in unemployment, now slowing down, which we are witnessing is frustrating and to some extent avoidable, the Labour party's criticism of the Government's record is both hypocritical and deceitful.

There are four main reasons why Labour's criticism is hypocritical and deceitful. First, the policies of every Labour Government under which this country has suffered since 1929 have led to higher unemployment when they left office than when they took office. However, this is the party that goes on about unemployment as though it had a good record on unemployment. It has an appalling unemployment record, just as it has had since the war an appalling national health service waiting list record.

Secondly, the Labour party tried to blame my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) for the recession. In the autumn of 1987 and during the early part of 1988, some of us, it is true, questioned the lowering of interest rate levels, but the Labour party did not criticise the lowering of interest rates to under 8 per cent. It asked for interest rates to be lowered even further.

Thirdly, the Labour party's support for the social action programme of the social charter and for a minimum wage represents a political double-barrelled shotgun aimed at the working population, particularly those in lower-paid jobs. For millions of people, a Labour Government would replace low wages with no wages.

The fourth reason why the Labour party's hypocrisy and deceit on unemployment is incredible is that the Labour party—I shall not talk about its Common Market Safeguards Committee, of which eight members of the Shadow Cabinet are still members—and the Opposition Front Bench are just as committed as the Government to membership of the exchange rate mechanism. As their only specific spending pledges are on child benefit and pensions, I do not see how a Labour Administration would make one iota of difference to unemployment.

No doubt Labour's answer would be training, but the Government are already pumping billions of pounds of taxpayers' money into training, in addition to the £20 billion that is spent annually by the private sector. Labour's training levy—the introduction of yet another socialist tax on industry—would either reduce profit margins and therefore investment or, if it expanded the money supply, would lead to an increase in prices. Those are the four clear reasons why, whatever the rhetoric and sincerity, a Labour Government would make no difference to the economy in the next 12 or 18 months.

Nowhere in the world has a minimum wage not caused higher unemployment. In France, which has a minimum wage, unemployment is about to peak at more than 3 million. Extremely high youth unemployment in Germany is being blamed on its minimum wage. When a minimum wage was introduced in the United States, it caused only large increases in black unemployment.

Many people have summed up the effect of a minimum wage. On 5 June, Gavin Laird of the Amalgamated Engineering Union rightly said on "Channel 4 News":

> "It has never worked in the past; there is no logic for it; it does not work in any other country and it certainly will not work in Great Britain."

I could not have put it better myself. Eric Hammond of the Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunication and Plumbing Union said in *The Daily Telegraph:*

> "It is so fundamentally wrong that it will increasingly threaten Labour's prospects of a national victory."

The hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), in "The Minimum Wage: Its Potential and Dangers", which was published in 1984, said:

> "The employment consequences will be little short of disastrous."

No wonder the Labour candidate in the Langbaurgh by-election has admitted that a statutory national minimum wage would increase unemployment.

Neutral commentators may disagree about exactly how much a statutory minimum wage would increase unemployment, but they all agree that it would increase it by between 64,000 and 500,000. They agree that it would have a negative impact on growth in the economy of between 0·5 per cent. and 2·5 per cent. and that it would add between 1 per cent. and 3·1 per cent. to the retail prices index. That is only if stage one of the Labour party's proposals are implemented; it does not take into account the effect of stage two.

The social action programme is another example of the Labour party's naive employment policies. It is further evidence that its policies are merely the result of what its paymasters, the trade unions, say. That is why it will try to con the public that it will not repeal most of the trade union reforms that we have made in the past 12 years. In a quantitative sense, in terms of the number of laws that have been passed in the past 12 years, that is correct, but if the totality of the laws represent a house, it will ensure that the laws that it changes will result in the foundations being decimated, with the result that it will fall down. What is the point of maintaining a proper legal framework for trade unions if law-breaking unions cannot be properly punished by the courts? What is the point of a legal framework if companies cannot get a court injunction to stop illegal strike action?

The crucial question on secondary picketing is the definition of the wording in Labour's policy document: "where there is a direct interest between two groups of workers of an occupational or professional nature". That means power and coal workers bringing the country to its knees once again. It means COHSE and NUPE members stopping the sick being admitted to hospital, and it means rail, tube and bus workers striking on the same day and bringing our capital city to a grinding halt. That is what the wording of Labour's policy document really means, and that is what will come about if we are mad enough to elect a Labour Government again.

Conversely, Conservative Members wish to protect the public further from trade union activities. I welcome the proposal in the Green Paper "Industrial Relations in the 1990s" to extend to the general public the same legal right to request an injunction from a court of law to stop illegal industrial action affecting a public service or an essential utility as is available to companies in law. If such court injunctions are ignored, sequestration of trade union assets will follow—but not, of course, if the Labour party is elected.

We can contrast the Government's approach with Labour's approach, which goes in the opposite direction, once again leading industry and the public as lambs to the militant trade unionist slaughter.

9.10 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): This has been a wide-ranging debate. We heard an eloquent and powerful contribution by my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) about the situation in Croatia. We also heard an interesting contribution by the hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe), who strongly criticised the Government for what he described as their extraordinary "confusion" over the channel tunnel route and their lack of strategy for rail freight. It was a quaint speech, telling us of the Government's "astonishing success" in bringing the north and south of the United Kingdom together. The way in which the Government have brought the north and south together was well spelt out by my hon. Friends the Members for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy), for Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson) and for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham).

Essentially, especially during the past four years, the misery and unemployment which the Government inflicted on Scotland and the north and west of this kingdom have been inflicted on the south as well. That is one more reason why, across the south, there has been a greater swing to Labour than in any other region and why, I must point out to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman), who seeks to speak for my native county, we look forward to a smashing victory in his constituency at the next election.

I regret the fact that I was not in the Chamber for the speech of the hon. Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw), but my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong), who was here, told me that he made a heavily veiled criticism of Government policy for its lack of recognition of progress as a key measure of the effectiveness of schools, and expressed concern about the morale of teachers who, he said, were not sufficiently recognised by society.

The hon. Gentleman spoke for himself, which cannot be said for the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey), who is not in his place, the Back-Bench chairman of the Conservative party education committee. I listened to his speech and thought that I had heard it before. Suddenly I realised that I had not heard it before but read it before—word for word in the article that the Secretary of State for Education and Science wrote last Friday in *The Times Educational Supplement*. He was almost, but not quite, word perfect. There must have been some error in the Conservative Central Office word processor as it churned out yet another brief for the hon. Gentleman to repeat.

The hon. Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) let the cat out of the bag about the Government's true intentions towards Her Majesty's inspectorate. The Secretary of State has been trying to say that he is a friend of the inspectorate, despite his proposal to cut it to a third of its current size, and he has created pandemonium. If he is a friend, he has not communicated that fact to any member of the inspectorate.

The hon. Member for Dartford—who, as ever, was frank—did not speak any honeyed words about the inspectorate but said that it had been captured by the left in the 1960s and remained captured, and that it was a self-perpetuating oligarchy . I am sorry that the Secretary of State was not in the Chamber when the hon. Gentleman ended by saying that his last ambition in politics was to abolish the Department in which he served for eight years.

Mr. Robert Atkins: Including me.

Mr. Straw: The hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins) says that he will be among those abolished, but he has already abolished himself—there has never been such a secret and silent Minister for Sport.

Mr. Atkins: Answer the question.

Mr. Straw: All he has to do is talk to the Whips, and we will have a debate on sport any time he likes.

The hon. Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) raised an important matter—the quality of education in Dartford and the part of Kent that he serves. He often raises that

[Mr. Straw]

subject, and we understand his desperation about what will happen to his seat at the next election. We have seen the bloodcurdling letters that he has sent to electors about what may happen if Labour is returned.

The reason that we have a different policy—we want good comprehensives in Kent—is because we are concerned about the standard of education there. I shall quote Mr. David Brown, Kent secretary of the National Association of Governors and Managers:

"Kent youngsters are being short-changed with an education fit for peasants".

He went on:

"when comparing Kent with 13 southern counties it had the lowest number of school leavers with five GCSEs grade A to C . . . the second highest number of pupils leaving with no qualifications, . . . the 12th lowest number staying on at 16."

The Secretary of State for Employment opened the debate and has given my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) and myself his apologies for the fact that he is now absent. Of course we accept his apologies with every grace. He has gone to Kincardine and Deeside to put the Government's side on the amalgamation of the highland regiments. We very much hope that on his way there he works out which side of the Government he is on with regard to that amalgamation.

The Secretary of State for Employment and the Secretary of State for Education and Science, in an interesting double act at the Dispatch Box, sought to challenge my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield about Britain's position in the league tables of numbers staying on between 16 and 19. League tables of international comparison are one measure by which the Government's education record can be judged. There are others, such as the number of children who have received a nursery education, where we are very near or at the bottom. There are measures of expenditure, which has dropped from 5·5 per cent of gross domestic product to 4·8 per cent. in the past 12 years and also the whole issue of the quality of the education service provided.

Mr. Dunn *rose*——

Mr. Straw: I shall give way in a moment.

The Secretary of State for Employment sought to protest when my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield suggested to him that we were near the bottom of the league tables, saying that we should not take too much account of them.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: He did not say that at all.

Mr. Straw: He did. He said that they were not terribly reliable. Whichever way one considers the league tables, Britain is at or near the bottom for the proportion of pupils staying on. Figures provided by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys show that, except for Portugal, we would be bottom of the league in Europe. Those are figures for the number of 14 to 18-year-olds staying on for training or full-time education.

Education participation rates——

Mr. Clarke: I shall give the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) time to read the newspaper cutting that he was trying to wave at us to make his great point. The figure for 14-year-olds in full-time education is 100 per cent.—that is difficult to beat in any country in the world. I think that he will find that the number of 15-year-olds is the same. According to latest figures, 93 per cent. of 16-year-olds are in education or training. I do not know what he is waving about, but he ought to read it before he does so.

Mr. Straw: The figures that I am quoting come from the Government. The number of 14 to 16-year-olds is indeed 100 per cent., but in the case of 14 to 18-year-olds the position is even worse than that emerging from those figures. It makes matters worse that the Secretary of State for Education and Science cannot even understand that.

Let us take the number of 16 to 18-year-olds. The source is "Education Statistics" for 1990 from the Secretary of State's own Department. If he wants the figures, he can have them. Britain is second from bottom of the league according to the figures for 16 to 18-year-olds published by the Secretary of State's own Department. Let us consider the education participation rates——

Mr. Clarke: For what?

Mr. Straw: For 16 to 18-year-olds in education and training. The source is the education statistics for the United Kingdom for 1990. The Secretary of State should apply himself to his own evidence. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development education statistics show that for 18-year-olds staying on in education, Britain is fourteenth out of fifteen. Let us take table D1.1 in the "Training Statistics 1991", which the Secretary of State denied existed earlier in the debate. They show again that Britain is second from the bottom, with only Spain below it.

The Secretary of State sought earlier today to suggest that this comparative survey "Youth and work: transition to employment in England and Germany" somehow backed up the Government's record. It does nothing of the kind. Indeed, the author of the work was so outraged by the Government's claims about what was said in the work that he wrote to the *Evening Standard* on 1 October and said:

"We found much to criticise about the British arrangement for training young people. Far too many of them lost all contact with the education system after the age of 16 and far larger numbers in England than in Germany were in dead-end jobs without any training at all."

Mr. Dunn: I want to go back to a comment made by the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor), which led the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) to go into a spate of incontinent muttering. The Leader of the Opposition apparently said in the campaign for the Langbaurgh by-election that £2·6 billion extra would be spent on education by a future Labour Government. Could we have the truth of it? Was the Leader of the Opposition right and, if so, does the hon. Member for Blackburn agree? Or was the Leader of the Opposition wrong and does the hon. Gentleman agree with that?

Mr. Straw: It would help the hon. Gentleman—because it is unusual for him—to check his facts or to read his Conservative Central Office brief before he speaks, or at least to memorise it. The Leader of the Opposition simply pointed out in an article that he wrote just before the party conference that the proportion of gross domestic product —national income—devoted to education since 1979 had dropped, and that if it had remained the same, the difference would be the figure to which the hon. Gentleman has referred. Our commitment is very different from the Government's. Our commitment is that there

should be a steady increase in the share of national income devoted to education and training over the lifetime of a Government.

There are four main elements to the Government's proposals in the Queen's Speech: on higher education, on further education, on adult education and on the so-called parents charter. On higher education, we will support the transfer to a single funding council because that was our policy. We argued for it and voted in favour of it in 1987 and in 1988. The Government refused to accept our arguments then and we are delighted that they accept our arguments now.

We will not support the Government's proposals in relation to the maintenance of quality in higher education because we think that it is wrong for the people who determine quality in higher education to be the same as those who determine funding——

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Why?

Mr. Straw: Because there is every possibility that if the fund payers determine quality, they will tend to overlook areas in which quality is going down as a result of financial pressures——

Mr. Clarke: Why?

Mr. Straw: I cannot understand the Secretary of State is looking perplexed. The reason is the enormous pressures that the Government, through the funding councils, are imposing on higher education to take in ever more numbers without at the same time being concerned about quality. If the Government are confident that quality will not be affected by the financial pressures that they are imposing on higher education to cut the inward resource year after year, the answer is to ensure that the inspectorate for higher education is wholly independent of the funding system and solely concerned with the issue of quality.

Mr. Clarke: With the greatest respect, I must say that I am puzzled and that I could not follow the argument as first expressed. For the sake of argument—and I do not concede this—I recognise that the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) is asserting that there are downward pressures on university funding. I think that he refers to our attempts to get cost-effective expansion. If those pressures exist, as the hon. Gentleman asserts, they are spread evenly across the system and do not affect one institution more than another. The argument for separating judgments of quality from the funding have been put to him by some people in higher education who are afraid that quality judgments might have a practical effect on the universities. Making quality separate would merely make quality control ineffective and of no practical consequence. The hon. Gentleman always gives in to lobbies and should not have given in to that one.

Mr. Straw: That is an absurd argument. It fails to take account of the practice of the Council for National Academic Awards and the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council. One of the reasons why the polytechnics have done so well in the past 21 years is that a clear decision was taken by Governments of both parties to separate funding and quality control. That was accepted even by the Secretary of State's predecessor but one, who introduced the Education Reform Act 1988. Had a system of funding and quality control been merged, I doubt whether the polytechnics could have achieved such high quality and cost-effectiveness. I want to ensure that, in pursuing cost-effectiveness, there is independent arbitration on quality.

Besides the higher education proposals, many of the Government's proposals are damaging. The Government have done nothing to reassure the public that their proposals for adult education will not be highly damaging if the Bill goes through. Their proposals for further education will transfer elected local authority control over further education to control by seven or eight appointed regional boards. Elected people will no longer have an influence on local further education; instead, the position will be similar to that set up by the Secretary of State for Health, where appointed quangos are in control. That too is unacceptable to us.

By far the most damaging proposition which the Secretary of State has advanced in his 12 months in office is likely seriously and adversely to affect the standard and quality of education in our schools. That is his plan to dismember Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools and to privatise the local inspectorate of schools so that inspectors are picked and paid by their own schools. That proposition was suddenly launched from nowhere on 30 July 1991 at a curious press conference which the Secretary of State gave in the Adelphi hotel, Liverpool outside a meeting of the Professional Association of Teachers. It has been condemned from all sides; there is virtually no advocate for it outside Government and there are precious few inside.

The chronology of the proposal tells its own story. In February, the then senior chief inspector, Eric Bolton, decided to resign. On 4 March, the Secretary of State told me in a parliamentary answer that he was setting in train a new procedure for the appointment of a successor to Eric Bolton. He said that the post would be advertised, which was duly done at some cost to the public purse. Then, on 8 May, the Secretary of State suddenly announced out of the blue that the advertising of that post was to be put on ice. He said that instead there would be a thorough internal review of the inspectorate, which would report by July. In answer to further questions from me, he said that no formal evidence would be sought but that there would be wide informal consultation.

The Government say that they believe in open government. They have published such reviews of the machinery of government in the past—in 1983, they published the Rayner scrutiny of the HMI—but the Secretary of State has refused to publish the latest internal review. Indeed, it has been kept so secret that no summary or abstract of the review is to be made available—*[Interruption.]* If the Secretary of State wants to say that he will publish the review so that the House can measure the current proposals against his madcap scheme for dismembering the inspectorate, he should say so now. It is my belief that the right hon. and learned Gentleman's refusal to publish the review—this is from the man who believes in open government—stems from the fact that it bears no relationship to the scheme that he is now putting forward. If that is not true, let us have the review.

The only evidence of the proposition's authorship that we can find is a pamphlet written by the chief inspector of Wandsworth, Mr. John Burchall, for the Conservative Centre of Policy Studies. That action is in clear breach of the Local Government Act 1986 and the Widdicombe rules. If that had been done by a chief inspector of a

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Labour local authority for a Labour think tank, Conservative Members would have been the first on their feet to complain about Mr. Burchall. The scheme with which the Secretary of State has been landed is almost word for word the proposition set out in the pamphlet in 13 rather badly argued pages.

It is proposed that HMI should be reduced from 500 inspectors to 175. Allowing for those to be transferred to the higher and further education funding councils, that is equivalent to a cut of almost 50 per cent. The Secretary of State says that HMI will achieve greater independence. However, the independence that HMI has had up to now has been deeply embarrassing to the Government. Each year it has produced a report setting out the state of the education service, and each year Ministers have treated that report as though it were a piece of stinking fish.

In the past 11 years, the publicity budget for the Department of Education and Science has gone up 28 times. In the past two and half years it has risen four times in real terms to pay for the publication of more and more glossy pamphlets such as the parents charter—party political propaganda produced at the taxpayers' expense. None of that money has been used on the HMI reports—not a penny piece.

The annual report published by HMI has always been a loose-leaf, photocopied document, shoved out at a time designed least to embarrass Ministers. Is it the Secretary of State's intention that the current senior chief inspector should publish his annual report in February, as has been done in the past, or is it his intention, as Secretaries of State managed to do in 1983 and again in 1987, to delay publication of that report until after the general election?

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have not given much thought to that question, for the simple reason that I do not follow the elaborate paranoid theory advanced by the hon. Gentleman who believes that I am so worried about those annual reports. The hon. Gentleman may have noticed that my proposals increase the independence of Her Majesty's chief inspector. They leave him free to publish his own report. I believe that he should be more independent of the Department and of the Government of the day. I assume the present senior chief inspector will produce his annual report next year. I do not fear that report. I believe that the hon. Gentleman and his friends have misused those reports in the past, but cutting down the scope for reports from the inspectorate has nothing to do with my proposals.

Mr. Straw: I shall table a parliamentary question about that and I look forward to confirmation of what the right hon. and learned Gentleman has just said.

When the inspectorate is reduced to 175, it will be virtually impossible for it to produce a report with anything like the quality of those produced in the past.

Mr. Clarke: I hesitate to intervene again, as the hon. Gentleman is getting near to the time left for my contribution. However, in future, the inspectorate will have the results of 6,000 inspections each year from which to draw the basis of its report—and that is in addition to the inspecting that the inspectorate will carry out. One hundred and seventy-five people is the best estimate that the senior chief inspector and I could produce between us of the numbers required to carry out the functions of the new independent HMI. There will be more information on which to draw and the reports will still be available. What the hon. Gentleman is spelling out about the proposals is an elaborate, but nonsensical, theory.

Mr. Straw: To try to suggest that the senior chief inspector agreed to 175 is preposterous. The right hon. and learned Gentleman knows that that figure was forced upon him by Ministers collectively. From documents that I have been sent by the senior chief inspector it is clear that the total number of inspectors will be used as follows: 11 will conduct high-profile surveys and focus inspections, six will inspect schools at risk and another 26 will undertake inspections to supplement database evidence.

Privatisation used to be a badge of honour worn with pride by these Ministers. Now Ministers utter the word only in order to deny that it has happened. But the truth is that HMI is to be privatised by the back door because the half of HMI who will not be employed by it will have to go and set up as private consultants. The local inspectorate is to be privatised. As the documents make clear, many of these so-called inspectors will not be educationally qualified but will be drawn, in the senior chief inspector's words, from the top of the Clapham omnibus.

What is so damaging to the maintenance of educational standards is the perverse belief of the Secretary of State that to secure competition between the providers of education, there must be competition between the regulators. That is as absurd as if there were to be competition locally between environmental health officers or, nationally, if British Telecom and Mercury were to pick and pay for their own regulators. The Secretary of State's proposal runs contrary even to the better parts of Thatcherite philosophy, which sought to separate regulator from provider. The Secretary of State is making the provider the regulator—it is the provider who pays the regulator. The regulators will be picked and paid for by the providers. It will become impossible to secure any sensible maintenance of a consistent standard of education.

There is another bad aspect of the proposals. The Secretary of State emphasises regular inspections. That is fine—so do we. But a regular inspection every four or five years cannot by itself be sufficient protection for the parents or the children; nor can it provide enough information by which to judge the effectiveness of a school.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): That is why we are going to publish exam results.

Mr. Straw: Publishing exam results is fine—*[Interruption.]* We have been saying that for three years, but as the Secretary of State managed to point out in his contorted evidence to the teachers' pay review body, exam results alone provide only an elementary indication of the effectiveness of a school. A continuous flow of information about the effectiveness of schools is also needed, and it can come only from a corps of local inspectors, properly supervised by a national inspectorate. If inspection is handed over to companies such as Coopers and Lybrand—to consultants—there will be no corps of people at local level to produce the necessary data.

This Government have the worst record of any Government on nursery education. They are bottom of the league for 16 to 19-year-old education and training. They have produced a £3 billion backlog of repairs and renewals

needed for our crumbling schools. They have left the teaching profession demoralised and undervalued. They have left students from low income homes in serious poverty. They lack commitment to the service, and they do not use it. They have applied double standards by funding favourably a few pupils in CTCs and grant-maintained schools while denying most schools the funds that they need.

The proposals in this Gracious Speech are either irrelevant or positively damaging to the raising of school standards. They exhibit no commitment, no leadership and no ambition on the part of the Government to and for our children. We need a Government who will do better for our children and our young people, a Government with policies dedicated to making this country the best educated and trained nation in Europe. This country needs and will get a Labour Government.

9.38 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): Unusually in a debate of this kind, the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) has sat down leaving me with only 22 minutes in which to reply. I make no complaint about that. I would have been quite happy if he had gone on for longer. He exposed the paucity of his case as he went on and every now and again he made a tantalising admission that he—rather surprisingly—agreed with certain aspects of the policy embodied in our forthcoming legislation.

Like the hon. Gentleman, I must acknowledge that in such a wide-ranging debate I will not have time to deal with many of the points raised. My hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Speed), the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) and my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) touched on aspects of British Rail to which I was tempted to respond. It is, however, many years since I was at the Department of Transport, so I shall concentrate on education this evening.

I am surprised not only that 20 minutes is left to me, but that education has been tabled at this stage in the debate on the Loyal Address. Hon. Members will realise that the conduct of the debate on the Gracious Speech is in the hands of the Opposition, and rightly so. They determine the subjects for each day and the deployment of speakers. The Gracious Speech contains three Bills on education; two English and one Scottish. They are drastic pieces of legislation which should rightly occupy a large part of the time of the House. One is on the parents charter, one on further and higher education in England and one on further and higher education in Scotland. These three large Bills probably rival the Bill that introduces the council tax and the asylum Bill as the heaviest pieces of legislation in this year's Queen's Speech.

This debate was tabled for a Monday night when, for the replies, Labour Front-Bench Members greatly outnumber those on the Back Benches, which is not surprising as it is a one-line Whip night. I take that as a compliment. The proposals in the three Bills presented by my right hon. Friends and myself have captured the public imagination and caught the Labour party without a policy. What is more, they have caught the Labour party without a spokesman able to put its objections clearly when he is called upon to address them. I would not normally have said that that was a reflection on the respective debating abilities of the hon. Members for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) and for Blackburn. It would be invidious for me to make the choice.

I should like to reply to more of what was said by the hon. Member for Sedgefield when he opened the debate. I have not heard the "white heat of the technological revolution" speech made so well for many years. I understand that the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) made it fairly well at this year's party conference. On the other hand, going back to my days in employment debates, it was curious that the hon. Gentleman skated over his party's policy on the minimum wage, enhanced benefits for maternity leave and so on. I trust that at some stage I will have the opportunity to tax him on the curious proposal that legislation which increases the wage bill of companies does not necessarily increase the costs of those companies and therefore can be regarded as having nil effect on their competitiveness. I had not heard that theory advanced with such bravura before.

Mr. Blair: The House will hear it again.

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman says that we will no doubt hear it again.

The hon. Gentleman got on to my area by making comparisons on education and training between this country and other countries. Some statistics were trotted out again both by him and, later, the hon. Member for Blackburn, seeking to show that we are miles behind other European countries in the league tables. The hon. Member for Blackburn, in a frenzied passion, was throwing pieces of paper into the air, saying that we were bottom of this league table and bottom of that league table, apparently without having read any of them. The cutting that he tossed across to us is part of an article from *The Times Educational Supplement*. The text reveals:

"the survey format does not allow for the fact that some respondents, both in the UK and elsewhere, are in part-time, rather than full-time, education."

I find that league table for 14 to 18-year-olds as unintelligible as the hon. Gentleman did. The text states:

"An EC spokesman admitted there were 'conceptual problems' in compiling the statistics, but it was the nearest they could get to being comparable."

The hon. Member for Sedgefield and I agree that the Anglo-German study is a useful basis for comparisons. When I quoted the study back at him, he resorted to some rather irrelevant quotation about the youth training scheme, in an attempt to fend off my criticisms. As I have the text in front of me, let me just remind him of the conclusions of the comparison between the preparedness of British young people and German young people for employment on the strength of the education and training systems in the two countries. Page 235 states:

"In our surveys the British samples reported the greater number of vocational learning experiences. In both cohorts, higher proportions of the British respondents reported experience of information technology, learning new skills, being challenged or tested, using their initiative and working co-operatively in groups."

I shall quote further from page 239, to give us an overall picture of the report. It says:

"Nevertheless, the overall picture of greater breadth of experience and skill in the British system, and the more positive appraisals by the British young people of what they were learning, is sustained."

[Mr. Clarke]

I quote that not to be complacent and not to say that, in this competitive world, we should not be striving, as the Bills outlined in the Gracious Speech help us to strive, for higher standards.

The argument used by many commentators on our system—that the grass is overwhelmingly greener on the other side of the hill in every respect in Europe—is exaggerated. Every year, participation by our 16-year-olds increases by 4 per cent. We shall catch up and, I hope, forge ahead of the best. However, we should not assume that a great deal has not been achieved quite spectacularly in the past few years.

I admired the speech of the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), one of the more distinguished orators in the House, against whom I debated only a week or two ago in the Oxford Union. I could not help thinking, when he criticised us for not participating in European Community efforts on education, that here was the last and most remarkable convert come to the communautaire viewpoint on these matters. I have listened to many of his speeches and I have never heard him advocate that before. The Labour party must be desperate to get into power if even such venerable leaders as the right hon. Gentleman have to make these obeisances in the direction of Brussels.

Mr. Foot: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is catching up. He should understand that I was in favour of a social charter in Europe before there was any such thing as the European Community. I hope that, when he is reporting our debate in Oxford, he will tell the House who won the vote. It would be satisfactory to have such a vote in the country.

Mr. Clarke: I concede the vote in the Oxford Union. The right hon. Gentleman still has the ability to mislead the young that he has shown in his distinguished past. I can well believe that he has always been in favour of a social charter in Europe, but he has never before asked us to be in Europe enjoying its disadvantages.

I return to the subject of educational policy and the Bills that must consume most of our attention. I commend my hon. Friends the Members for Rugby and Kennilworth (Mr. Pawsey), for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) and for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) for their overall appraisal of our policy.

I shall concentrate on the point made by the hon. Member for Blackburn. One major Bill that will come before us is that putting into effect the parents charter. Until the hon. Gentleman turned to the future of the HMI, he was hard pressed to find anything that he wanted to oppose in the parents charter. His main concern appeared to be that he did not want too many parents to be able to read it because they would find it attractive.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kennilworth correctly said, the parents charter is based on two policies designed to help all the other steps that we shall be taking to raise standards of education. The first is a much better range of objective factual information about the performance of schools for the parents and local public in the communities that the schools serve. The so-called league tables will publish not just examination results but truancy rates, staying-on rates, the destination of pupils and other information. Knowledge of how schools perform will help to improve the choice of parents. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford said, in an intervention in the speech of the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor), not only will it help parents to choose in those parts of the country where choice is practicable because transport is readily available, but, even in rural areas where choice is difficult, it will, for the first time, give parents better means to influence schools because they will be able to see, set out objectively, the performance of those schools.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: Newspapers will use the raw detail that will be supplied by the league tables, especially on examination results. What will the right hon. and learned Gentleman do to protect schools which have many students with special needs, especially students who are not statemented but who are seen to have special needs? The right hon. and learned Gentleman nodded when I asked him the same question earlier, but he has not said how he will ensure fairness between schools and therefore, no discrimination against students with special needs.

Mr. Clarke: Any intelligent parent, intelligent governor or intelligent newspaper person will bear it in mind that various factors influence results. That is what will happen when we get what the hon. Gentleman describes as the raw data. It will be a complete change to report these facts instead of keeping them secret. There is no reason why information such as the number of statemented children and attainment levels in national curriculum tests should not be made freely available by our schools. The information will be accompanied by statements on the purpose of a school and its particular aims.

The arrangements remain the same for special needs. If I do not get the chance later in my response to answer the comments of the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) on students with special needs in further education, I say now that I attach great importance to those students. There will be a duty on the Further Education Funding Council specifically to ensure that further education is provided for those with special educational needs beyond the age of 16.

We can debate statementing when we examine the Bill. There is a genuine difference of opinion between the experts on whether statementing, as it is now applied in sixth-form schools but not in further education colleges, is a desirable tool. There is no desire on our part to play down the importance of providing for those with special educational needs throughout their school career and thereafter.

I return to the setting out of league tables. It is no good saying that they will comprise raw data. They will be data that parents have never been allowed to see before. In my part of the country—the county which I represent in part is not the only one in this position—Labour-controlled local authorities are still adamantly refusing to release the data to the general public. They are advising schools not to make them available. The commitment of the Labour party is set out in "The Parents' Partnership", which in my opinion is a pretty pale imitation of the Government's policy.

Mr. Blair: We got our policy out before the Government's.

Mr. Clarke: Yes. When the Labour party knew that the parents charter was coming, the hon. Gentleman did not half rush out its paper, and he did not draft it very well.

The information in the Labour party's document all comes under the new education standards commission that will take over responsibility for Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools and co-ordinate the work of local inspectors. The following is then offered to the public:

"Through reports, studies and inspections the Commission will assess educational standards of schools and of local education authorities as a whole and publish detailed information on how to judge a school's performance."

Does

"detailed information on how to judge a school's performance"

mean that the system will be the same as our parents charter, or does it, as it sounds, means that there will be an extra layer of bureaucracy, taking into its embrace Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools and producing not what has been described as raw data, but information that colours it all?

Anyone who is appraising a school will take account of the socio-economic backgrounds of different schools, for example. Much stress is placed on that. There will be serious dangers, however, if the information that is set out in performance tables is clouded by footnotes and qualifications, which sometimes are advocated because they are designed to prove that whatever the differences between examination performances there is no such thing as a good school or a bad school. It is thought that that will be the result if enough factors are taken into account.

I fully accept that it requires a good school to achieve good examination results, especially in an inner-city area rather than in a well-favoured suburb. A danger arises, however, from the constant emphasis that left-wing commentators put on socio-economic data. It is not right to assume that those in inner-city areas cannot be expected to achieve good examination results. The league studies show that there are positive dangers in assuming that in poor areas there will be poor results, and regarding that as an excuse. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford said, there were systems which ensured that that did not happen.

The hon. Member for Blackburn and I passed through education on a route that was remarkably similar to that followed by many hon. Members. We both went to state primary schools; we both passed the 11-plus; we both had local government scholarships—the hon. Gentleman went to a direct grant school while I went to what was then an independent school. The hon. Gentleman came not from an especially poor background, but not from an especially advantaged one either. He was not told that socio-economic circumstances meant that he could expect to get bad examination results. His talents were demonstrated through a system that gave him opportunities and brought out the best in him. Too many people in the Labour party kick away the ladder by which they rose through the education system and seek to defend poor performance where there is no economic advantage.

Inspection is very important, as it is the second string of raising the quality of education in our schools. The hon. Gentleman has changed his wording—at last, he did not accuse us of privatising HMI. It is a pity that debate on public services is reduced to such a silly level. He now accepts that we are not privatising HMI. The Bill will give HMI a new, independent, statutory role, with its own powers and duties separate from those of the Secretary of State. It will continue to inspect, and an important part of its role will be to advise, to produce reports, and so on. It will also monitor the new system of inspection which, for the first time, will produce more than 6,000 reports a year. More importantly, those reports will be produced for the benefit of the parents who read them.

Mr. Straw: Tonight I said nothing different from what I said before. Will the Secretary of State now admit that he intends to privatise part of the local schools inspectorate? It will in part become local, privately owned and controlled consultants. In other words, it will be a privatised inspectorate.

Mr. Clarke: Local authorities can continue to inspect in their areas. Alongside them will be the new inspectors, from private organisations—*[Interruption.]* I repeat that we are not privatising HMI. There will still be local government inspectors—we are not privatising them. However, there will be new inspectors, who will provide an alternative——

Mr. Straw *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: No, I am not giving way.

Mr. Straw *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. One hon. Member at a time, please.

Mr. Straw: The new privatised inspectors will be instead of public service inspectors.

Mr. Clarke: We cannot privatise people who were not there before. Currently, 6,000 inspections are not carried out every year. The number of reports that will be produced for parents will be not diminished, but greatly increased.

With respect to the hon. Member for Blackburn, the hon. Member for Truro made slightly more careful progress through the arguments. However, I wanted to ask both hon. Gentlemen what would be the alternative. We are introducing a new system that will generate 6,000 straightforward reports a year. As my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) said, they will be intelligible to those who read them. Parents, almost universally, never read Her Majesty's inspectorate reports on their schools. Indeed, it is unusual for parents even to see such reports. Some 3,000 to 5,000 inspectors will be required to produce those reports. Is the Labour party proposing that Her Majesty's inspectorate should suddenly take on 3,000 to 5,000 inspectors in one great national monolithic inspecting organisation? Perhaps that is the proposal—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Blackburn is not sure whether that is or is not his proposal.

I suspect that the Labour party, because of the pressures on it, will be driven to suggesting that all inspectors should be local council inspectors, inspecting the councils' schools. The Labour party is always huffing and puffing about privatisation and independence, but it believes that every school in the country should be run by local councils and inspected by those councils. Who should inspect the schools for councils but ex-teachers, because they are deemed to be the only people properly qualified? Apparently, anyone who is not a teacher or who does not work for the council should not be allowed to undertake an inspection. That is not standards or objectivity, but giving in to the usual pressures from the National Union of Teachers and NALGO, to which Labour Members always give in.

[Mr. Clarke]

I do not have time to debate now the Further and Higher Education Bill. Other than wanting local authority control of further education, Labour has no policy on that matter either.

Our Bills are all of a part with those objectives praised by my hon. Friends the Members for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) and for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst)—the drive to get better standards back into our education system, to increase yet further the participation of our young people, and to match the quality of education and training provided by our competitors abroad.

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

BCCI

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sackville.]*

10 pm

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): This is only the second time that the House has been given an opportunity to debate the momentous consequences of the closure of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International. The past three months have seen almost daily developments, and a 15-minute speech and 15-minute reply cannot do justice to the huge amount of information that must be shared and analysed.

Over the past few months, I and members of the campaign team visited depositors and BCCI staff members all over the world. We visited Abu Dhabi and Dubai, where we met members of the royal family and other officials; Hong Kong; Gibraltar; and other towns and cities in Britain.

We met people who remain stunned and bewildered, like victims after some great natural disaster. It is impossible to comfort them. We heard stories of such sadness and desolation that it was difficult not to be moved to tears. Those are the innocent victims, who knew nothing of the serious fraud. They put their faith and money in a bank that was being monitored and restructured under the close supervision of the Bank of England.

During the campaign, we met the Governor of the Bank of England, three times; the Chancellor of the Exchequer, twice; the Foreign Secretary; and the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, twice. We had numerous meetings with the provisional liquidator, Christopher Morris; the majority shareholders' solicitors, Simmonds and Simmonds; and the restructuring advisers, Schroder Wagg. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition and the leader of the Liberal Democrats were by far the most supportive. People were unfailingly courteous and showed great sympathy—but throughout, all eyes were firmly on Abu Dhabi.

I pay tribute to the tireless efforts of members of the campaign committee. Associations were formed and meetings held to get people organised and to keep them informed. Only last night, at a meeting chaired by Ahmed Shazad at Brent town hall, depositors and staff reaffirmed their commitment to the campaign. Bankers and international business persons are not supposed to be natural campaigners, but they have proved themselves a match for this moment.

The expectations and hopes of those people and of many others, which were given life by the excellent judgment of the Vice-Chancellor of the High Court on 30 July, were cruelly dashed by the decision of the major City shareholders that the bank could not be reconstructed. That decision, announced on 3 October, was a bitter disappointment. We were told later that the fraud was so enormous—a total of $10 million—that reconstruction was impossible, and that any money the majority shareholders could put in would soon disappear into a large hole. We were told that one cannot reconstruct something that is not there.

From being the bank that refused to die, BCCI became the bank that ceased to exist. It was merely a shell with glittering branches at the best addresses in London.

Has the Minister any information as to what has become of that $10 million? Nobody seems to know. I am

informed that the bank's liquidation will probably occur on 2 December, and I have a number of specific questions, of which I have given the Economic Secretary notice.

Will he outline for the record what steps the Government took to support the reconstruction process, and what approaches were made prior to 3 October to the majority shareholders, to see what could be done to help?

Has the Minister met, or received a report from, his hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office concerning his visit to Abu Dhabi? Members of the campaign called for that visit, which we saw as a vital step on the road to an acceptable settlement.

Did the Minister ask the majority shareholder whether he was prepared to assist in finding a solution to the problem? I am certain that the BCCI issue was raised; what issue in the whole saga did the discussion centre on, and who exactly did the Minister meet?

Does the Minister not agree that the package to members of staff was shamefully low? Will he support their reasonable request for a reasonable redundancy package that will take into consideration their length of service and undoubted loyalty to the bank?

Will the Minister take this opportunity to confirm that the Governor has now retracted his blanket criticism of members of staff on the ground that they were involved in a criminal culture? Has he seen the BBC's "Money Programme" of 27 October? He will know that the programme disclosed that, on 26 April, the Bank of England issued a section 39 notice which required the production of named documents. The case came to court and was decided on 10 May. In his affidavit to the court, Roger Barnes, the head of banking supervision, demanded that the 6,000 files—the so-called Naqvi files, which were held by Allen and Overy, the solicitor of the Sheik of Abu Dhabi—be handed over to the Bank of England.

Mr. Barnes said that BCCI appeared to have made false and fraudulent statements to the governors of the Federal Reserve Bank in America. He said:

"if true . . . these matters are of concern to the Bank as supervisors of the defendant and raise questions as to the continued fulfillment of the minimum criteria for authorisation under the banking act".

Before that time, Federal Reserve investigators were in London, and they went to Abu Dhabi between 16 and 22 March this year. In view of that information, has the Minister called for a report from the Bank of England?

This afternoon, I spoke to Mrs. Barbara Mills, the head of the Serious Fraud Office. She confirmed that the SFO had received documentation concerning the BCCI fraud only on 4 July; yet on 10 May the head of banking supervision was referring to false and fraudulent statements. Does the Minister not agree that the SFO ought to have been involved at that early stage? Does he not also agree that, as the matter was not raised before the Select Committee, it would be helpful if the Governor gave evidence to the Committee again?

The Bingham inquiry, of course, needs to consider that and other points. Last week, I received a letter from Lord Justice Bingham in which he said that he was prepared to visit Abu Dhabi, provided that he was able to see individuals who would help his inquiry, and as long as it was within his terms of reference. Will the Minister confirm that the Government will assist in any way possible to arrange any meetings that are necessary for Lord Justice Bingham?

Lord Justice Bingham went on to tell me that he could not predict when his report would be published, but that he would report as soon as "humanly possible". Will the Minister join me in urging that the report be prepared as quickly as possible?

Will the Minister tell the House when he expects the Prime Minister and the Chancellor to give evidence to the inquiry? The Bingham inquiry is important, because it is the only way in which we shall be able to get to the truth of these important matters.

Does the Minister agree that there is a very strong case for temporarily relieving the Governor of the Bank of England of his duties, so that he can give even greater assistance to both the Bingham inquiry and the Treasury Select Committee? It must be extraordinarily difficult for the Governor to deal with the aftermath of BCCI as well as with his other important duties. A secondment, with the Government's blessing, may be the answer.

Let me make it clear that I am not calling for the removal or resignation of the Governor. In my view, however, it may well speed up the entire process if he makes himself available in the way that I have suggested. Will the Minister consider my suggestion?

Does the Minister stand by his statement, which was confirmed by the Chancellor, that, should the Bingham inquiry show that the Bank of England was negligent, he will consider the question of compensation?

There are only 28 days left before the crucial hearing on 2 December. This has been a catastrophe for so many people. I believe that the worst is yet to come. Does the Minister have any estimates of the likely impact of the closure of BCCI on the British economy? We know how many staff jobs have been lost, but does the Minister have any idea what the knock-on effect will be? It has been put to me that, after 2 December, billions of pounds could be lost in exports and lost orders, and that business closures will result in job losses, which will be an even greater burden on the employment benefit and social security system.

Both official and private bodies that import goods from the United Kingdom have lost substantial sums. Does the Minister seriously believe that what is perceived as a default by British regulators will have no impact on British exports? As of today, only 9,000 of the 40,000 depositors have made claims under the interim scheme. There are two trusts still in existence.

There is, in my view, a strong case for applying what remains in those trusts for the benefit of staff and others who will suffer hardship, notwithstanding the deposit protection scheme. Will the Minister consider an amendment to the law that would activate the deposit protection fund on provisional rather than full liquidation?

The depositors protection association has raised with me a number of concerns about the operation of the scheme. First, the scheme is mean, compared with the scheme in the United States. The compensation limit was fixed at 75 per cent. of £10,000 in 1979. It was raised to 75 per cent. of £20,000 in 1987, and that limit remains the same. Secondly, only sterling deposits were covered. More than half the United Kingdom deposits, by value, were by non-sterling depositors, for whom there is no protection.

Are the Government prepared to commit themselves to improvements to the scheme? In the United States, the

[Mr. Keith Vaz]

cover is for up to $100,000 in any currency. Is British protection to be second-class? What signal does that give to our overseas clients about the British banking system?

This House ought to be concerned about the reputation of the United Kingdom as a banking centre. We must also be concerned about this country's reputation in the Gulf. The Minister of State is quoted as saying that there is no lack of confidence in Britain as a result of what has happened but, as we found on our visit, officials are very polite in public but voice many concerns and criticisms in private.

The chairman of the depositors protection association has had discussions with many substantial depositors who have lost money and who are now actively reconsidering where they should place their deposits in future and whether or not other European Community states may provide more beneficial protection than the United Kingdom. That could have a serious impact on the funds available to United Kingdom lending institutions.

Will the Minister spare a thought for the depositors in Hong Kong, Gibraltar and the Isle of Man? There was a conditional purchaser in Hong Kong. I should like to praise the efforts of Mr. David Doo and others who campaigned for that. However, Gibraltar and the Isle of Man are not protected, and they need protection.

Finally, what steps are being taken by the Secretary of State for the Environment to help the local authorities which relied on the authorised investment list and lost millions of pounds? Will they be given permission to take steps to prevent their losses from burdening the poll taxpayers in their area? From the Western Isles in Scotland, through Bury, down to Southwark in London, local authorities and directors of finance acted in good faith. They should not be left to face the consequences, unaided by the Government.

I was heartened this afternoon to hear from the provisional liquidator, Christopher Morris, that negotiations are still going on in Abu Dhabi to see whether anything above realistic assets could be raised by the majority shareholders to provide a better deal than the deal on offer by means of the deposit protection scheme. I welcome those negotiations. They need the Government's support. Will the Minister give his full support tonight to the negotiations?

I urge the Government, through the Chancellor of the Exchequer, to convene an emergency meeting between representatives of the majority shareholders, the Bank of England, the provisional liquidators, the depositors and former members of staff to see what can be done to help both the depositors and the former members of staff. Only the Chancellor of the Exchequer has the political clout to do so. The Government cannot sit by and watch the lives of so many people being destroyed. I implore the Minister not to abandon those who have suffered and who will suffer if the Government do nothing. To fail to act now will only compound the tragedy.

10.15 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. John Maples): The hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) eloquently stated the problems that this bank fraud has caused its employees, depositors and customers. He asked what has happened to the $10 billion. That is the crux of the matter: it has been stolen. The bank has been defrauded of that sum. The section 41 report, which is broadly in the public domain, shows how those frauds were perpetrated, and I hope that, as the Serious Fraud Office investigation continues and as prosecutions in this and other countries are initiated, other details will be revealed.

The hon. Gentleman asked me to say what steps the Government took to support reconstruction. We made it clear that the Bank of England would consider any proposal for reconstruction. As he knows, no such proposal was made. Shareholders took the advice of a leading London merchant bank but decided that they were not in a position or were not prepared to put a proposal to the bank. It would not have been proper for the Bank to promote a reconstruction, because it would have had to sit in a quasi-judicial capacity and decide whether its proposals should be allowed a banking licence.

Nor would it have been appropriate for the Government to play a positive role in such a reconstruction. Again, if the Government were the applicant or were behind the application, the bank would have been placed in a difficult position. In addition, that was not necessary, because shareholders and their advisers knew what had to be done to put a proposal for reconstruction to the bank, and there was nothing that the Government could have added to that.

The hon. Member for Leicester, East asked what my hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office discussed on his visit to Abu Dhabi. He did not specifically discuss BCCI, although he raised the subject while he was there. He returned only last week, and I understand that he has said that he will write to the hon. Member and presumably let him know what was discussed. It became clear that relations between the United Kingdom and the Emirates are still close and cordial and that the BCCI affair, although sad, will not be allowed to affect our relations adversely.

Reconstruction was not raised while my hon. and learned Friend was in Abu Dhabi, but he mentioned the plight of BCCI depositors and staff in the United Kingdom, and he made it plain that, although he recognised that the majority shareholder had suffered greatly, many in the United Kingdom were also suffering. He arranged for letters from the BCCI depositors protection association and the BCCI campaign committee to be handed to the Abu Dhabi authorities.

The Abu Dhabi Government are as keen as we are for the depositors to get back as much money as possible and for employees to be given fair severance terms. The authorities made it clear to my hon. and learned Friend that they had set up a committee to handle those issues.

The hon. Member for Leicester, East asked about redundancy terms for staff. I do not think that anybody would pretend that the terms are generous, but they meet the statutory obligations. Anything more generous is a matter for the shareholder. I understand that the insolvency and redundancy payments that are made before the winding-up order is passed will not be subject to any deduction or set-off for loans that are owed by employees to the bank.

There is a dispute about whether redundancy payments made after the winding-up order has been made are subject to set-off, and the Department of Employment is taking legal advice to establish a joint position with the liquidators. At the moment, they disagree about that, and

for the time being, any insolvency or redundancy payments are not subject to set-off for loans owed to the bank.

The other matter which might interest employees involves mortgages. There was some concern that mortgages would be called in January when the preferential terms period expired, but I understand that that is not the liquidators' intention. On 2 January, when the period of the extension of the favourable terms expires, they will write to the people who have borrowed from them and say that they are free to continue those mortgages, but on commercial terms, not preferential terms.

It is not the liquidators' intention to call the mortgages. That is good news for the borrowers, because it should mean that they will not be asked to repay their loans at short notice. Those who at that time are still unemployed will probably qualify under the social security rules for the interest on those mortgages to be paid out of social security funds. For the first 16 weeks, one gets only half the interest and, after that, all of it. Many people will have gone through the 16 weeks by that time.

The hon. Gentleman again referred to the criticism of the staff. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and I have made clear, that criticism applies only to the senior management of the bank. On 4 October, I issued a press release in which I said:

"I hope the staff will find work again soon. In July, the Chancellor commented in the House that it would be monstrously unfair if honest, hardworking employees of BCCI were tainted by the actions of their superiors. I hope that prospective employers will not hold the fact that they worked for BCCI against them."

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor made that point strongly in the summer, and I am happy to reiterate it. We believe that the criminality in this bank was confined to very senior management. It is not suggested that those at branch level were involved, or that everyone was tainted by those actions.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the investigation into the ownership of First American bank shares and Credit and Commerce American Holdings, the BCCI subsidiary that was thought to have acquired those shares, and to the BBC 2 item on the "Money Programme". There was a little misunderstanding on this point. The American authorities were looking into the ownership of the bank to see whether BCCI had breached American law in acquiring it. They asked the Bank of England to help them to acquire some documents that might assist in those investigations, and those were the documents that were the subject of the section 39 notices issued by the Bank of England. As the hon. Gentleman knows, in effect there were three sets of documents, because some are protected by an injunction.

The reference in the official affidavit of the Bank of England to "false and fraudulent statements" said that, if what was alleged were true, it would be clear that BCCI officials would have had to make false and fraudulent statements to the American authorities. It was not saying, "We now have hard evidence that false and fraudulent statements were made." In any event, this related only to what was in effect a breach of American regulations, not British regulations. It is not the same fraud that was the subject of the removal of the $10 billion from the bank; it was a fraud in the United States, involving lying to the authorities there, and was not the same as the fraud that resulted in the bank collapsing.

I wish to illustrate that point. It was clear that, on their own, the papers that the Bank of England acquired and handed over to the federal authorities would not provide the Bank of England with evidence relevant to the authorisation criteria—the fit and proper people running the bank. The Federal Reserve, however, set that new evidence alongside the information that it had already gathered to try to establish what had happened and whether United States law had been breached.

Plainly, it was more sensible for the Federal Reserve rather than the Bank of England to be left to pursue the investigation. After all, it was an investigation into a possible breach of American law. The Bank was therefore content to await the Federal Reserve's conclusions and those of the Price Waterhouse investigation, which was already in train. As it happened, the Federal Reserve did not come to its conclusions on the acquisition of First American bank shares until 29 July, by which time the Bank of England had already closed BCCI.

The hon. Gentleman asked me whether I thought that the Serious Fraud Office should have been involved at that stage. I do not think that it should have been. This was an American legal issue—a question whether American law had been broken. There was no suggestion in this context that British law had been broken. However, the Serious Fraud Office was told, within a few days of the receipt of the section 41 report from Price Waterhouse, of the evidence of that fraud.

The hon. Member for Leicester, East also asked me whether it would be helpful if the Governor gave evidence to the Select Committee on that issue. That is a matter for the Select Committee. I am sure that, if it were to call upon the Governor and ask him to deal with that question, he would attend and answer any questions asked of him.

The hon. Member asked me a series of questions about the Bingham inquiry. We shall assist in any way we can with facilitating the judge's trip to Abu Dhabi, and we have helped—we have passed on his letter to the Abu Dhabi Government through our embassy there, and the embassy will assist him in any way possible.

I have no idea when the Prime Minister and the Chancellor will give evidence to the inquiry. The answer to that question is, when they are called. The Prime Minister has made it clear that all Ministers will be available to give evidence to the inquiry, if the judge so requires. Therefore both or either of them will give evidence if called to do so, but they have not yet been called.

Mr. Vaz: Are they going to submit written evidence before the judge considers whether they should be called?

Mr. Maples: The inquiry has already had an enormous number of documents both from the Treasury and from the Bank of England. Neither the Chancellor nor the Prime Minister has been asked for a written statement, but if they are asked, I am sure that they will provide it, as the Prime Minister has said that Ministers, including himself, will co-operate in every possible way with the inquiry.

I do not think that the Governor is having any difficulty in performing his normal duties as well as assisting the Bingham inquiry.

The hon. Member mentioned compensation. There has been some misunderstanding, because when we last met, we corrected a statement which he had made to the press about that. At the end of his statement, he said that all he

[Mr. Maples]

got from me was "tea and sympathy", so perhaps he will agree that he did not get the offer of compensation as he is suggesting.

What I said then was that we have to await the Bingham inquiry and its report. What we would do if that report says this or that is a hypothetical and academic question. It may say a lot of things about bank regulation. It would be entirely pointless for me to attempt to deal with the sort of hypothetical questions that might arise. I cannot anticipate the report or its conclusions, and, as I have told the hon. Gentleman and the House before, I have no reason to believe that the inquiry will find any fault with the Bank of England's conduct.

Mr. Vaz: I accept that, and I accept that that was what the Economic Secretary said. However, we sometimes have to deal with hypothetical situations. Is he ruling out compensation now and for ever, or is he saying that he will read the report and, even though he thinks that it will clear the Bank of England, if there is a semblance of a recommendation or a conclusion that the Bank of England was negligent, he will consider compensation then?

Mr. Maples: I do not think that it is reasonable to ask me to go any further than I went. I am not prepared to deal with hypothetical questions about what the report might or might not say. In a few months, we shall discover what it says, and then it will be perfectly proper for the hon. Gentleman to ask me to respond to any criticisms that the report makes of the Government or of the Bank of England.

The hon. Member for Leicester, East asked whether I had any estimates of the likely impact upon the British economy. Clearly this affects a particular section of the business community, and it is a serious matter for them. There will undoubtedly be some lost exports and lost business as a result, but the hon. Gentleman probably overestimated that.

As we have only three minutes left, the hon. Gentleman asked me to deal with his questions fairly quickly. He asked me whether we would consider amending the law to activate the deposit protection fund on provisional rather than full liquidation. Yes, we will consider that, but we would only be prepared to consider changing it in respect of an application by the regulator. We could not be put in a position where the deposit protection fund could be activated on a frivolous or vexatious application by somebody other than the regulator, but we shall certainly consider the matter.

Are we prepared to commit the Government to improvements in the deposit protection scheme? As I said before, the answer to that question is no. There are no immediate plans to do so, but, as the hon. Gentleman probably knows, the European Community is negotiating a directive on this issue which will establish minimum standards of compensation across the Community, and it is now generally accepted that those should be kept at modest levels. Nevertheless, that may involve some changes to the British scheme, but the present draft would not do so.

The hon. Member for Leicester, East is wrong to draw too much comfort from the United States scheme. The moral hazard created in the United States and the problems for savings and loans institutions there were an almost direct result of the very generous compensation schemes available, which remove any risk to the depositors.

As far as local authorities are concerned, the Secretary of State for Scotland has given permission for Western Isles council to borrow for the time being to continue to provide services. The Department of the Environment is still considering what action would be appropriate, if any, in respect of the English authorities, which lost much less, and even less than that on a proportional basis. They should not have anything like the same difficulty in dealing with it.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman asked me about depositors who have lost money in branches in Gibraltar, Hong Kong and the Isle of Man. While one obviously feels incredibly sorry for such people, it is not the responsibility of the British Government. It was not a British bank, and the branches where those people lost money were not in the United Kingdom. In those circumstances, I do not think that there is any moral or legal responsibilty on the British Government or the Bank of England to do anything about it.

This sad and sorry saga has been at a great cost and loss to many people, and we are extremely sorry about that, especially as it has affected one group of people in our society. I hope that I have answered most of the hon. Gentleman's questions, and I am sure that we shall return to the subject again.

The motion having been made at Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at half past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 5 November 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

Trafford AHA (Expenditure)

1. **Mr. Churchill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average capital expenditure within Trafford area health authority at constant prices *(a)* in the period 1974-79 and *(b)* 1979-1991.

The Minister for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): Using 1990-91 prices, average capital spending between 1974-75 and 1978-79 was £2,526,000 a year. Between 1979-80 and 1990-91 spending was £3,083,000—a real increase of 22 per cent.

Mr. Churchill: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Is not it clear from those figures and from many others that it takes a Conservative Government to deliver the goods to NHS patients and that all the Opposition have to offer are promises which more often than not prove false? Will my hon. Friend congratulate Trafford area health authority and everyone involved in the hospitals there on the excellent job that they are doing and especially on the way in which they have brought down waiting lists?

Mrs. Bottomley: I certainly endorse my hon. Friend's remarks. All that the Labour party offers is promises and rhetoric; we have delivered an improved health service. My hon. Friend will know in his part of the world of the £2 million new maternity unit, the £2 million mental illness unit and the £4 million geriatric and physio unit—all practical achievements. As my hon. Friend rightly pointed out, no patient in his area waits for more than two years and there has been a dramatic fall in the number of those who have to wait a year. That, too, is a practical achievement in the health service. It is high time that the Opposition gave recognition to all in the service who have achieved these excellent results.

Mr. Skinner: When I hear Tory Members speaking about the health service, in Trafford or anywhere else, I am bound to come to the conclusion that they are after family jobs. Why does not the Minister condemn the appointments of spouses of Tory Members and of Members of the House of Lords who pick up more than £5,000 a year for doing a day's work? It is time this scandal was put to an end.

Mrs. Bottomley: That is a slightly strange remark to make to me. The hon. Gentleman, who is always well informed, may be aware that I have an uncle who was a Labour Member of Parliament and in the Cabinet. His wife was the chairman of a health authority and she performed that job excellently for many years. I urge the hon. Gentleman to go to Friern hospital. The reason why I feel so strongly about the care of the mentally ill is because of all that my aunt, Peggy Jay, taught me. No one ever cast smears at her on account of her excellent achievements. Those whom we have appointed were chosen on their merits and because of their strong and unequivocal commitment to our national health service.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: Is my hon. Friend aware that she has just scored a marvellous bull's eye? Does she agree that the Trafford figures show a dramatic fall in waiting lists and that that is a tribute to the efficient way in which the health authority has managed its operating theatres? Does not it also prove, as my hon. Friend the Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill) said, that the Conservative Government are spending more on the health service and does not it nail the falsehoods repeatedly advanced by the Opposition? We have to go back a little way to remember that in 1976 they presided over the most savage cuts ever imposed on the national health service.

Mrs. Bottomley: The only time spending on the national health service has been cut was when the Labour party was in power. My hon. Friend is right that management as well as money is what counts. The achievements of his health authority are remarkable. It has one of the lowest rates of cancelled operations in the country. It is organising the service, delivering high-quality care and using manpower and finance to the best possible effect.

Cornwall Air Ambulance

2. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will reconsider making a Government contribution to the costs of the Cornwall air ambulance in view of its contribution to meeting the target for emergency ambulance call-out times.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): No, Sir. It is for the local management of the service to determine the most effective deployment of resources to meet performance targets.

Mr. Taylor: The Minister will know that those targets can be met only by the air ambulance in my area. Without that ambulance the target set out in the patients charter would not be achievable. Will the patients charter be guaranteed by public funds or is it to depend in future on private charity?

Mr. Dorrell: The patients charter sets out standards which ambulance services are expected to match. It is for the chief ambulance officer of each area ambulance service to decide how best to match those standards. The hon. Gentleman should note that although the Cornish air ambulance makes a valaable contribution in the county, it has not produced a measured improvement in response times for ambulances in Cornwall.

Sir Gerrard Neale: May I ask my hon. Friend nevertheless to keep in touch with the health authority in Cornwall? The county is 100 miles long and my constituency is the most sparsely populated area of Cornwall. Many of my constituents live 50 miles from the

nearest district general hospital. I urge my hon. Friend to keep in close touch to make sure that response times are up to the charter.

Mr. Dorrell: We shall certainly keep in close touch with the Cornish ambulance service and, of course, with every other ambulance service to ensure that they match response times and put to good use our investment in the ambulance service. That investment has provided defibrillators for more than 2,300 front-line ambulances across the country and carries through the commitment to provide a trained paramedic on each front-line ambulance by 1996. Those improvements in the ambulance service will apply in Cornwall as they apply in the rest of the country.

NHS Spending

3. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the projected capital spending in the NHS in the next three years; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. William Waldegrave): For the future, my hon. Friend will have to await the autumn statement by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer which I understand will be made tomorrow.

Since 1979 we have increased capital spending on average by 4·3 per cent. per year. Labour when in office cut it by an average of 6·7 per cent. per year.

Mr. Thurnham: Is my right hon. Friend aware that that means that since 1979 there has been a two thirds increase in capital spending compared with a cut of one third when Labour was in power? Is he aware that the North Western regional health authority has a record capital spending programme for next year of more than £100 million and that it includes Bolton's new hospital?

Mr. Waldegrave: Those dramatic figures are correct. Labour's record on capital spending was lamentable. It was about a one third cut in real terms in capital spending in Labour's last period in office. The North Western regional health authority has a magnificent capital programme for new projects beginning next year and at the head of that programme is Bolton general hospital. That will cost about £37 million in bricks and mortar and another £10 million for equipment. There are also major new projects at Chorley and South Ribble, Lancaster, Central Manchester, Salford, Tameside and Glossop. As I say, the total is about £100 million for next year.

Ms. Hoey: As the Secretary of State is aware, Westminster hospital is due to close and the accident and emergency department is to move to St. Thomas's hospital. Will the right hon. Gentleman give a commitment that capital will be made available in time for the accident and emergency unit to be completed and ready to receive patients when Westminster hospital closes?

Mr. Waldegrave: As the hon. Lady knows, the commitment to the new Westminster hospital on the old St. Stephen's site is one of the biggest of all the projects in the national health service. The change will need careful management to ensure that the major gains for patients that will come from it are properly realised. I shall look into the specific matter that the hon. Lady raised.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Does my right hon. Friend agree that those figures sit ill with the, I am sure honourable, argument of the Opposition that we are trying to close the health service? How can we be spending two thirds more on capital equipment? My right hon. Friend must be wrong when he says that we are spending 4·3 per cent. more in real terms on the health service than when we came to office. The Opposition tell half-truths because Labour is the only party which when in office cut national health expenditure.

Mr. Waldegrave: The previous Labour Government started off with their normal irresponsible pledges which produced enormous inflation and catastrophic cuts to all public service capital programmes. Nowhere did those cuts hit harder than in the health service. Many of those who are now on the Opposition Front Bench were deeply ashamed of that at the time and remain deeply ashamed of it. They are right to be so ashamed.

NHS Trusts

4. **Mr. Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the operation of hospital trusts.

Mr. Waldegrave: There is increasing independent evidence that the first trusts are proving that bringing management back into the hospitals is already bringing benefits to patients and staff. Waiting times are coming down in most places and staff report improved management and job satisfaction.

Mr. Kennedy: When the Secretary of State made his recent announcement in the House of the second wave of trust applications and approved in principle applications for the four London teaching hospitals he said that, in the interim, until the review was completed, they would benefit from the advantages that could flow from greater local hospital management devolution. If that is a benefit short of trust status, why is it necessary to force through trust status while encouraging local hospital management and in so doing to bring the assets, the buildings and the personnel out of local health service management? Why is that superior simply to having better efficiency through greater local management?

Mr. Waldegrave: It is not difficult to explain. Some of the benefits of devolved management can be achieved without full trust status, but, for local management, one of the major gains of full trust status is full control of capital. That is one reason why hospitals seek it. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is clear on that matter.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is significant that the two major hospitals in Kidderminster district health authority have increased the number of in-patients treated over the past eight years by 14 per cent? The health authority, one of the 30 most efficient in the country, is consulting on third-wave trust status because it believes that it can give a better service to patients and local people on that basis. Does not that contrast with the recent comment by the general secretary of the Institute of Health Service Managers on the Labour party's plans for the health service? She said that they were an unworkable mess.

Mr. Waldegrave: I agree with my hon. Friend. Labour's role in all this is somewhat disreputable. I draw the attention of my hon. Friend to the recent threats issued by the Labour party candidate in Orkney and Shetland, who said that, by doing this,

"it could certainly be argued by an incoming Labour Administration that you had contributed to your own redundancy."

As my hon. Friend pointed out, Labour played a disreputable role in relation to trusts. When I drew the attention of the Leader of the Opposition to a previous threat of this kind, made by the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist), the right hon. Gentleman withdrew it at once. I hope that the Opposition chief spokesman on health matters will withdraw this similar threat today.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the Secretary of State think for a moment about the effects of NHS trusts on the low-paid hospital staff, who are just as essential as medical staff in the running of the hospital? I am thinking of domestics, porters and maintenance staff, who are grossly underpaid and who are suffering badly as a result of administration of hospital trusts and the attempts to break away from the national negotiating machinery.

Mr. Waldegrave: I would strongly argue that the national negotiating machinery has, over the years, delivered low pay to such people. The increased flexibility of NHS trusts will allow them to pay more where the local markets can afford it and I predict that this will increase the pay of the lower-paid staff in such hospitals. That is why, to the embarrassment of the Labour party, some of the local branches of those unions are beginning to support trusts.

Mr. Oppenheim: When it comes to Opposition claims about NHS trusts, should not we bear in mind that, two years ago, the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) was telling everyone that general practitioner contracts would result in less time being spent with patients? That turned out to be untrue, so why should we now believe these spurious scares about NHS trusts leading to privatisation? Is not the truth of the matter that the hon. Gentleman is interested only in using his spurious scares to frighten the sick and the vulnerable for his own party ends?

Mr. Waldegrave: The scares that the Labour party tried to run on these matters have rebounded on it. I remind the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook)—he seems not to wish to rise on these matters—that the letter from the Labour party candidate to the trust applicant reads:

"Were you to do this"—

continue with the trust—

"in the face of so much opposition, it could certainly be argued by an incoming Labour Administration that you had contributed to your own redundancy."

When I drew the attention of the Leader of the Opposition to previous threats of that sort, he wrote as follows:

"Of course I can confirm that there will be absolutely no action of this kind."

The hon. Member for Livingston must respond to these scares. Indeed, they are worse than scares, they are threats.

Ms. Harman: Will the Secretary of State confirm—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer!"] If Conservative Members paid attention to the issue they would know that my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) repudiated the threat last week.

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the majority of first-wave trusts face serious financial problems? How much will he spend to bail out the first-wave trusts so that they do not end the first financial year in deficit?

Mr. Waldegrave: I am sorry that the Labour party's chief spokesman on health did not rise to respond to these matters. He should stand up and repudiate the threat in the House.

The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) is completely wrong on the facts. If she wishes to attach herself to the scare, I am delighted. As I have said, she will find that she is completely wrong.

Rugby NHS Trust

5. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many additional patients are now being seen by the Rugby NHS Trust as against last year; and what percentage increase that represents.

Mr. Dorrell: In the period April to September 1991 6,715 in-patients were seen at Rugby NHS Trust—an increase of 3·7 per cent. over the same period last year.

Mr. Pawsey: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that helpful and cheering response. Clearly it is good news for the people of Rugby and especially for patients attending St. Cross hospital. It represents a fine effort by the management and workers of the hospital. Does my hon. Friend agree that the way forward is signposted to other improvements in the health service? Will he therefore redouble his efforts to promote NHS trusts while ignoring the ill-founded criticism of Opposition Members, who are prepared to argue more for party dogma than for patient care?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He chose a good day to raise the matter, because only yesterday the hospital opened a new out-patients department. The hospital's track record on waiting lists bears comparison with any in the country, with the number of those waiting for more than two years for in-patient treatment having decreased since June 1990 from 137 to 18. Since the trust has been established we have seen the appointment of new paediatricians, the introduction of new laser technology, a commitment to new surgeons in the general surgery and accident and emergency departments and the continued development of improved accident and emergency facilities in the hospital.

Patients Charter

6. **Mr. Gregory:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the patients charter.

Mr. Waldegrave: The patients charter demonstrates our commitment to providing high-quality services within the NHS which are responsive to people's views and needs. It has been widely welcomed, for example, by the Consumers Association, which said that

"it is a golden opportunity to put patients first."

Mr. Gregory: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that this is the first time that any Government have introduced a genuine patients charter of rights? Secondly, does he agree that the quickest way to ensure longer waiting lists,

unreasonable behaviour and hospitals again being run by unions rather than by consultants is for power to be given to the Labour party?

Mr. Waldegrave: That is correct. The structure of open agreements between district health authorities and hospitals gives us, for the first time, a clear way of setting standards, monitoring them and enforcing them. That is a great gain from the reforms. The first step to patient responsiveness is encapsulated in the patients charter.

Mr. Ashton: Did not the patients charter cost £2 million to publicise and launch and was it not £2 million worth of Conservative propaganda? Have not we heard planted questions this afternoon that have contained carefully worked-out statistic after statistic? It has been a public relations exercise for this week's by-elections. We are in the run-up to a general election and every figure that the Secretary of State has produced today has been carefully worked out and planted among Conservative Back-Bench Members as a publicity stunt, just like the patients charter.

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman fails to understand the importance of the patients charter, as he fails to understand the reforms. It is vital that we get across the fact that under the reforms in the NHS we can now set proper standards of care throughout the country. It is vital that, in the agreements reached next year, we set out what is to be done nationally and locally. That is inherent in the reforms. It is right that every household should know its rights under the NHS.

The whole operation on the patients charter—the printing and so on—has cost about £2 million. That expenditure is well worth while if it gets across to people the facts about what their rights really are.

Mr. Cormack: As the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) and his Front-Bench team are so singularly ill-informed, why does not my right hon. Friend invite them to the Department for a teach-in, when they could be given the true facts and figures? Let them then spread all these lies.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have been trying to brief some Labour Members, especially the London Members. Some of them have been invited again and again to meet the London ambulance service for a briefing other than that which they get from the trade union. They refused to come.

Mr. Alton: Following the disclosure during the past 24 hours of the outbreak of legionnaire's disease at two Liverpool hospitals, does the right hon. Gentleman accept that an essential part of a patients charter should be the right to know when such outbreaks have occurred? Can he explain why that information was concealed for some weeks in one case? Does he accept that another element of the patients charter in this day and age should be that hospitals are constructed in a way that shows that we have learnt the lessons of the past? Equipment should not be installed if it is likely to give rise to legionnaire's disease.

Mr. Waldegrave: I agree that one benefit of the patients charter and, indeed, of the reforms will be the greater availability of information. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will want to be very careful not to scare people unecessarily. In the first incident, it still has not been shown that the infection derived from inside the hospital. All the necessary investigative and follow-up actions were taken and as soon as the problem was known local general practitioners were informed. I have considered the matter and I shall continue to do so, but I do not believe that there has been any dereliction of duty in this important matter. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman, who is a responsible Member of Parliament, would not want to mislead people in this matter.

Dame Jill Knight: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the West Midlands regional health authority has just issued a special paper welcoming the patients charter and agreeing to do everything possible to turn rights into realities? Will he add one more right to the patients charter —that of peace and quiet for sick people in hospital? Is he aware that there is a growing practice of allowing unlimited numbers of people, for unlimited hours, to visit patients in wards? That is not conducive to recovery and nor is the practice of children running up and down wards for hours on end. I hope that my right hon. Friend will add that right to his patients charter.

Mr. Waldegrave: I welcome the steps taken by the West Midlands regional health authority. The issues to which my hon. Friend referred are just those where the health service needs to do a little better on listening to patients' needs. We often receive letters about relatively minor matters that can easily be put right after discussion with patients. I am sure that the hospital that my hon. Friend has in mind will wish to take account of her comments.

Mr. Robin Cook: Can the Secretary of State explain why the words "patient choice" do not appear in his patients charter? Is it because he knows that his new contract system has reduced patient choice? What does his patients charter offer to the thousands of patients who, through the College of Health helpline, have chosen a hospital with a shorter waiting list, but cannot get into that hospital because their health authorities will not pay for them to be treated there?

What does the patients charter offer to the woman in Wandsworth who last month found that she could not have her second child in the hospital that she chose for her first child because her health authority has no contract with that hospital? Why should the House take seriously any patients charter that does not give back to those patients the right to choose their hospital—a right that they had until the Government took it away?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. Under the old system—the system to which the modern Labour party characteristically wishes to return—there was the freedom of the right to refer to any hospital and that right remains. However, that sort of reference was nugatory because the money did not follow the patient. We are moving towards a system where a choice will be made and that choice will become reality because the money will follow the patient and so enable that patient to be treated. That is what the hon. Gentleman still has not grasped.

On the matter of choice, the patients charter draws attention to new freedoms and the ease with which people can change their general practitioners, which is a fundamental improvement in freedom. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman still does not understand that the whole drive behind the reforms is to back the general practitioner's decision with money so that choice becomes reality.

Menopause Research

7. Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the amount of NHS money applied to menopause research.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I regret that it is not possible separately to identify the money devoted to the range of conditions associated with the menopause from the £225 million spent on medical research last year. However, my hon. Friend will be aware of the current work which includes a review of screening techniques for post-menopausal osteoporosis and an economic evaluation of the benefits of hormone replacement therapy.

Mrs. Gorman: I thank my hon. Friend for her reply. I understand that the Government are spending somewhat less than £500,000 in that area. Is my hon. Friend aware of the proceedings of the international menopause conference which point out that the number of deaths of women in the post-50 age group from heart attack and particularly stroke is twice as great as the number dying from osteoporosis and 10 times as great as the number of deaths from breast cancer? Does not that mean that we should be putting a great deal more money into such research or is it to remain the Cinderella of medicine for ever?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend identifies why it is difficult separately to identify the sums of money. As she says, associated conditions are heart attacks, strokes and cancer. About £1·5 billion is spent on health research each year. Our new research strategy ensures that we get the best possible value from that and, above all, apply the lessons. However, I can give my hon. Friend the undertaking that as long as she remains in the House such research will not be the Cinderella of the health service. There are a great number of excellent projects. Should my hon. Friend happen to be in the Cleveland area, I strongly urge her to go to the South Cleveland hospital to see the excellent work being undertaken there with a bone densitometer.

Mr. Cousins: Is not the Minister aware that it has been known for some time that four times as many women as men suffer the chronic pain that comes from the loss of movement in and the fracture of hip joints?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am not an expert, but does that question have something to do with the menopause?

Mr. Cousins: You, Mr. Speaker, betray the ignorance of men if you do not understand the relevance of my question. The research has been done for some time and the results have been known for some time, yet still the Government do nothing.

Mrs. Bottomley: I am pleased that there has been a threefold increase in, for example, HRT prescriptions during the past 10 years. We fund to the tune of £1·9 million about 40 voluntary organisations which help spread the message about the importance of HRT and the prevention of osteoporosis. Our recent leaflet on women's health, which has been a remarkable success, also provides information. However, the hon. Gentleman is right. When the research has been evaluated and the screening survey has been completed we will be able to make even further progress in ensuring that the health service is dedicated to prevention as well as cure.

Income Generation Unit

8. Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the latest figures for the full cost, and staffing details, of the income generation unit; and what are its aims.

Mr. Dorrell: The income generation unit is no longer a separate entity within the Department.

Mr. Barnes: Has the income generation unit given advice to trust hospitals and health authorities on the building of private wings? Was such advice given to the Chesterfield and North Derbyshire Royal hospital? What is the difference between building private wings and privatisation?

Mr. Dorrell: During its existence the income generation union gave a wide range of advice to NHS units. For the expenditure of little more than £250,000 per year we have been able to generate extra funds to support and improve patient care within the NHS rising from £9 million in 1988-89 to £50 million last year. Part of those resources were raised from the sale of NHS facilities for the treatment of private patients. I cannot understand why some Opposition Members—we do not know whether this is the official Opposition Front-Bench policy—appear to believe that profits from private medicine must be preserved for private companies and not made available to the NHS to improve care for NHS patients.

Mr. John Greenway: Is my hon. Friend aware that with the help and advice of the income generation unit, a business man in my constituency has successfully installed private telephones in hospitals in the north-east, paid for by advertising? The only loser from that practice is British Telecom. Some of the profits made from BT telephones in hospitals, which Labour Members appear to think are excessive, can be recouped by the hospital and used to benefit patients.

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Not only does that initiative produce a wider range of services to benefit patients and extra resources for the health service but an improved range of hospital facilities, so that services previously available only to private patients in private hospitals are increasingly available to all patients in NHS hospitals.

Mr. Rooker: Was the income generation unit responsible for the policy adopted by New Cross hospital in Wolverhampton and the Mayday hospital in Croydon, whereby bedridden patients must hire a television for a minimum of three days at a cost of £1·95 a day—which is about twice the rate charged by high street television rental companies? Is it not scandalous that ministerial offices and the House have televisions provided by the taxpayer, yet bedridden patients who want to watch television to help them to relax must pay?

Mr. Dorrell: Hospital managers are responsible for providing such services, not any unit of the Department of Health. If the result of the income generation approach is that more resources are released to treat more patients and provide additional resources for their medical care, it does not seem that anyone should have to apologise for that policy.

Child Welfare

9. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the aims of the Children Act 1989 with regard to improving the welfare of children.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Children Act 1989 incorporates most private and public law relating to children. It sets out clearly principles for their care and upbringing, and is in effect a charter for children.

Mr. French: Will my hon. Friend firmly rebut the criticisms made by those who continue to argue that although the aims of that Act are excellent, the funding arrangements to support it are not?

Mrs. Bottomley: The Act was implemented with an unprecedented level of co-operation and collaboration between central and local government and I pay a warm tribute to all those who helped with the delivery of guidance and the legislation's careful framing. The Lord Chancellor's Department and social services departments were involved in the training of 140,000 social service staff last year, when the social service standard spending assessment increased more than at any time over the past 15 years.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Is the Minister aware that the Act cannot be fully effective unless the provision of child psychiatric services is improved? Does she acknowledge the concern that exists about that aspect and can she explain what action the Government intend to take?

Mrs. Bottomley: There will be an announcement in the relatively near future about the results of the review that we are conducting into arrangements for child psychiatric services. I announced such a review at a conference that I addressed the other day. The traditional pattern of child guidance services is not always adhered to and we must ensure proper integration in hospitals and the community. There has been a substantial increase in the number of child psychiatrists, a great increase in clinical psychologists and an increase in child psychiatric nurses. We must ensure that all staff with considerable expertise work to best effect in collaborating not only with the health services but with social and education services.

Hospitals, Wanstead and Woodford

10. **Mr. Arbuthnot:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what new hospital facilities are available to the residents of Wanstead and Woodford; and if he will make a statement about the funding of further phases of building at Whipps Cross hospital.

Mr. Dorrell: Phase 1 of the redevelopment of Whipps Cross hospital cost £18 million. It includes a new out-patient department, four operating theatres, a hydrotherapy pool, a new pharmacy, improved sterilisation facilities and three new wards.

The Forest Healthcare trust is committed to start phase 2 of the redevelopment of the hospital in the next financial year. This will include a dedicated day surgery unit, further expansion of out-patient facilities and two more new wards. In addition, the capital loans fund is financing the development of new facilities for physiotherapy, occupational therapy and other day services for people with a learning disability.

And finally, the Government's quality initiative is providing £384,000 to finance a new medical day unit at Whipps Cross hospital.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Having given us that excellent news, can my hon. Friend confirm that the commitment to spend £2·5 million on the start of phase 2 of the Whipps Cross hospital development will continue under the new trust arrangements? Can he give any indication about the further funding of phase 2 that will be needed, beyond that £2·5 million?

Mr. Dorrell: On the establishment of the Forest Healthcare trust, responsibility for allocating capital to the trust passes from the region to the Department. I can assure my hon. Friend that the Department will honour the commitment given by the region to provide £2·5 million to get phase 2 under way. For the remaining resources that will be needed, the trust will be competing in the national pool of capital resources that are available to NHS trusts.

NHS Consultants

11. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS consultants are on maximum part-time contracts; and if he has any plans to end this practice.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: A total of 5,172 hospital consultants in England were on maximum part-time contracts on 30 September 1990. There are no plans to end the maximum part-time option, which has existed since the early days of the NHS.

Mr. Mullin: On the day on which the Secretary of State gave a pledge to his party conference that everyone would have equal access to free health care, I was contacted by a constituent, Mr. Ronnie Watson, who had been waiting since September 1990 for an appointment with a consultant to discuss a possible hip operation and had just been told that he would have to wait until some unspecified date in 1992.

Mr. Watson had then telephoned the same consultant in the same hospital and had asked how long he would have to wait to be seen privately. The reply was that he could be seen the following Wednesday for a fee of £45. How can the Secretary of State reconcile that experience, which is being replicated all over the country, with the experience of Mr. Watson?

Mrs. Bottomley: Even Barbara Castle did not outlaw the arrangement whereby consultants are able to conduct their private practices. The private practice must not in any way impinge on national health service commitments. The patients charter makes it clear that there will be local standards for out-patient appointments, as well as the national standards for general appointments.

We are seeing steady improvements. I very much hope that the hospital to which the hon. Gentleman referred will be able to consolidate further the remarkable progress that it has made over the past couple of years—a 56 per cent. fall in the number of two-year waiters and a 35 per cent. fall in the number of one-year waiters.

Pay Beds

12. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the revenues for pay beds in the NHS in 1990-91.

Mr. Waldegrave: Total private patient income for 1989-90 was £92 million. Information for 1990-91 is not yet available.

Mr. Dunn: As the provision of day beds ought to be the responsibility of the trusts, will the Secretary of State take time today to condemn Labour's vicious attacks on those individuals who have been selected to help run the trusts?

Mr. Waldegrave: I join my hon. Friend in deprecating the attacks made by the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) on Anne Parkinson and Sheila Taylor, who have rightly been appointed to serve on trusts. I also join him in deprecating the attack on my noble Friend Lord Jenkin, who has accepted an appointment on a trust. I find it surprising that Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen wish to exclude spouses because of whom they happen to be married to when they have good records of public service.

The hon. Member for Livingston drew attention to the behaviour of previous Secretaries of State in this regard. Would he now like to condemn the behaviour of the last —and I mean last—Labour Secretary of State, Lord Ennals? At the same time as his hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) is saying that pay beds are to be driven from the health service and given to private companies, Lord Ennals has taken a leading position as a director of a private healthcare company—while remaining a Front-Bench spokesman on health for the Labour party.

Mrs. Heal: Is the Minister aware that an Essex GP is calling on national health service hospitals in the Mid-Essex health authority to boost incomes by carrying out privately, in pay beds, procedures that they have effectively banned from the NHS? Does the Minister agree that to increase income from patients excluded from free treatment is not only an abuse of the founding principles of the NHS but a classic illustration of the two-tier health service that his Government are introducing?

Mr. Waldegrave: I welcome the hon. Lady to the Opposition Front-Bench team. I remember that when she came to the House she was, like her leader, a passionate supporter of CND. Their principles have gone by the board. As for the matter that she raises, I welcome the fact that GP fund holders, and all GPs, are doing more in their own surgeries, which cuts waiting lists and speeds patient care. I regret the fact that the hon. Member for Livingston saw fit not to answer the challenge that I laid down to him, just as he has not answered any of the challenges that I have laid down to him today, and that he has also seen fit to put the hon. Lady, on her first outing today, into a rather difficult position.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 5 November.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Is the Prime Minister personally in favour of a single European currency—yes or no?

The Prime Minister: At this moment, in these circumstances, no.

Mr. Onslow: Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is general support for the emphasis that the Foreign Secretary has placed on the importance of keeping the European Commission out of the nooks and crannies of our national life? Will he, in any negotiations with our European partners, give the highest priority to getting the European Commission under some sort of genuine parliamentary control?

The Prime Minister: I share the views expressed by my right hon. Friend yesterday. One of the things that we shall be seeking to do in the negotiations on the political union treaty is to try to ensure that the Commission—at present under no effective control—increasingly comes under the control of the most appropriate Parliament, in this case the European Parliament.

Mr. Kinnock: Since the Prime Minister acknowledges convergence to be a matter of considerable importance in the development of the European Community, why is it, now that the Engineering Employers Federation, the Confederation of British Industry and his noble Friends in the House of Lords have all made cause for new investment incentives for British industry, that he and the remainder of the Government refuse to take such initiatives in order to support this very best way of securing recovery?

The Prime Minister: On the right hon. Gentleman's first point, convergence is not just important; it is absolutely vital if there is to be any success whatsoever, or any prospect of a single currency that would not damage the whole of Europe. The most effective way of ensuring that there is investment in this or any other country is to ensure that we have low inflation and the right economic environment.

Mr. Kinnock: When unemployment has risen by 800,000 in Britain during the last year, when 50 per cent. more companies are in receivership and when manufacturing investment is down by 19 per cent., how can the Government justify taking such a listless attitude to the needs of British industry? Why do the Government refuse to give the same backing to British industry as our European Community competitors give to theirs?

The Prime Minister: It is not all that many months ago that the right hon. Gentleman was saying to the House and to people beyond it that the most important thing was to get inflation down from its then level of 10·9 per cent. and to recreate the conditions in which people would feel secure to invest. I agreed with the points that he made then

and that is precisely what we have done. We are now reaching a position in which growth and investment will reoccur and, as we saw throughout the complete period of the 1980s, there will be a growth in the absolute number of jobs.

Mr. Kinnock: Since the Prime Minister said that it is important to create the conditions for economic and industrial success, will he listen to the CBI which, in its report asks the Government to take proper account of the interests of manufacturing industry instead of pursuing the policies that they are pursuing? After 12 years, is there any hope of the Government ever taking the interests of manufacturing industry properly into account?

The Prime Minister: If the right hon. Gentleman had paid more attention to the CBI yesterday, he would have heard the director general say that since the crash of October 1987, real take-home pay is up by 11 per cent., manufacturing productivity is up by 20 per cent. and manufacturing exports have increased by £76 million for each and every working day.

Mr. Sayeed: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the two essential components for a policy of nuclear deterrence are that one possesses the capability and that a potential enemy does not doubt one's willingness to use it in order to defend oneself? Does he agree that a few weasel words in a newspaper do not constitute a policy of nuclear deterrence, particularly when the leader of that party has stated clearly that he would never use nuclear weapons, even if Britain were under nuclear attack?

The Prime Minister: I share the view expressed by my hon. Friend. The fact that we have had a nuclear deterrent for a number of years has added materially to our security and I believe that we should continue to sustain that deterrent. It is a matter of regret that the Opposition's commitment to that deterrent is not generally accepted. The words of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), "If we change to win, we could change when we have won", show that British people will not trust the Opposition with defence policy.

Q2. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 5 November?

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Flynn: Why is the Prime Minister trying to turn the national health service into a family business for card-carrying Conservatives? Why did he appoint two Tory ex-Ministers, the sister of a Tory Minister, the wives of two Tory Members of Parliament and the husband of a Tory Member of Parliament to run opted-out hospitals? Is that what the Prime Minister means when he says that he believes that Conservatives want to use the national health service? They are using it—milking it for their own financial gain.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman has clearly forgotten that, for example, Lady Callaghan was an excellent chairman of Great Ormond Street hospital and a number of other wives of eminent people in public life have held that position. It is extremely odd that the Labour party should propose that women should be barred from jobs because of their husband's position in public life. Among those whom the hon. Gentleman has maligned is someone who has a decade's experience of working in the NHS. If the hon. Gentleman does not think that that is a proper contribution to the health service or a proper qualification for the job that she holds, I am very surprised indeed.

Q3. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Prime Minister to list his official engagements for Tuesday 5 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Viggers: Will my right hon. Friend anticipate the Chancellor's statement tomorrow to the extent of confirming that funds will be made available to ensure that our armed forces, although smaller, are even better equipped? In particular, will he confirm that conventional submarines will continue to play an important role and that the story broadcast by the BBC last night as a hard fact—that the HMS Upholder class of submarines is to be sold—is completely untrue and without foundation?

The Prime Minister: I can confirm my hon. Friend's last point. We have shown our commitment to better equipment by our recent purchase of the Westland helicopter and our decision to re-equip the Army with the Challenger II tank. Both were expensive but necessary purchases to ensure that our armed forces have the best possible equipment. That is our policy and will remain so. I am bound to say that that does not seem to be the policy of the Opposition. The principal Opposition party is committed to cutting defence expenditure by a quarter, and the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) is committed to cutting it by a half.

Mr. Ashdown: The Prime Minister insists that even if the other 11 go ahead he is prepared to reject an agreement on Europe at Maastricht. Will he describe how he sees the future of this country, should he allow that to happen?

The Prime Minister: I have repeatedly made it clear in the House and beyond that I am working to seek an agreement at Maastricht that will be acceptable to the House and this country. That remains the position. I have set out our determination to work for that agreement and the principles on which the agreement will need to be based. I have arranged a two-day debate in the House so that I may express that clearly and listen to the views of the House. If I judge that the agreement is in the interests of this country I will sign it. If I judge that the agreement is not in the interests of this country, it would not be right for me to sign it and I will not sign it.

Q4. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 5 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Paice: As this is the first Prime Minister's Question Time since the Commonwealth conference, may I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his constructive and positive approach to the issues? Will he confirm that he was not detained or locked up and was widely recognised as the leader of this party—unlike the experience of the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) after four years as Leader of the Opposition?

The Prime Minister: I can confirm that it was an excellent Commonwealth conference. The Commonwealth

came closer together than it has been for a long time. There was substantial agreement on changing policies on South Africa, which I much welcome, and there was a warm welcome for our decision to implement the Trinidad terms arrangement, which, if fully implemented by every member, will relieve the poorest countries in the world of $17,000 million of debt.

Mr. Harry Ewing: Is the Prime Minister aware that just over an hour ago I received a letter from British Alcan, which has a factory in my constituency at Falkirk, informing me that 169 of the work force will lose their jobs, not because they are inefficient but because the machinery on which they work is 50 years old? If that is not proof of lack of investment, what is? Is the Prime Minister further aware that those men like their jobs and that, with his help, they would be able to keep them, but he is not prepared to help them? Try telling men in Falkirk that the economy is on an upturn.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is clearly under the misapprehension that I have been Prime Minister for 50 years—not yet.

Q5. **Mr. Hannam:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 5 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hannam: When my right hon. Friend next meets the British Medical Association, will he raise the success of the first wave of national health service trusts, particularly the success story of the South Devon Healthcare trust? In the past year, it has increased the number of patients by 10 per cent., the number of doctors and nurses by more than 50 and reopened two wards. Will he congratulate the BMA on its wholesale condemnation of the latest Labour party smear leaflet that has been distributed at the Langbaurgh by-election?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to join my hon. Friend in those remarks and to join the BMA in its scathing remarks about the Labour leaflet. The BMA said that the leaflet was in bad taste, and it must be very frightening to the people of Langbaurgh. Like my hon. Friend, I read the report of Labour's latest scare story about the NHS. I hope that people will realise that what Labour is saying is inaccurate. It is a tissue of falsehoods. I hope that people will look at the real record of improvement in the NHS, not the misrepresentations that they get from the Labour party.

Q6. **Mr. Strang:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 5 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Strang: Has the Prime Minister noticed that the major issue in the Kincardine and Deeside by-election is the widespread public opposition to the application by Foresterhill hospital in Aberdeen to become a self-governing trust? As the Minister with responsibility for health in Scotland clearly favours trust status and as the Conservative candidate has come out publicly against it, will the Prime Minister tell the House who he agrees with —his Health Minister or the candidate?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the application for that hospital to have self-governing status has been submitted to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. He has an obligation to study that application and to determine whether it is in order. That is what he is doing. When he has done that, he will announce his decision.

Renewable Energy

3.31 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Colin Moynihan): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the Government's decision to launch the biggest contractual requirement to build renewable energy plant ever announced in this country. This will be achieved through the 1991 Non-Fossil Fuel Obligation Renewables Order.

We believe that renewable energy has an important role to play in helping us tackle the serious threat of global warming. By comparison with fossil fuels, renewable sources of energy produce far less gaseous emissions that harm our environment and some technologies produce none at all.

No Government in history have ever done so much to promote renewable sources of energy and this Government have done so in two ways. The first way has been to invest record amounts in research and development. A record £174 million has been spent on renewables R and D over the past 12 years and a record £24 million has been allocated for this year. The second way—just as important—has been to create for the first time an effective marketplace for renewable energy through the establishment of a non-fossil fuel obligation.

The Government made the initial non-fossil fuel obligation order for renewables last year. The level of that order—102·25 MW declared net capacity—reflected the capacity "secured" by the 75 projects that were then ready to sign contracts. The Government also announced that we intended to make additional renewables orders during the 1990s, to introduce an additional 600 MW of capacity.

The 1991 renewables order—the first of these additional orders—has been laid before the House this afternoon. In deciding the structure and level of the 1991 order, we took into account the need to strike an appropriate balance between diversity of renewable generating technologies and the cost, through the fossil fuel levy, to the electricity consumer. We also took into account the advice of the Director General of Electricity Supply and the views of the regional electricity companies.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has decided that the order should have six separate technology bands covering wind, hydro-electricity, landfill gas, municipal and general industrial waste, sewage gas and other. These technologies are at different stages of technical and market development, but each has considerable promise for the future.

First, landfill and sewage gas are the closest to independent commercial application already. It is important that their energy potential is utilised, and that the methane, a major greenhouse gas which would otherwise be emitted, is not released to the atmosphere. For landfill gas, we have therefore set an obligation of 48 MW. The regional electricity companies have contracted with 28 projects for landfill gas generating stations at a price of 5·7p/kWh.

For sewage gas, we have set an obligation of 26·86 MW. The regional electricity companies have contracted with 19 projects at a price of 5·9p/kWh.

The utilisation of the energy potential of waste materials is also an important part of the Government's recycling initiative and will assist in reducing greenhouse emissions. Future waste disposal strategies are likely to lead to increased incineration and energy recovery from municipal, industrial and other waste. We have therefore set an obligation of 261·48 MW for municipal and general industrial waste generating stations, and the regional electricity companies have contracted with 10 projects, at a price of 6·55p/kWh.

Hydro-electricity is an established technology. We must ensure that its potential is exploited wherever it is sufficiently economic and wherever it is environmentally acceptable to do so. An obligation of 10·36 MW has been set with the regional electricity companies contracting with 12 projects at a price of 6p/kWh.

Wind technology has some way to go before it can become economically competitive. The establishment of a market leading to deployment, together with further research and development, are necessary steps in reducing costs. Hence a separate band with a higher strike price has been set. We have therefore set an obligation that will build up to a substantial level of 82.43 MW. I understand that the regional electricity companies have entered into contracts with some 49 projects, at a price of 11p/kWh.

This will enable the potential of wind farms to be assessed by the planning system in a variety of locations, an important factor if the longer-term potential of wind energy is to be exploited. Preparation of a planning policy guidance note on renewable energy is nearing completion and we hope to go to public consultation on the draft this month. The document will comprise general guidance on planning for renewable energy together with more specific guidance on the environmental impact of wind farms.

For other non-fossil generating stations—in practice, this means other waste combustion plant—we have set an obligation of 28.15 MW, the regional electricity companies having contracted with four projects, at a price of 5.9p/kWh.

Taking all bands together, the order sets an obligation that builds up to 457 MW DNC over the period from 1 January 1992 to 31 December 1998. The contracts signed by the regional electricity companies cover some 122 projects—75 per cent. of which would be entirely new—with a capacity of 472 MW meeting nearly 50 per cent. of the figure of 1,000 MW by the year 2000 which the Government announced in last year's White Paper on the environment. This reflects the high level of response from generators to a major policy initiative. We must also look beyond 2000 to the next century. My renewable energy advisory group will now reassess the 1,000 MW figure in line with our belief that renewables could potentially produce 20 per cent. of our current electricity demand by the year 2025, if they can be commercially deployed.

In addition, 38 renewable energy projects with a capacity of 16 MW will benefit under arrangements announced on 15 May by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland. Two of those projects involve wind power while the remainder are hydro generating projects. Of the total, 14 projects with a capacity of 6 MW are entirely new developments.

The Government will announce in due course their proposals for a further renewables order. Meanwhile, I can inform the House that the Government have decided to explore with the European Commission the possibility of making the next renewables order to set an obligation in respect of a period that would extend beyond 1998. If this were agreed, it would enable the regional electricity

companies to offer generators a premium price, financed through the fossil fuel levy, for the additional period covered by the next renewables order.

Through the 1991 renewables order, the Government take a further major step in assisting renewables to enter the commercial electricity generation market, and in implementation of their renewables and environmental policies. I believe that it is the largest requirement to contract for renewables-sourced electricity generating capacity ever to be announced in the European Community.

The 1990 renewables order virtually doubled the amount of renewables-sourced generating capacity that was contracted to the regional electricity companies in England and Wales. The 1991 order virtually doubles that amount again. Together the two orders give some 134 entirely new renewables projects, with a capacity of 540 MW, the opportunity to go forward to commissioning.

I commend the order to the House.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Although the Minister has repeated the words that this is the biggest ever, best ever and largest ever renewables order not just in this country, but in the European Community, is it not the case that even if one adds last year's order to this year's order, one ends up with a figure slightly less than that which was committed by the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board for construction in the first year of its operation in 1948? That is the truth of it. What we have got is a Minister who is full of hype and full of tripe.

Is it not also true that the hon. Gentleman has failed to tell the House—I hope that he will correct the omission—that last year's order approved only some 12 per cent. of the applications that were sent in? Despite the Minister's appearance of keenness, he is turning down the vast majority of applications. Can he tell us the percentage of approvals this year from the total applications? Can he also confirm what proportion of the total megawattage for which he has contracted this afternoon is new capacity?

Does the hon. Gentleman agree that he has still not solved the problem of the elephant and the flea, given that the nuclear industry gets 98 per cent. of the benefits of the order under which he has announced the non-fossil fuel obligation tranche, while the renewable sources get 2 per cent.? Anyone who comes to the House and announces that that 2 per cent. somehow deserves an almighty pat on the back is not living in the real world.

The Minister has been unable to provide the House with any information on how he will get the regional electricity companies, who must buy the electricity, to abandon their obstructive attitude. That attitude has been the despair of many applicants for small windmill developments and small-scale hydro developments.

Far from the Minister's searching to persuade the European Community to allow the Government to do what he claims they want to do—to have the ability to go beyond 1998 so as to offer a higher price for renewables energy—the European Community has practically had to send the airline ticket to him to go over to Brussels to discuss something on which there has been an open-door policy since the original electricity privatisation legislation was conceived three years ago.

The truth of the matter is that the European Community wanted to block any preferential treatment for the nuclear industry, but the Minister insisted on tying the renewables industry to the nuclear industry. That is what has caused the 1998 limit to be maintained. That is entirely the result of the Government's faulty design of their electricity privatisation. It has nothing to do with any obstruction by the European Community. Is it not true that one cannot expect to get any credit for pushing against an open door, especially one that has been open for three years?

It is absolutely hypocritical to hide behind Brussels when claiming that we cannot have longer contract periods for wind power. The reason why the price for wind power is so high at 11p/kWh is simply the product of the crazy structure that the Minister has designed.

Is it not true that the Non-Fossil Purchasing Agency—a subsidiary company with no proper legal entity, which is owned by the 12 regional electricity companies and upon which the Government are relying—is disliked intensely by all the people in the renewables industry, because they know that those regional electricity companies, the owners, do not want to buy renewable energy? They do it reluctantly and they do it late, which is one of the reasons why this order, like last year's, was about two months late. Leaving the regional electricity companies in charge of renewable industries is like leaving the fox in charge of the chicken coop.

Is it not true that the renewables industries in this country will not start moving unless we get a Labour Government who will set up a renewable energy agency that will want to do the job and will not have to be dragged into it kicking and screaming? Only then will we start to catch up with Denmark, Holland and other countries, and only then will we be able seriously to exploit the potential of renewable energies in combating the threat of global warming.

Mr. Moynihan: The hon. Gentleman's last comment should be set in the context of the fact that my announcement today, worth £130 million in terms of premium payments to generators, is 17 times more than the total that the last Labour Government gave to renewable generation. So it is nonsense to posture at the Dispatch Box as the friend of renewables—that has been disproven by history.

The hon. Gentleman's second point was the old and frequently heard red herring about the nuclear option. Time and again his colleagues, along with Members on both sides of the House, have recognised that there is no reason why expenditure on renewables research and development should bear any proportional relationship to nuclear expenditure. Each energy technology requires a different level of investment to carry out the necessary R and D and its development for commercial use.

As for the number of projects that received support, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman agrees that when projects are proposed a balance must be struck between the diversity of renewables-generating technologies and the cost to the electricity consumer. Two hundred and six projects satisfied the "will secure" tests, of which 122—considerably more than the hon. Gentleman's guess—have contracted. The hon. Gentleman extrapolated from last year's figures—he said that they were so low—the idea that the number in this year's order would be similar. He was wrong about last year's number, and I hope that he will agree that 122 projects contracted out of the 206 that were proposed and which satisfied the "will secure" test represent a tremendous advance for renewable energy in this country.

Dr. Michael Clark (Rochford): I congratulate my hon. Friend on his statement, which will be well received in the House and in the country. Not only does it give a massive boost to renewable energies in Britain but it encourages them in Europe and the whole world.

Is my hon. Friend aware that the Energy Select Committee on a recent visit to Scandanavia looked at the technology for producing electricity from incineration of waste and from wind power, and that that Committee will be delighted that his technology, in whose development we have been at the forefront, will be encouraged by the scale of its development in this country?

Finally, may I point out to my hon. Friend that waves as well as wind are prominent in this country, especially in the winter? Will he therefore encourage wave energy research as well as wind energy research?

Mr. Moynihan: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support and I can give him the undertaking that he sought. Wave energy is under review by a Government steering group that includes independent members. Its work is due to be completed shortly, and interim and final reports will be published early next year.

I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that the granting of planning permission for the Cemmaes wind farm was a significant boost for renewables and an excellent result from the first public inquiry into this type of project. Many of the proponents of the projects in the second tranche of the NFFO recognised that putting such projects in areas of outstanding natural beauty such as national parks was not likely to be successful. So a large number of the new projects announced today for consideration in the second tranche of the NFFO are not in places of outstanding natural beauty. Given that a planning policy guidance note will be available, I hope that we can learn from the first NFFO tranche and ensure that more of the projects that have satisfied the "will secure" tests and been announced today will come to fruition in the not-too-distant future.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Although the Minister's statement is welcome, it shows an extremely belated conversion and is a very timid move. The figures that he has announced show that we shall get only 1 per cent. of our electricity from renewable fuels. If the Government have a real belief in the importance of renewables, why are Scotland and Northern Ireland exempted from a non-fossil fuel obligation? Given that our European colleague countries are far ahead of us in developing renewables, why do the Government refuse to plan beyond 1998 when European legislation allows such planning? The Government wanted to ring-fence the nuclear industry and found that the European Community rightly held that that was anti-competitive. Real investment is needed in non-renewable alternative fuels, and the Government are only beginning to make an inroad into this vital alternative and far more environmentally sound sector of energy.

Mr. Moynihan: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that Scotland has undoubtedly the best renewables potential in Great Britain. In parallel with the statement, I announced a number of projects that have been agreed separately. It is important for the renewable energy advisory group, which is currently sitting and is due to report at the beginning of next year, to advise on the future exploitation of renewable energy sources in Scotland. Under the Electricity Act 1989 it is up to the Secretary of State for Scotland to decide how to take matters forward. Northern Ireland is already in the process of drawing up its own NFFO obligation and is receiving assistance from us. I hope that the lessons learned from the first tranche of the NFFO will be carefully considered and extended to further renewable energy production in the United Kingdom.

As for the 1 per cent. point, I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the statement, which made it clear that this tranche alone was so substantial that it made historical the figure of 1,000 MW from renewable energy by the year 2000 and shows that the figure needs to be reassessed in line with the far more realistic appraisal of energy paper 55 which looks towards 2025 and makes it clear that commercially deployed projects would give us the potential to produce 20 per cent. of our current electricity demand by that year. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman welcomes that and recognises that without the statement we would not be on the road to that success.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that this is an order on which there will be a debate. May I ask for single questions rather than multi-questions so that as many hon. Members as possible may be called?

Mr. John Butcher (Coventry, South-West): I congratulate my hon. Friend on his excellent announcement. It provides a major opportunity for sections of British industry which have incredibly good strengths in research and development and engineering skills. I urge my hon. Friend to maintain at good levels the checks and audits on technology so that British manufacturers are given a real opportunity and so that we shall be able to leapfrog our European competitors by providing technologies that are in great demand and environmentally friendly.

Mr. Moynihan: I can give my hon. Friend that undertaking. It is vital that projects are environmentally friendly and economically viable. That is why we need constantly to monitor on an audit basis along the lines that my hon. Friend mentions.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Will the Minister confirm that on the criteria that he has announced he has turned down the scheme at Portwood weir in my constituency? There will be considerable disappointment in my constituency about that, first because the River Tame has provided power for mills for well over 200 years and it would be nice if it could continue to provide power in some form, and secondly because the scheme appeared to meet the EC criteria for a grant. It seems odd that the EC is prepared to put up the money for these schemes but the Government refuse to give them the go-ahead.

Mr. Moynihan: Individual projects have not been announced today. They are a matter for the Non-Fossil Purchasing Agency, which will today contact each of the contractors by post. In due course I shall write to every hon. Member about the outcome. I understand the hon. Gentleman's point about his constituency projects. He will understand that a balance must be struck between effective renewable generating techniques and the cost to the electricity consumer.

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): Will my hon. Friend tell us to what extent his programme can be delayed

by protracted planning procedures and to what extent, by use of general development orders, he can reduce that risk to the minimum?

Mr. Moynihan: I very much hope that the problem, which is undoubtedly considerable in the wind energy section, of planning applications and the delays in planning procedures will be overcome by the planning policy guidance notes that we are producing. It will also be assisted by recognition of the fact that many of these wind projects were not best sited in the first tranche of the NFFO. They were often sited in aesthetically beautiful areas and there was a lot of local opposition to that. Many of the projects coming through in this tranche are not so sited, so the combination of the two should speed up the planning consideration of these projects which will, I hope, come to favourable conclusions.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): Why should Northern Ireland be denied the benefits of this scheme? When does the Minister intend to speak to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to ensure that, at long last, the Province catches up with the rest of the country, as we have quite a lot of wind there?

Mr. Moynihan: I have discussed the development of renewables with my colleagues in the Northern Ireland Office. Much progress has already been made this year towards the first non-fossil fuel obligation for Northern Ireland, drawn up by Ministers. I hope that, with our assistance, and with the lessons learned with the first NFFO in England and Wales, the objectives that the hon. Gentleman has outlined will be realised and there will be renewable electricity generation in Northern Ireland.

Mr. John Hannam (Exeter): will my hon. Friend ignore the griping from the Labour party and accept our congratulations on the huge boost that he has given to renewable sources of energy? Will he comment on the future of solar cell electricity?

Mr. Moynihan: There is no doubt that there are tremendous opportunities in solar energy, especially in the long term reaching into the next century. Some opportunities are significant in building design and we need constantly to persuade architects to take those into account when designing new buildings, both domestic and industrial. As Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen will know, there is a vital opportunity, which we should grasp, in photovoltaics. I am glad to say that we recently announced a £250,000 investment, working in collaboration with BP, to take forward the search on photovoltaics, so that we are in a position to harness the tremendous potential for solar energy in the next century. It will not be before the next century, but we should invest in research and development now so that we can maximise future opportunities for solar energy.

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian): The country will welcome anything that will increase the use of benign sources of energy, but, given hon. Members' responses to the Minister's statement, does he agree that there is a great need for the reallocation of financial resources à la fossil fuel levy and in relation to the investment that is taking place in nuclear power? The disproportionate balance between research into benign forces of energy and that into nuclear energy is a scandal. The mining industry is paying a subsidy towards this because coal is a fossil fuel.

There will be disappointment that the Minister was not more positive about wave energy, and made no announcement about it. He will have to make a better response than his reply to the hon. Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark) about how he proposes to deal with wave energy, given the treatment that Professor Salter received when he put forward his Salter duck plan, on which the figures were definitely fiddled. We are at the stage when something must definitely be done.

Mr. Moynihan: I think that I have answered the question about the balance between renewable energy research and development and R and D for nuclear energy. Wave energy is of critical importance and the world leader in this is on the Isle of Islay, looking at a near-shoreline device. The project on Islay is already proving highly successful.

The Salter duck project is being reviewed in two places. I have already referred to the steering group. Secondly, it is important that, in close co-operation with my Department, and with my full support, Professor Salter's technology should be assessed in detail and independently. He has agreed to that. I have also steered him in the direction of the European Commission, because this is just the sort of renewable energy project in which it may be interested. I give the hon. Gentleman a clear assurance that we are working closely with Professor Salter; if his project proves both technically viable and economically competitive, it will play an important part in the future.

Mr. Tony Speller (Devon, North): I thank my hon. Friend on behalf of hon. Members on both sides of the House, who did not realise until this afternoon that they were pushing against an open door. I ask him to ensure that many applications are turned down, for good renewable energy does not mean despoiled countryside. I thank my hon. Friend for looking through the range of technologies and for his full range of acceptance. He has not confined himself to one or two technologies. This is a happy day for renewable energies, and Back-Bench Members should be pleased.

Mr. Moynihan: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support. I am sure that every Member recognises that one of the problems, especially with wind projects last year, was that the environmentalists who were keen for us to develop wind farms were the first to oppose applications when it came to the planning stage. I think that we have overcome that difficulty, and I think that a planning policy guidance note will overcome such difficulties in future. That is essential, because renewable energy research and development and commercial development should be a central part of any energy policy in this country. I intend to make it so.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): The Minister rightly referred to the development of Islay of shoreline wave energy. Does he accept that great importance should be attached to offshore wave energy, and that many of us are keen that that should be so? The Government have failed to invest in research and development, and it is not good enough to refer the matter back to the European Commission. A budget of £300,000 in 1991-92 for research is entirely inadequate. Will the Minister admit that the Department was wrong in 1982 when it accepted allegations that were made against the potential of wave

[Mrs. Margaret Ewing]

energy? Instead, will he enter into a clear commitment—if it cannot be this year, then the following year—that there will be major investment in wave-energy research?

Mr. Moynihan: I hope that the hon. Member heard me correctly earlier when I stated that I was keen to continue to work in close collaboration with Professor Salter and with anyone else who comes forward with potentially commercially viable proposals at this stage, and also technologically acceptable proposals, for wave energy, including both shoreline and offshore devices.

The review that has been carried out by the steering group will be published shortly and I shall ensure that the hon. Lady receives a copy. The purpose of the review is to examine the technologies and to set the parameters within which we can take wave energy forward. The project has not been put on the back burner, and we are not encouraging the Commission to take it over from us.

I suggested to Professor Salter that it would be in his interests, now that we are persuading the European Commission to fund research and development on wave power and other forms of renewable energy, for him to approach the Commission to assess the funding opportunities there. I am not for one moment disclaiming the potential of considerable shoreline and offshore wave energy development in future.

Mr. Peter Rost (Erewash): Is my hon. Friend aware that especially welcome in his excellent announcement is the approving of 10 projects for converting municipal waste into energy? The Government must acknowledge that there is involved a fuel that is far too valuable to dump into holes, thereby causing environmental pollution through methane. Even when there is methane extraction from landfill, only about a third of it can be usefully extracted. The remainder is a potent greenhouse gas.

Mr. Moynihan: I am in full agreement with my hon. Friend. I believe that about half the projects contracted under the general and municipal industrial tranche, to which he referred, have a long-term potential to utilise combined heat and power. The CHP schemes are eligible to contract within the NFFO, provided that non-fossil fuels are used. I am sure that my hon. Friend will welcome that as an additional benefit which will stem from my announcement.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): The Minister will be aware of the considerable interest in wind energy on the western seaboard of Wales. The potential is there. Can he give an assurance that in considering projects he will take into account the value that they may have to the agriculture fraternity as a subsidiary and auxiliary source of income? Although we must be careful not to despoil the countryside, we must not turn down projects that are acceptable within the local community because of some opposition outside a community. Will the Minister give me the assurance for which I ask?

Mr. Moynihan: I give the hon. Gentleman my full assurance on that matter.

Sir Ian Lloyd (Havant): Although I am sure that all hon. Members accept that alternative energy has joined that singular category of motherhood and sliced bread as something that no one can seriously oppose, perhaps I might ask my hon. Friend two questions——

Hon. Members: One.

Mr. Speaker: One, because there is rather heavy pressure.

Sir Ian Lloyd: My hon. Friend has set the ambitious target of 20 per cent. Will he tell us, first, why it is that the thorough analysis carried out by the Committee on Nuclear and Alternative Energy Systems of the United States Congress postulated a maximum target by the end of the century of 5 per cent., assuming zero interest on capital? What has happened to change either the fundamental economics or the fundamental technology?

Finally—if I may, Mr. Speaker—I have just discussed this matter with the Vice-Premier of China. He told me that his country will burn an additional 200 million tonnes of coal by the end of the century. Is it really wise, at this stage, to invest all the research and resources into alternative energies in this country, when the result will be more than swallowed up by what happens on the Pacific rim?

Mr. Moynihan: On the last point, one of the exceptionally important aspects of the research and development work being undertaken into renewable energy is to provide the resident expertise in the United Kingdom with the opportunity to export its technology and world leadership. We have already referred to world leadership in such sources as shoreline and landfill gas. We are second in the world behind the United States and do more than the rest of the world put together. As we develop a pool of expertise, especially for energies that are marginally more efficient elsewhere—I am thinking of solar technologies that are more efficient in Africa than in Britain—we should be able to export that. There is a by-product from the research and development, which is that United Kingdom companies will be able to export in that market.

On my hon., Friend's first point, energy paper 55 to which I referred did not provide for a date at the end of the decade. It said that the renewable energy advisory group is reviewing the target of 1,000 MW by the end of the decade, because, as is clear from today's announcement, we are in a position potentially far to exceed that. We are looking at the next three decades up to the year 2020 or 2025. A number of the technologies that are not yet commercially viable nevertheless warrant research and development support at this stage, especially solar energy and photovoltaic energy. When they are commercially viable, we will be world leaders in that technology. Having seen some of the expertise at BP, I have no doubt that we will be in that position.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): Does the Minister understand that his Government's failure to announce the extension of the non-fossil fuel obligation to Scotland signals to Scots that the Government simply are not serious about the development of renewable energies in our country? As the Conservative party is on the point of becoming the third party in a four-party country at the by-election later this week, is it not time that the Government stopped giving Scotland what it does not want—nuclear waste and nuclear energy—and instead

gave Scotland what it wants, which is direct encouragement for renewable energies in a country which the Minister himself described as rich in potential for such developments?

Mr. Moynihan: The hon. Gentleman is obviously unaware of the substantial investment in the research and development programme in Scotland on renewable energies. The East Kilbride centre, which concentrates on wind power, will be important in the United Kingdom's development of new technologies in highly exposed areas where the meterage per second of wind speed, especially in Scotland, is considerably higher than it is in the east and south-east of England.

The non-fossil fuel obligation is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland. Under the Electricity Act 1989, it is for him to decide on the methodology for developing renewable energy in Scotland. I have made a clear commitment to the House today that, because of representations from Members on both sides of the House, the renewable energy advisory group will fully assess how best to develop renewable energy from Scotland. The hon. Gentleman's points, together with those made by other hon. Members, will be taken into account.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have to have regard to the fact that there is another statement after this one and that there is such pressure on the debate on the Gracious Speech that I shall have to impose a 10-minute limit on speeches. I shall allow questions to continue until 4.15 pm. I hope to call most hon. Members if they are brief.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): As someone who has championed the cause of renewable energy since the mid-1970s, I give a warm personal welcome to my hon. Friend's statement, which I believe to be in exactly the right direction. I just wish that we had done more of it sooner.

My hon. Friend mentioned the fossil fuel levy. Is it expected that that will be the embryo for a carbon tax to pay for more investment in renewable energies?

Mr. Moynihan: The answer to my hon. Friend's second point is no. On his first point, I pay tribute to him, because I know that he has worked assiduously for development in renewable energy. I am glad that he is so supportive of the important and substantial announcement that we have made today.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): I thank the Minister for this modest death bed penance on renewables. For the past 12 years the Government have behaved like latter day Don Quixotes tilting at windmills and all the other renewables. Is not the most practical step that he could take to help renewables to allow those people working on tide, wind, coppicing and other renewables in the Atomic Energy Authority a separate organisation free from the foolish need to produce short-term profits, allowing them to invest in the advantages of renewables, which are essentially long-term?

Mr. Moynihan: The hon. Gentleman is right about the siting of the energy technology support unit at the AEA, but he will be aware that the ETSU is a discrete unit working full time on renewable energy. It is highly effective, highly professional and highly regarded and in no way would its organisational change mean that it was any less committed to or capable of working on the types of renewable energy mentioned by the hon. Gentleman from tidal to wave power. I am pleased that he mentioned coppicing and wood as a fuel, because there is no doubt that with the increasing amount of agricultural land at our disposal wood as a fuel, including coppicing, could be an important part of our renewable energy strategy in future. We announced only last week the first farmer co-operative with five farms seeking to develop a market.

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): Is my hon. Friend aware that his statement that 28 landfill sites will be used will be widely welcomed in the country as well as, I hope, by responsible organisations such as Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace? Is not his statement a significant contribution towards the Government's interest in green policies? In furtherance of that, may I urge him to bend his considerable energies towards the development of solar and tidal power?

Mr. Moynihan: We are directing much research and development money towards solar and tidal power. With regard to landfill gas, as my hon. Friend knows, in addition to the schemes that should come on stream as a result of today's announcement, there are some 36 landfill gas utilisation schemes in the United Kingdom, saving 160,000 tonnes of coal equivalent per annum. I would not want today's announcement to go by without underlining how important the contribution of renewable energy projects is to reducing the emissions that lead to global warming, and we should recognise that as an important environmental benefit.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The Minister mentioned methane, but is he aware that in many pits there is methane which could be used but usually is not? Will he draw attention to the National Coal Board's policy of closing pits, because when a pit is closed not only is low-sulphur coal lost in many cases, but the methane is then allowed to find its way to the surface? In Arkwright in my constituency, more than 200 people faced the prospect of an explosion because the coal board allowed the methane to escape. Will the Minister tell the coal board to stop that practice and deal with the methane?

Mr. Moynihan: The coal board never misses an opportunity to study carefully the comments made by the hon. Gentleman in the House, and I am sure that today will be no exception.

Mr. Malcolm Moss (Cambridgeshire, North-East): I congratulate the Minister on his personal involvement in bringing about the increased commitment to renewables. Does he agree that his announcement today would not have been possible without the privatisation of the electricity supply industry, and could not have been made by a Government in hock to the National Union of Mineworkers?

Mr. Moynihan: That is absolutely correct.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): Having listened with interest to the Minister's statement on renewable energy and the fact that there has been reference to other sources of power, when shall we have a comprehensive statement on energy policy from the Government? When shall we see the Tory party bringing forward a

[Mr. William O'Brien]

comprehensive energy policy which will include electricity, coal—primarily coal—and other energy sources? What is the Minister doing about a comprehensive fuel policy?

Mr. Moynihan: There is no doubt that, if the hon. Gentleman assiduously continues to attend debates on energy policy, as he has done, he will map together a comprehensive Government energy policy. Today, he will have benefited greatly from hearing exactly what is the Government's policy on renewable energy.

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): Given that the burning of municipal waste is a major element can my hon. Friend estimate the number of landfill sites that will no longer be needed, and whether an increase in the burning of waste will lessen the problem in places such as Crossways in my constituency, where vast areas are threatened with landfill?

Mr. Moynihan: There will not be the great trade-off that my hon. Friend imagines. It is important that we introduce recycling initiatives that are environmentally friendly; give, where necessary, a reduction in emissions; and generate electricity where the opportunities arise. Equally, landfill will continue to be an important part of our strategy, not least because there are more opportunities annually for landfill to be created, as more sand and gravel continues to be extracted and landfill sites filled. However, they are often further from centres of population and a net result is cost rises that make incineration increasingly more attractive where there is competition between the two methods.

Mr. Chris Butler (Warrington, South): Do the longer-term contracts that my hon. Friend's statement envisages, which presumably depend on the longer-term view, take the prospects of a Mersey barrage—*[Interruption]*—any further?

Mr. Moynihan: I am being lobbied heavily by my right hon. Friend the hon. Member for Wallasey (Mrs. Chalker). I pay tribute to the Mersey barrage company for approaching the project very professionally. We provided additional resources for further studies, because it is important that all aspects are carefully examined—not least the project's commercial viability, technical feasibility, and environmental significance. That work will be completed as soon as possible, not least because, as it is a private-sector, commercially orientated project, its proponents want to ensure that the momentum is sustained—and we will assist them in that.

Bangladesh (Cyclone)

4.16 pm

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement on my visit to Bangladesh from 31 October to 3 November. The main objective was to see the after-effects of the cyclone of 29 April, the worst this century, and to assess the progress of rehabilitation.

I did not visit at the time of the initial relief operation, because I did not want to divert local transport and personnel at the height of relief operations. On the visit, I was accompanied by officials and Mr. Michael Whitlam, director-general of the British Red Cross.

With our high commissioner in Dhaka, we visited coastal areas in the districts of Chittagong and Cox's Bazar, including several of the offshore islands where the cyclone damage was worst of all.

It is difficult to overstate the tragic consequences of the cyclone. I visited areas where almost half the population lost their lives. In all, more than 150,000 men, women and children died. On Sandwip island, the villagers performed for me a moving re-enactment of the events of the cyclone and its aftermath.

The psychological effects of the disaster will take years to heal, but the physical work of rehabilitation exceeded our expectations. Schools are being reconstructed, new houses completed, and fishing boats built. Most important of all, the main rice crop, planted after the cyclone, is by all accounts a very good one. The resilience of the people of Bangladesh is heartening.

The progress that I saw would not have been possible without great efforts by the Government of Bangladesh, local and overseas non-governmental organisations, and the donor community. At the beginning of May, Britain gave £6·5 million for immediate disaster relief directly and through the EC. Our aid was handled through NGOs, and it appears to have been most effective in helping to avoid any major fatalities in the aftermath of the cyclone. I also heard warm tributes to the work of the Royal Marines in the distribution of relief supplies.

Britain has since made available a further £5 million for rehabilitation, again through British and local NGOs. During my visit, I announced that, of that, £750,000 will go to the excellent local voluntary organisation, the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, and £500,000 for the further British Red Cross shelter building programme on Sandwip.

Already, British funds have been put to good use, as I saw with projects involving Concern, Help the Aged, and other NGOs. The assistance contributed by Britain's Bangladeshi community was also greatly appreciated. I confirmed our willingness to finance reconstruction items such as bailey bridging and ferry engines from the £15 million commodity aid agreement signed last month. I discussed the lessons to be learned from the relief and rehabilitation exercise with all whom I met, including the Prime Minister, Begum Khaleda Zia, and a wide range of NGOs.

It is clear from my visit that the key features of our approach have been well justified. First, we used NGOs as our channel of assistance, working with the Government of Bangladesh. Secondly, we purchased relief materials in-country, rather than succumbing to the temptation to fly in supplies that all too often prove inappropriate. I have

emphasised to all parties the need for good communications and a real partnership between Government and NGOs in Bangladesh to make aid effective—and not just in times of disaster.

I believe, however, that there is more that we can and should do. The donor community should press ahead with the construction of multi-purpose buildings suitable for use as cyclone shelters. We are financing 24 such shelters under our rehabilitation funds, through the Red Cross and through local NGOs. The EC, Germany, Japan and Saudi Arabia are also financing shelters. The World bank is preparing a project to cover the balance of requirements. I shall be discussing that with the bank in Washington next week.

More needs to be done on disaster preparedness, notably in regard to radio communications. I am glad to report that the British Red Cross, with its League partners, plans to upgrade the communications facilities of the Bangladesh Red Crescent, which more than proved their worth in this cyclone. We are ready to assist in this, should there be a funding gap.

As on previous occasions, I am holding a post-disaster review of our responses. I want to be sure that, wherever our urgent help is needed next, we are as ready as is humanly possible.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Let me convey to the House the regret expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) for her absence. Earlier today, my hon. Friend left for northern Iraq to witness and discuss the problems confronting the hundreds of thousands of Kurdish refugees who face the grim prospect of winter, and renewed acts of repression by Saddam Hussein. My hon. Friend hopes to address the House about those matters when she returns.

We welcome today's statement. The Minister will recall that it was the Opposition who, on 8 May, asked her to visit Bangladesh. The small amounts of money that she has committed to important work in Bangladesh are welcome, but the £5 million to which her statement referred must be seen against the background of her frank admission to me, on 15 October, that Britain's aid last year, as a proportion of gross national product, had been the lowest ever recorded—I repeat: the lowest ever recorded. That admission at the Dispatch Box sent a shudder through the Government's own Back Benchers.

Is it true that the Prime Minister's recent debt initiative —the write-off initiative—does not cover Bangladesh, the world's fifth poorest country? Why should that be so? Because Bangladesh does not appear to meet the Government's criteria. Will the Minister say clearly whether that is true? The House and the country need to know.

Is it not true that the cost to Bangladesh of servicing its foreign debt is over a quarter of the amount that it receives in aid from all donors? How can Bangladesh possibly rebuild its economy after the cyclone, when it is saddled with such debt obligations? Is it not also true that the Government aid given to this poor country is concentrated disproportionately on large-scale energy and infrastructural communication projects? It has not been focused on poverty alleviation.

Despite some notable projects—yes, promoted by the present Government—still too little Government money has been spent on schools, health networks, farming, small-scale rural projects, fisheries and the formation of credit groups to help the regeneration of economic activity at a local level. To provide funds for cyclone shelters is one thing, but unless the use of such shelters forms part of local community-based programmes, experience suggests that such relief projects can fall into disrepair.

Can the Minister deny that the ODA resisted funding a number of such poverty-focused rehabilitation projects that accompanied cyclone shelter programmes? The next Labour Government will change the emphasis of their aid programme in favour of the poor, and will support programmes of poverty alleviation.

On 8 May, the Minister told the House that she was discussing with her EC counterparts the need for a co-ordinated EC approach to international relief. What has been the result of those discussions? Has that co-ordination been established? Ministers have repeatedly stressed the need for good governance to be a criterion in the allocation of aid. Recognising Bangladesh's commitment to democracy under a newly elected democratic Government, will the British Government now substantially increase their contribution as a reward for meeting the new criterion? If good governance is to be an incentive, surely those who meet the new criterion must be rewarded.

The Minister told the House that the World bank has identified $2·3 billion for strengthening the economy of Bangladesh. Could she comment on what projects she expects these moneys to be allocated to and in what time frame?

On 8 May, the Minister was asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) about seed aid to help local farmers replenish seed stocks lost in the cyclone. What proposals does she have to help these small farmers, who otherwise face debt or bankruptcy? Has the Minister considered linking the EC's fisheries decommissioning scheme to the aid programme, with the replacement of Bangladeshi fishing vessels in the way advocated by my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) and me on 8 May?

What consideration is being given to the recent severe river flooding in the north of the country? Will the Minister make a point of ensuring that aid is allocated for rehabilitation in that area, which was badly damaged in the floods of September of this year?

The unfolding tragedy of Bangladesh in the aftermath of the cyclone is of deep concern to the whole House. I hope that the Minister's visit will have reassured the people of that country that the world remains conscious of their plight. The whole House will want to unite in expressing its support for the efforts of the Government and people of Bangladesh in rebuilding their lives and communities.

Mrs. Chalker: I welcome the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) to his Front-Bench post. I am sure that he will bring his incisive mind to his work in public, rather than all the background, unofficial work that we know he has done for so long for the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd), for which perhaps he has not been thanked as much as he should have been by others.

I realise that the hon. Member for Cynon Valley departed today for northern Iraq. I have been only too conscious of the anxieties of the House regarding the problems facing the Kurdish and other Iraqi people. I have been in touch with Prince Sadruddin, who I hope will very soon go to Baghdad to put the very point to Saddam Hussein that is in all our minds today.

[Mrs. Chalker]

As for this statement, in total £11·5 million is not a small amount. It is in addition to more than £50 million in the annual aid programme that goes to Bangladesh. To answer the hon. Gentleman's comments about Bangladesh and the Trinidad terms, I thought that he would know that Bangladesh is not rescheduling its debt; nor is its debt service ratio as high as for countries that are eligible for the existing Toronto terms. This Government have long since written off Bangladesh's aid debt. We provide all aid on grant terms to Bangladesh and will continue to do so.

The hon. Member for Workington spoke more generally about health, family planning and farming. Our aid programme is taking account of needs in such matters. We have found a valuable link through the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee; and we have ensured that, where we can gain the Government's agreement to engage in such projects, we shall do so. I spent a good deal of Sunday talking about such projects with members of the Government, including the Minister of Health and Family Planning, whom I pressed hard on doing more in the areas of health and population.

Our Government have turned our minds to the community development aspects of shelter projects and we have included those in our aid to BRAC through the British Red Cross and Red Crescent programme. It is true that some projects do not meet the criteria upon which we have to insist, but that does not alter the fact that we are fully engaged, and will continue to be so, in community-based development projects.

In terms of the European Community's approach to international relief, at an informal meeting in July, I proposed various solutions, which were accepted by my colleagues. We had not at that time received a paper from the Commission. There has been debate within the Commission about this, and it will be discussed again at the end of the month in the Development Council. We shall respond on good government, and where a country, Bangladesh or otherwise, makes progress, we shall respond as generously as we can.

Next week I shall be discussing with the World bank to what projects it intends to give aid. We have already given seed aid to Bangladesh to help in the aftermath of the cyclone. We have also offered assistance to the Rangpur area in the north-west which has suffered from flooding. However, the harvest there is expected to be good. The staff of the British high commission who visited the area last week have told me, as have the non-governmental organisations in Bangladesh, that there is not a famine. However, I have made it clear that we shall assist in that area if the Bangladeshi Government wish us to do so.

We have done a great deal to set the scene for the future, to ensure that there is much more protection for people in the event of future cyclones. I intend to see that that work continues to be done by us and all other donors.

Mr. Timothy Raison (Aylesbury): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on a worthwhile visit in the wake of such an apalling disaster, and on the sizeable amount of money that we have given to assist Bangladesh. Can she develop a little the ideas about improved international co-ordination, especially UN co-ordination, in terms of preparations for possible disasters and the implementation of an effective strategy once disasters have struck?

Mrs. Clarke: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his comments. Since we and the Germans proposed the plan, which is now endorsed by our partners in the European Community and the UN, we have had nothing but encouragement for the idea of a UN disaster supremo and a worldwide system for disaster response co-ordination that we envisaged from the beginning. However, it seems clear that the current Secretary-General of the United Nations will not appoint such a person, as he is coming to the end of his time in New York.

We have made it clear to all our partners in the UN, particularly in the Security Council, that we believe this to be a matter of the utmost urgency. We believe also, with fellow donors in the OECD committee, that we can cause a swift arrangement to take place. In the meantime, we are all ready to do what may need to be done before we achieve the UN disaster co-ordination that we all think is necessary.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): Does the Minister recall that, during the overseas development debate last year, she interrupted my speech when I was complaining about the lack of progress towards the United Nations target of 0·7 per cent. of gross national product? She said:

"The Government have always accepted the target in principle. We cannot stipulate a timetable, but we shall work towards it as fast as we reasonably can".—[*Official Report*, 14 December 1990; Vol. 182, c. 1264.]

Does she therefore share my party's disappointment that, whatever effort is being made in Bangladesh now, it is coming out of a smaller pot because we have moved away from the target that she promised last year instead of towards it?

Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries in the world, and 86 per cent. of its people live below the poverty line. Does the Minister accept that we welcome the steps that she has taken and join in congratulating the non-governmental organisations on their work since the cyclone disaster?

The Minister said that the Government were contributing to the construction of 24 essential concrete shelters to prevent Bangladesh from again being ravaged by cyclones, which are inevitable. Clearly, 24 shelters are nothing like enough. The right hon. Lady says that she will discuss the subject with the World bank in Washington next week. From her own discussions with the Bangladesh Government, how many shelters does she conclude will be required, and how optimistic is she that they will be constructed before a disaster strikes?

Mrs. Chalker: I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman was in the House when I spoke about resources at a previous question time. I made it clear that the average percentage of gross national product spent on aid in recent years was about 0·3. There were fiscal fluctuations, and at the end of 1990 certain bills were held over to 1991. We work on financial years, not calendar years. Therefore, although I am disappointed by the figure, I shall not allow it to deflect us from close targeting and the proper concentration of aid on the poorest countries, of which Bangladesh is certainly one.

The number of shelters that are needed depends entirely on what type of shelters are constructed and where they are placed. That is why we said that, under our rehabilitation fund and with the British Red Cross and local NGOs, we shall press ahead with the construction of

the 24 shelters that are required. The European Community, to which we contribute, Germany, Japan and Saudi Arabia are financing shelters. The World bank is also preparing to finance other shelters and community institutions to act as shelters. We are a major contributor to the World bank.

Although the cyclone was much more severe than in 1970, fewer people lost their lives. The problem is not only the number of shelters that are available but persuading people to use them. Earlier today, I examined the possibility of constructing shelters that take cattle on ground level and people above. To a Bangladeshi family, although it may not seem so to us, losing their cattle is almost as serious as losing a child. We have been working on the wider considerations and have been seeking to persuade other donors to be conscious not only of the need to construct many shelters but to try to tackle the whole problem. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will bear with me. I shall take his words ringing in my ears to Washington next week.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): My right hon. Friend is to be congratulated on her efforts in this extremely difficult situation. Bangladesh is a sad country, because it attracts so many natural disasters. There seems no way of providing enough to prevent a cyclone, flooding and the many diseases that occur in that part of the world. I wonder whether it is realistic to build shelters rather than to try to move the indigenous population from the more dangerous areas. I know that many Bangladeshi people are fishermen, but it seems that, potentially, they will always be in danger. I am sure that my right hon. Friend will persuade the United Nations to do what it can.

Mrs. Chalker: There is a treble problem, the first part of which is the rapid increase in the population. Although the population has fallen from an average of seven children per family in 1970 to five, it is still very high. There are estimated to be about 110 million people in a country with little land space, much of which is exceedingly low-lying.

The second problem is that this low-lying land is extremely fertile. Fisherpeople go out into the bay of Bengal, and the area also attracts farmers and others. The water acts as a magnet, causing overpopulation in the region, and there are not sufficient inland areas to which people can go. People tend to gather in low-lying areas. The numbers of people involved cannot be moved forcibly.

Community buildings are necessary, anyway. If they can be used as cyclone shelters as well, a double purpose will be fulfilled by building them. We cannot tackle just one problem and provide cyclone shelters. As our aid programme is increasingly doing, we must concentrate our efforts not only on providing an infrastructure and sufficient power, but, more particularly, on alleviating poverty and instituting health and population programmes, on which we now concentrate.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): The House will welcome the right hon. Lady's statement on the progress that is being made towards the rehabilitation of these terribly devastated areas around the bay of Bengal. I am sure that there will be great appreciation of the right hon. Lady's tribute to the people of Bangladesh and to the Bangladeshi people here who are contributing to relief efforts. I am sure that her tribute to the work of the NGOs will also be greatly appreciated.

As I think was clear from the right hon. Lady's remarks, rehabilitation is only one stage in what needs to be done. Ahead lies a massive programme to take measures under the World bank's flood action plan to mitigate the effects of a repetition of such disasters.

We should like some assurances from the right hon. Lady. First, we should like an assurance that the world community has been fully apprised of the priority that must be given, within aid programmes, to flood prevention and cyclone disaster plans. Secondly, we should like an assurance that the Government of Bangladesh now give greater priority than they did in the past to long-term coastal defence and cyclone protection measures.

Mrs. Chalker: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his comments. I wish to reassure him that, in addition to the work that we shall continue to do to protect people from cyclones, we are heavily engaged in the Bangladesh flood action plan—four projects are being worked upon by Britain alone. The conference here in December 1989, which I chaired, took other aspects of that plan forward. We wish to ensure that all donors maintain the action which has been taken. We are, of course, encouraging the new democratic Government of Bangladesh to support all those measures, but it will take time for them to be quite as active as we would wish.

Dr. John G. Blackburn (Dudley, West): As someone who has been very interested in Bangladesh over many years, I wish to offer my right hon. Friend warm and generous congratulations on the factual excellence of her report. The coastal stretch between Chittagong and Cox's Bazaar is screaming out for large-scale civil engineering works. Britain could play an important part in providing such a facility.

Mrs. Chalker: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. Having spent more than a day flying over the coastal region between Chittagong and Cox's Bazaar, all the islands and some of the inland areas, I am well aware of the lack of infrastructure. Several local community groups are involved in rebuilding boats, and it may be that we can better help through that approach and others, rather than by providing masses of concrete. We are considering the problems. As I said, we shall provide bailey bridging and ferry engines, which will help considerably in the short and long term.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): The Minister may recall that, on 8 May, I urged upon her the need to provide immediate assistance to the fishing communities that were so badly devastated. I was therefore pleased to hear her mention the assistance given to the fishing communities. Will she confirm that that assistance has taken the shape of appropriately constructed vessels and gear? Can the majority of those fishermen now continue with their fishing? Has any of this assistance gone into building onshore facilities for the fishing communities?

Mrs. Chalker: I am afraid that I cannot answer the hon. Gentleman's last question about onshore facilities. The activity which I saw when we were in the area between Chittagong and Cox's Bazaar shows that fishing has taken off once more. Every time we went near a small port, we saw boats being built. There was much activity. I am glad that we and other donors can help.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall allow questions to continue for a further five minutes. I hope that the House will understand if I give precedence to those hon. Members who are not seeking to speak in the debate.

Mr. Ian Grist (Cardiff, Central): As the population of Bangladesh is due to grow by more than 30 million by the turn of the century, will my right hon. Friend say what was the response of the Minister of Health and Family Planning in Bangladesh when she rightly raised the issue of [illegible] measures?

Mrs. Chalker: I am glad to say that I had a better response than I expected. I have made it clear to Minister Yussif and his officials that we are fully prepared to help not only with child care issues and population planning but with contraceptive supplies. I shall keep my hon. Friend and the House informed as we make progress on this issue, as I am determined that we shall do.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Does the Minister agree that western aid in the past has shown an over-emphasis on capital projects which have had little impact on the overwhelming majority of the very poor people of Bangladesh? Is it not now clear that we should emphasise more the need not just for shelter but for solid and substantial housing, which will ensure that there will be fewer casualties the next time a cyclone hits the area? After all, if the cyclone had hit the United States or Britain, 150,000 people would not have died.

Mrs. Chalker: In reviewing the past few years of the Bangladesh programme, it is clear that we have been doing more and more to alleviate poverty and to provide the type of projects to which the hon. Gentleman referred. Without a decent infrastructure and sufficient power, poverty alleviation projects—however good they may be in themselves—will not have the desired effect. A balance is required in any aid programme. Bangladesh needs power, and we now concentrate all our power work on efficiency. That means not new stations but efficient production by and distribution from existing stations. The balance in the Bangladeshi aid programme is coming right. We are never unaware of what needs to be done to alleviate the dreadful distress facing so many Bangladeshi people.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Did my right hon. Friend see the report of the Inter-Parliamentary Union disarmament conference in March last year, which called on all nations to use their military forces in disaster relief action? I am sure that my right hon. Friend knows that, in Portland, the Royal Navy regularly trains for disaster relief, and that we have an excellent record, especially in respect of the Kurds and Bangladesh. What efforts has my right hon. Friend made through her Department to encourage other Governments, especially Governments in these areas with large armed forces, to deploy their forces when disasters occur?

Mrs. Chalker: I thoroughly agree with my hon. Friend. I have always encouraged the use of forces in disaster relief. Some of the training given in this country will be an integral part of the training that my special people will get in the future. It is true that the Bangladeshi armed forces performed well after the first few days. They helped a great deal and were greatly assisted by the United Kingdom and United States forces who went specifically to area.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): The Minister is obviously aware from her visit to Bangladesh that it is a desperately poor country with a hard-working population. Will she reveal a little more about her discussions during her visit on the question of debt write-off which may be offered to the Bangladeshi Government in the future, on ways of increasing the earnings of Bangladesh from exports and especially on commodity prices? Bangladesh, like many other poor countries, is stuck in the bind of high interest rates and low export prices, which leads it further into debt. Unless the debt crisis is resolved, the poverty of Bangladesh is likely to continue for a long time.

Mrs. Chalker: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman can have heard what I said earlier. The British Government have long since written off Bangladesh's aid debt, and we provide all our aid on grant terms. Bangladesh is not rescheduling its debt, and its debt service ratio is not as high as that of other countries that are eligible for the Toronto terms and, therefore, for the Trinidad terms. Although that may be so, we have done a great deal to try to encourage the export earnings and we will continue to do so.

The most important point is to give the goods of the developing countries access to the developed world, which is why the round of talks on the general agreement on tariffs and trade is so vital. In the fibre sector, the Tootal company in Bangladesh has made great strides in recent years, and there is much to be gained from further work of that type.

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [31 October].

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.—*[Mr. Peter Walker.]*

Question again proposed.

Rights, Freedoms and Responsibilities

Mr. Speaker: In view of the late start which was due to the two statements, it will be necessary to put a 10-minute limit on speeches between 7 pm and 9 pm. I also ask those who are called before that time to limit their speeches to about that period in the interests of their colleagues.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Even Front-Bench Members?

Mr. Speaker: I hope so.

4.51 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Kenneth Baker): The title of the debate on this day on the Queen's Speech has traditionally been "Rights, Freedoms and Responsibilities", words which sit rather more easily in the Conservative vocabulary than in the socialist lexicon. I am sure that the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) will tell us at length what his proposals are on rights, and whether such rights should be enshrined in a charter or in a Bill. In the past, he has expressed enthusiasm and lack of enthusiasm for both.

I hope that he will also touch on responsibilities. It is an axiom of Conservative belief that a stable society can derive only from the acceptance of responsibilities as well as from the declaration of rights. Over the past 12 years, this Government have introduced a number of measures to ensure that people fulfil their basic responsibilities, especially towards their children. Through the Criminal Justice Act 1991, parents can now be held more directly responsible for criminal acts committed by their children. We have also ensured that fathers will not be allowed to walk away from their financial responsibilities, because fatherhood is for life.

We have encouraged responsibility at a local level by developing the network of neighbourhood watch schemes, now 92,000 nationwide. We have encouraged more people to come forward as school governors through our education legislation. We have given council tenants the right to own their own homes, a hugely successful policy. Home ownership increases people's sense of responsibility.

In the Queen's Speech, we are further extending and increasing rights. First, there are the rights of parents to have more information about how their children are performing in school. Secondly, there are the rights of consumers, involving bringing the powers of the regulators of the utilities up to the level of the strongest. Thirdly, in the Asylum Bill, we are extending new rights of appeal. Fourthly, we are increasing the right of people to own shares in the denationalised companies for which they work.

Let me also remind the House that we have extended the rights of trade unionists to participate in the affairs of their union, and we have given individual employees the right not to have to join a trade union if they so wish. We have given every employee the right not to strike unless there has been a ballot beforehand.

In our proposals for the citizens charter, we are giving rights to people to ensure that the public services which they get are provided efficiently. The victims charter sets out for the first time the rights, the entitlements and the expectations of those who have been victims of crime.

We have improved and protected the rights of suspects in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act. We are now examining where the proposals there can be extended from tape recording to video recording. We have announced the establishment of a prison complaints adjudicator in the prison service.

I am obliged to the Opposition for choosing this area for debate because it allows us to remind the country of the rights that we have created, of the freedoms that we have protected and of the responsibilities that we have enhanced.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): When the Home Secretary considers further extensions of rights, will the Government consider extending the rights of occupational pensioners in so far as they are protected by the Occupational Pensions Board, which is a public body, and will they especially consider protecting the rights of the 35,000 pensioners of Lucas Industries who do not get the full pension allowed by the Inland Revenue? Yet the company is about to milk the pension fund by £150 million. Those pensioners need to have their rights protected, because the company has not paid a penny piece into the fund for the past six years. Where in this catalogue of rights are the rights of those people to be extended by strengthening the powers of the Occupational Pensions Board to stop the actions of companies such as Lucas?

Mr. Baker: I will certainly draw what the hon. Gentleman says to the attention of my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Secretary of State for Social Security. I will look into the case. I was not aware of the circumstances to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

I was making the point that we have extended many new rights during our term in office. Those rights have enhanced the freedoms and responsibilities of our people.

Since 1979, this Government have given the highest priority to expenditure on law and order. Expenditure on the police has risen by 67 per cent. in real terms since 1979, which has led to an increase of 15,000 uniformed officers and 12,000 civilian staff. We are pround of this record and we intend to continue it. Next year, there will be a further 1,000 uniformed police officers.

Compare that to the miserable record of the previous Labour Government. They cut expenditure by 3 per cent. They left the police forces of our country 8,000 under establishment. The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook was a member of the Cabinet which approved that. He cannot shrug off his responsibility and he cannot take refuge in his usual complacency. He was one of those who sat round the Cabinet table and agreed cuts in law and

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order expenditure. The reason why he and his colleagues did that is that Labour's heart has never been in law and order. The Labour party marches to different tunes.

In his lengthy article in *The Observer* four weeks ago, the man who is the shadow Home Secretary did not once mention law and order. He did not mention the police or the prevention of crime.

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): Did it have a good restaurant guide?

Mr. Baker: The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook is too easy a target for such a pointed jibe. In his party conference harangue, which lasted for half an hour, only three paragraphs—10 per cent. of his speech—were on law and order. That shows the low priority that he attaches to these important issues.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I hope that the Secretary of State takes the subject seriously. Does he agree with Peter Nobes, the chief constable of West Yorkshire, that there has been a doubling of almost every crime over the past 10 years? Does he agree that the chief constable makes a good request when he asks to have back on the beat the police who have been taken away from us because of poll tax capping? What is the Secretary of State going to do about it? It is all right to have a knockabout and a jest, but people in my constituency and in West Yorkshire generally are in danger every day because of the Home Secretary's irresponsibility.

Mr. Baker: I agree with a great deal of what the hon. Lady has said. One of the most effective ways in which the increased number of police officers which I have announced can be used in the next year is on the beat. Our civilianisation programme means that jobs that are done now by uniformed officers can be done by civilians which releases even more uniformed officers on to the beat. As hon. Members will know from visiting their local police stations, it is now quite common to find that the people working in the reception area where the public come in are now civilians. That allows the uniformed officers who normally work there to work on the beat. That is not one of the issues that divides us. Lots of things do divide us on law and order, but it is commonly understood that we all want more policemen to be out on the beat because the public find their presence reassuring.

I was making the point that when Labour and the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook were in office, they showed a total indifference to these problems. I want to be fair to the Labour party, because I must not accuse it of having no ideas or policies on law and order.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Baker: I shall give way to my hon. Friend in just a moment.

The Labour party has specific policies that have been published in copious and interminable publications such as "Meet the Challenge, Count the Change". I give the Labour party full credit for having policy ideas.

The Labour party believes that the police should be accountable to police authorities consisting of elected councillors only. In a recent opinion poll, the public were asked their reaction to that, and a whole 8 per cent. agreed with that Labour policy—what a ringing endorsement. The Labour party has another policy that is nearly as popular—to make local councils responsible for crime prevention. It proposes giving them a duty, rather than a power, to do so. Once again, the opinion poll revealed what the public thought of that proposal. This time, a whole 3 per cent. supported that policy. On the other hand, 60 per cent. of those polled believed that the police together with local neighbourhoods should be responsible for crime prevention—which is the Government's policy.

There is another policy that the Labour party has worn like an albatross around its neck for the past seven years. It wants to abolish the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act. How does that sit with the public? In the same poll, that Labour policy won the endorsement of 3 per cent. of the public. Only 3 per cent. of the British people supported that long-standing Labour party policy. Yet again the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook has dealt his party a losing hand. It is little wonder that, when the right hon. Gentleman displays his hand, his colleagues throw up theirs in alarm.

Mr. John Carlisle: My right hon. Friend mentioned the status of police authorities. Is he aware that, in the county of Bedfordshire, which is Labour-controlled, some of the money directed from my right hon. Friend's office to the police authority—specifically designed to increase police numbers to strengthen the police force in the county—has been siphoned by the local authority into other areas? The police did not receive the full allocation of moneys that my right hon. Friend intended that they should have. Is such action rare, or is my right hon. Friend aware that that might have happened elsewhere?

Mr. Baker: It is not a rare case. Certain other authorities where Labour has been in office for some time have not allocated the same priority to spending on law and order as other authorities. My hon. Friend has given us a good example and I am sure that he will make the most of it to his constituents, because law and order should be given the highest priority. As I said earlier, law and order is not the highest priority for the Labour party.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East) *rose*——

Mr. Baker: I shall give way in a moment.

The Labour party's failure to make law and order its highest priority was illustrated last weekend when the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook had the opportunity to set out his policies on law and order.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow) *rose*——

Mr. Baker: I shall give way in a moment.

The right hon. Gentleman wrote an article for the *New Statesman and Society* in which he returned to his familiar theme of attacking the judges. He said:

"There is no doubt that the character and position of the judiciary is in urgent need of change."

How will that happen? Who will appoint the judges? Will they be appointed by the Labour party's national executive? After all, it is appointing candidates up and down the country. The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook is the biggest deselector of Labour candidates. Now he wants to be let loose to deselect judges. That is equivalent of the politicisation of the judiciary. That is the prospect held out to the electorate by the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Leighton: I know that we are near to a general election, but would the right hon. Gentleman please remember that he is not the current chairman of the Conservative party, he is the Home Secretary? We do not expect such a flippant presentation, we expect something rather more serious. If he is claiming that law and order is close to his heart, why have we had so little law and order in the past 12 months [HON. MEMBERS: "Twelve years."] of this Government? Why has crime doubled in that time?

Mr. Baker: We have been in office for a little longer than 12 months. We have been in office for 12 years and we intend to be in office for much longer.

I have attempted to set out some of the differences between the Labour party and the Government on law and order and it is entirely legitimate for me to do so.

Crime prevention is an important matter. The hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) referred to the crime figures. He should be aware that the Home Office is spending £15 million a year on crime prevention schemes. As a result of our safer cities programme, we already have schemes operating in 19 cities. Hon. Members will be aware of the other projects that we intend to launch. Fourteen drug prevention teams have been established through our drugs initiative programme.

It is essential to reduce car crime, which now constitutes nearly 30 per cent. of all recorded crime.

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): Although the measures that the Government have introduced are welcome, does my right hon. Friend agree that they will not reduce auto crime until we have a system under which juvenile offenders can be locked up? At the moment, a small number of those offenders constantly reoffend. Without such a system, some of those who are bailed, and bailed again, constantly reoffend.

Mr. Baker: The Home Office will complete a research project about reoffending on bail in a matter of days and we will publish the results. That project will draw together the experience gained across the country.

In several public statements, I have made it clear that, when young offenders appear before the courts, the magistrates should think carefully before granting them bail. I shall go no further than that because it is not for a member of the Executive to instruct or to pressure in any way any elements of the judiciary. However, the courts must be aware of the dangers that exist if some young accused hooligans are not committed to custody.

Earlier this year, I published a Green Paper about juvenile custody. We do not have enough places for secure accommodation for juveniles, and some authorities have closed them down. Many Labour authorities believe strongly that no one under 16 or 17 should be committed to custody in any circumstances. That view is not shared by the Conservative party. The policy advocated by some Labour authorities is one of the reasons for the Green Paper, in which I state that we need more secure accommodation for juveniles.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): Is my right hon. Friend aware that facilities were made available for secure accommodation in Leicestershire but that they were voted down by the Labour and Liberal parties?

Mr. Baker: That is one example, and I have heard of other Labour authorities that have specifically reduced or eliminated secure accommodation. The sad fact that one must face is that there are some juveniles below the age of 16—soon it will be below 17—who must be kept in secure custody; for example, those who commit severe crime. We do not want to lock up hundreds of thousands, but there are some juveniles who must be held in secure custody because of the seriousness of their crime. It is regrettable that in some parts of the country Labour authorities have closed such accommodation.

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford) *rose*——

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): Which authorities?

Mr. Baker: Leicestershire.

Mr. Vaz: That is a hung council.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. Mr. Baker.

Mr. Baker: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse).

Mr. Lofthouse: Did I understand that the right hon. Gentleman agreed with his hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) that more young people should be locked up? Although no one condones crime, surely it would be better policy to find such youngsters some work.

Mr. Baker: We will produce a consultation document, before Christmas I hope, that deals with the roots of criminality and what leads youngsters, principally young boys, into crime. The hon. Gentleman will find that it contains many positive proposals to try to ensure that those youngsters do not set out on a path that leads inevitably to custody.

The House is aware that, three weeks ago, the Cabinet agreed to my proposal that a new offence should be introduced to deal with joyriding—the House will appreciate that that crime should not be known as "joyriding". That offence will deal with the crime of stealing a vehicle without the owner's consent when that offence is aggravated by damage or dangerous driving.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle) *rose*——

Mr. Baker: I have given way a great deal and I should like to proceed with my speech for a while.

It would not be enough just to increase the penalties for taking and driving away from six months to two years. The new offence needs to be carefully defined to hit the mischief of damage and injury associated with the theft of the vehicle.

Since I made my announcement lawyers in the Home Office have been working on the definition of the new offence so that it will be tough and effective. The Bill is now being drafted and I can assure the House that it will be introduced as soon as it is ready. I am glad to hear that the Labour party has agreed that that Bill should go swiftly on to the statute book.

Mr. Martlew: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Baker: No. I shall give way in a moment.

Our campaign to reduce car crime goes much wider than the Bill. The House will be aware that I have spoken to motor manufacturers to persuade them to fix more secure locks on their cars, to introduce burglar alarms and also to invent a device that immobilises a car when someone has broken into it. I have had two meetings with

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the manufacturers, the second much more positive than the first. I can assure the House that I want progress on these matters.

I have also spoken to the insurance industry. Within the past month its members have made significant changes to their policies in respect of theft from and of cars. Owners will bear a share of the loss. Those fitting certain protective devices will get a reduced premium. The premium for cars that are the favourite targets of young thieves will be much higher.

I want to say a word about our support for the victims of crime. We have given them a great deal of support and an entitlement to that support. There are now 360 voluntary local schemes providing help and support to the victims of crime. In 1986, only £136,000 was being spent on this programme. That has risen this year to £5·4 million, and next year it will increase to £7·3 million. We have also published a victims' charter which sets out in detail the advice and support available to victims.

Mr. Martlew: In March this year I wrote to the Home Secretary on behalf of the Cumbria police authority asking him to ban the sale of skeleton keys, which are a major problem in the north-west. They are used in crime and can be bought for as little as £50. A Home Office Minister replied that he did not intend to take any action against the free sale of such keys. Surely the right hon. Gentleman should be doing something practical instead of waffling on like this.

Mr. Baker: Following the hon. Gentleman's representation I discussed it with the Association of Chief Police Officers, whose members said that in their experience skeleton keys were hardly ever used in crime—but that other devices were. They did not say that I should take this action.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West) *rose*——

Mr. Baker: I have given way a great deal and I must pursue my arguments now.

Since the House last debated the Queen's Speech, Lord Justice Woolf has produced his report on the riot at Strangeways. In a White Paper I announced the acceptance of virtually everything in that report. We have introduced the largest measure of reform of our prisons this century. Many of the improvements are already in hand.

The House will know that I announced that slopping out, which is a degrading practice, should be eliminated by December 1994. This was faster than Lord Justice Woolf recommended. Already the building and plumbing programmes for that are well in hand.

Many other changes are also being introduced. They include the number of extra visits that prisoners have from their families. I know that that concerns many hon. Members. Pay telephones are being provided throughout the prison system. The training of prisoners is being improved. Education opportunities have been improved and increased so that prisoners have a chance of learning a skill which will encourage them to lead non-criminal lives when they are released.

Since 1987, the number of prison officers has increased by some 4,700, an increase of 27 per cent., at a time when the prison population has fallen by about 3,000. I am glad to tell the House that next year we will increase the number of prison officers by a further 1,600. To staff the new prisons which are coming on stream, we are recruiting and training prison officers at the unprecedented rate of 2,500 a year.

I am also glad to tell the House that tomorrow we shall be awarding a contract for the private management of the new Wolds prison in Yorkshire.

The House will also know that in the Queen's Speech we announced that there would be a Bill creating the new offence of prison mutiny, which will carry with it a maximum sentence of 10 years. We will also increase the penalties for aiding and abetting escapes to a maximum sentence of 10 years.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Can the Minister explain why, 18 months after the Strangeways riot, 760 prisoners are still being held in police cells in the Greater Manchester and surrounding areas? Is it not time that these people were held in proper prisons instead of these degrading circumstances?

Mr. Baker: The hon. Gentleman has come in right on cue, because I want to deal with that matter now, as the House would expect me to in a debate of this kind.

We are about a third of the way through the biggest ever prison building programme, which is going to increase the number of cells over the next two or three years by several thousand.

Unfortunately, at the moment—I agree with the hon. Gentleman about this—we have far too many prisoners in police cells—about 1,800 a day. This is fairly close to the maximum that the police can deal with. It should not be the duty of police officers to look after prisoners in police cells.

The reason for this is the unprecedented surge in the prison population over the last few months. There are 3,000 more convicted and remand prisoners than the experts predicted. This has occurred at a time when some prison accommodation is out of use as a result of the Strangeways riots, and it bears particularly heavily on the Greater Manchester force. Over the course of the next few months many more places are becoming available.

The present problem is exacerbated by a number of industrial disputes in our prisons. I am glad to say that disputes at Pentonville and Wakefield have been satisfactorily settled. Threatened industrial action at Birmingham and Brixton has been suspended. We are doing everything we can to resolve the disputes at the other prisons. I do urge the Prison Officers Association to take to heart the recommendations of Lord Justice Woolf about industrial action. The population of a prison should not be determined by the Prison Officers Association.

To assist with the pressure before Christmas, I have decided that the new young offenders establishment at Brinsford, which is just north of Birmingham, should be brought on stream early. That will allow us to stop using the prison at Brockhill for young offenders and instead keep it open on a temporary basis to hold adult prisoners.

If the prison population continues to rise, we will have to consider calling upon the assistance of military personnel on a temporary basis. I do not judge it necessary just at this moment to do so, but this is a subject which I will hold constantly under review.

The Asylum Bill is one of the most important in the Queen's Speech. Many people are now leaving their own

countries, and claiming to be political refugees. We have a proud centuries-old tradition in our country of welcoming those who have a genuine and well founded fear of persecution. We will continue to provide refuge for such people, but we cannot accept the abuse of this tradition.

The purpose of our Bill is to distinguish quickly, fairly and openly between the genuine applicant and the bogus applicant. Genuine applicants will be allowed to stay, and indeed will have the right for their families to be reunited with them. Bogus applicants should be returned to the country from which they came.

The Opposition motion calls for rights. The Labour party will therefore welcome our Bill, which creates two new rights: a right for all applicants to appear before a tribunal, which some applicants do not have today, and a further right of appeal to a court of appeal, which also does not exist today. It is recognised across the whole of Europe that action on these lines has to be taken. Every country in Europe is taking similar action.

I was therefore astonished when, at the Labour party conference, the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook stridently promised to oppose this Bill. I will remind the House of his words. He said of this Bill:

"I make this absolute promise. We shall fight that shameful proposal in Parliament with the ferocity that comes from deep and abiding contempt that it could ever have been considered and put before us."

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): I am fully behind my right hon. Friend, but did I understand him to say that everyone will have a right to go before a hearing? On 2 July he said in the House:

"The Bill will provide for accelerated handling of clearly unfounded cases. An adjudicator will be able to dismiss an appeal without an oral hearing upon deciding that there is manifestly no substance to the claim."—[*Official Report*, 2 July 1991; Vol. 194, c. 167.]

Is that still true?

Mr. Baker: As I said in last week's press release and as the immigration rules and the rules issued by the Lord Chancellor stipulate—I hope that we will have an opportunity to debate these matters soon—the Bill will attempt to shorten the determination process to three months. The decision by immigration officials of the Home Office will take a month, and there will be eight weeks after that for the appeal process. Some manifestly unfounded cases may not go to appeal. It is up to the adjudicator to decide that.

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): A moment ago, the Home Secretary said that every applicant for asylum would have the right of appeal to a tribunal. I see the Under-Secretary nodding at that. The right hon. Gentleman made a statement in the House about a fast track procedure under which some applicants would be sifted out immediately and would not have the right of appeal—at least not the right of audience in an appeal or representation in an appeal. The adjudicator would deal with the papers there and then. If that is the case, the Home Secretary's statement of a few moments ago is wrong.

Mr. Baker: It is not the case. I ask the right hon. Gentleman to study the papers that I issued on Friday. Every refugee applicant will have the right to go to the adjudicator, who will decide.

Mr. Hattersley: A moment ago, the Home Secretary said that every applicant for asylum would have the right to go to an appeal tribunal, and his hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) rightly picked him up on the point. If that were the case, the Bill would be very different from the one that is being presented. The hon. Member for Lancaster rightly said that what the Home Secretary called the fast-track applicant will go not to a tribunal but to an adjudicator with no new evidence.

Mr. Baker: Even today, some claims are manifestly unfounded. Some applicants arrive from Canada claiming refugee status. There are a few each month. Every refugee applicant will have the right to appeal to the adjudicator. That was set out in our papers last week. Opinion polls over the weekend showed 80 per cent. support for the Bill. The right hon. Gentleman's determination to oppose the Bill shows an abiding contempt for the feelings of ordinary voters, including no doubt many in his constituency.

It is not for me to offer helpful advice to the right hon. Gentleman, but I shall do so: when in a hole, one should stop digging. Only a week ago, the right hon. Gentleman appeared on BBC Radio's "The World this Weekend" and dug with the vigour of a navvy. First, he pooh-poohed the idea that the number of those claiming asylum was continuing to rise. He said:

"I only admit there will be some few—not very many—but a few, who will apply bogusly."

If the right hon. Gentleman believes that, he is in the most solitary position in Europe. His attitude betrays staggering complacency.

I shall give him the figures of refugee applicants for the past three months. In August, there were 3,300; in September, there were 3,500; and in October, there were 4,400. The problem is not getting smaller; it is growing. If the right hon. Gentleman were responsible for the matter, we are assured that today he would be doing exactly nothing about it. His hallmark on this issue is complacency and indolence. He needs to stir himself.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): My right hon. Friend says that we are to continue our tradition of offering a haven to refugees. It is important for him to define a refugee. During the recent troubles in India, many of the people who came to this country and who said that they were refugees from oppression by the Indian Government were proposing various forms of armed or violent protest against that Government. Are they to be defined as refugees? That was a real issue during the troubles in the Punjab and had a real effect on Wolverhampton.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. In accordance with practice, the Home Secretary is required to reply before giving way again.

Mr. Baker: The definition of refugee is laid down in the United Nations convention. I do not think that it is possible to change that definition. A refugee is defined as someone who suffers from a well founded fear of persecution, and the process has to determine whether such a fear is well-founded. That determination process is carried out by the Home Office and the adjudication tribunal.

Mr. Dicks: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the aim of the Bill is to protect the rights of the British people and make those rights more important than the so-called rights of bogus refugees?

Mr. Baker: The purpose of the Bill is to distinguish between the bogus and the genuine refugee applicant.

The problem affects the whole of western Europe. I was at a conference in Berlin on Wednesday that was attended by ministers of the interior for the Twelve and for the countries of eastern Europe. Several parts of Russia and the new countries of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia were also represented. They were all very alarmed by the prospect of substantial movements of people. This year Germany expects to receive applications amounting not to 50,000, which is the rate approached by the United Kingdom, but 250,000 non-German speaking refugees. The Germans say that they cannot absorb that number, and country after country is saying the same. Hon. Members will be aware of the unpleasant aspects in political debates in some countries in Europe. I am taking action which I am sure is responsible and necessary.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): Will the Home Secretary confirm that his adviser on race matters, the Commission For Racial Equality, have made representations to the Government that their proposal to withdraw legal aid from applicants would leave the Government in breach of the provisions of the Race Relations Act 1976? In order to override that, they intend to introduce a statutory instrument.

Mr. Baker: I do not accept that interpretation. As I made clear in July and as the Lord Chancellor made clear, the provision of green form legal aid will be withdrawn when other services are available, but not until then. The House will appreciate that the Government provide funds for green form legal aid and for the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service, a body which represents refugee applicants at the initial process of determination and at the tribunal hearing.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. Baker: I shall do so for the last time.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the right hon. Gentleman take this opportunity to condemn the campaign that is being mounted in some sections of the popular press? That campaign is racist in intent and is against the interests of people who are seeking asylum from situations of great danger. The Home Secretary is promoting his Bill by saying that people who are fleeing from political or social oppression do not deserve to come here and do not deserve political asylum. Because of his fast-track methods, such people may well be returned to face even greater danger to themselves and their families in the countries from which they have come. The proposed legislation undermines the principles of the 1951 Geneva convention.

Mr. Baker: That is absolute rubbish and I expect the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook to condemn it as such. That is not the purpose of the legislation. I am not prepared to condemn the various newspapers which have written about this subject in a responsible way. There is genuine concern about this problem. The Opposition pooh-pooh the matter and the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook says that it is not really a problem and that the numbers are going down. He would do nothing about the problem, and that is why he is unsuited to hold the office of Home Secretary.

I have tried to show the real gap between Labour and the Conservative party and Government on matters of law and order. The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook is happy to describe himself as a socialist on many occasions, although the advice from Mr. Mandelson is to drop the word. Only last weekend, the right hon. Gentleman said:

> "For socialists, constitutional reform is not an end in itself. It was one of the ways by which a more equal society can be created."

It is clear to the right hon. Gentleman that for him the banner of rights and freedoms that he would wave represents a very different set of outcomes from those in which Conservatives believe. For the Opposition, the subjects of this debate are strictly for the realm of rhetoric. The rhetoric of socialism claims to enhance rights, but the practice of socialism invariably extinguishes and restricts peoples' rights. The rhetoric of socialism talks of freedom, but the practice of socialism involves the restriction of personal freedom.

People will not give up lightly what they have gained under this Government, and they will not easily embrace a creed that has been rejected by so many nations in recent years. I am glad that at the next election the choice will be between conservatism and socialism. Nowhere will the difference be more marked than in the attitudes towards law and order.

The Labour Government neglected and cut resources for law and order, and the right hon. Gentleman sat at the table agreeing to those cuts. We have shown our commitment to law and order as a major issue. It is what concerns most people. I have to tell the right hon. Gentleman that indolence, sloth and complacency are not enough.

5.29 pm

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): There is only one thing to say about the Home Secretary's speech: I have heard more intellectual contributions from Lord Waddington on the subject, and I never believed that I would make that statement about anyone holding the office of Home Secretary.

Let us return to a serious discussion of the subject before us. Inevitably, two aspects of the Gracious Speech have focused special attention on the Home Office. They are the inclusion of the Asylum Bill and the absence of any commitment to action against what we still—inappropriately—refer to, as the Home Secretary did today, as joyriding.

The absence of the joyriding Bill, to use the misnomer adopted by the Home Secretary, is not the only surprising omission. The legislative programme should have included a criminal justice Bill to prohibit conviction on confession evidence alone, to bring some consistency into a chaotic sentencing policy and to give statutory rights to the victims of crime. The programme should also have included a Bill to deal with the crisis in our prisons, by implementing at least part of Lord Justice Woolf's report. Above all, the Gracious Speech should have included a crime prevention Bill.

Today, we debate a legislative programme that could have been proposed only by a Government who have no purpose other than hanging on to office for a few more

months. Extraordinarily, the Queen's Speech does not even include the usual platitudes, promising, in the words of last year's speech; that the Government would

"vigorously pursue their policies in fighting crime."

This is the first Queen's Speech for 20 years not to make such a general promise. I can only assume that the words were left out because an assurance "vigorously" to continue "fighting crime" would have raised only a horse laugh when offered by a Government with a record of this Government on this subject. They preside over the fastest increasing crime rate in our history.

At the beginning of his speech, the Home Secretary went to some lengths to compare what life on this subject was like under a Labour Government in 1979 with what it is like under a Conservative Government now. He failed to make only one comparison—that on crime rates. That is hardly surprising, as the crime rate has doubled in the 12 years since the Conservative party was elected on a promise of law and order.

The Home Secretary excused the appalling record on law and order by saying that, for every year since the war, the crime rate has increased by 6 per cent. on average. So it has, but last year the crime rate increased by 18 per cent. —three times the average—and the Home Secretary had nothing to say about that, and not a single mention of that subject appears in the Queen's Speech.

Mr. Tredinnick: Is it not a fact that, under the Labour administration, police pay was on a disastrous slide and policemen were leaving the force in record numbers? How does the right hon. Gentleman reconcile that with what he is saying?

Mr. Hattersley: I can make three points. First, it is not true that police officers were leaving the force in record numbers. Secondly, the report on police pay which led to police being properly paid and allowed public forces to expand was initiated by my right hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) and me during that Labour Administration. Thirdly, we did not need as many police officers when the crime rate was 50 per cent. of what it is today. The Home Secretary will not focus on the fact that, after 12 years of Tory administration, the crime rate has risen and there is not a word in the Queen's Speech about how the Government propose to deal with that.

There is the repeated, and inevitably broken, promise to regenerate the inner cities, but the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary have been explicit in rejecting the connection between crime and deprivation, so that is nothing to do with contributing to more peaceful streets and safer homes. The Government, who have failed to combat crime, have, judging by the Queen's Speech, given up the battle altogether.

The Home Secretary has at his disposal the framework —*[Interruption.]* Perhaps I should have a brief pause in the hope that the Home Secretary will begin to listen to the debate. The Home Secretary will have at his disposal the framework of a crime prevention Bill—the Morgan report, prepared by a working party in his Department, which sets out a series of practical measures which, were they implemented, would reduce crime. They include better street lighting, more secure pensioner flats and bungalows, the demolition of derelict property and a social programme aimed specifically at unemployed and disadvantaged young people—a programme which the Home Secretary despises, but which everybody else regards as central to the fight against crime.

The Morgan report echoes and repeats the essential elements of the crime prevention programme set out by the Labour party two years ago, including proposals that local authorities should be given specific responsibility for crime prevention. The proposal that the Home Secretary chose to scoff at is a proposal from his Department. Furthermore, it has already been adopted by the progressive and most successful local authorities.

The Home Secretary always represents Labour local authorities as failing in their duties on crime prevention. I say "always", but it is not quite always. On 30 October, the Home Secretary issued a circular boasting about the success of the safer cities project and he listed four local authorities that he thought were particularly to be commended for their action in this sector. He mentioned four schemes that he thought were a paradigm that other local authorities should copy. They are a reduction on domestic burglary on a housing estate in Wolverhampton —Labour; a reduction in crime in car parks in Nottingham—Labour; the introduction of a new security system in central Birmingham—Labour; and the improvement in home security in pensioners' housing schemes in Lewisham—Labour

Every one of the examples of a good crime prevention policy was from Labour local authorities, but today, in a trivial way, he scoffs at them. He must understand that the legislation that we want to involve local authorities in crime prevention is intended to bring the laggard Tory authorities up to the level of the Labour authorities about which, on other occasions, the Home Secretary boasts.

These proposals should have been backed up by a real increase in resources and in police manpower. I repeat what the Home Secretary ignores but cannot deny—there is not a chief constable in England or Wales who believes that his resources are sufficient for the task that he is required to perform. There has been an increase in numbers over the past 10 years, but the obligations on the police have grown far faster than the resources.

Let me remind the House of some of the new tasks imposed on the police. For example, there is the operation of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, highly desirable, but highly complicated. They have also to enforce the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, the Road Traffic Act 1991, the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988 and the Football (Offences) Act 1991. There is also the supervision of remand prisoners in police cells, neighbourhood watch, the arrest of visitors who overstay their visa date and the massive increase in crime itself. All this has imposed an enormous extra burden on the police, and the increases in manpower have done nothing to match these new tasks.

Because of those new tasks—I quoted only a few of them—police forces are more overstretched than at any time this century. Let me tell the Home Secretary what the chief constable of Cleveland told me last Wednesday. He estimated that over the past two years, his resources had increased by 3 per cent., but his obligations had grown by 30 per cent. He also said that it was no good the Home Secretary announcing a higher establishment; higher establishment levels were of no use or interest to him, because his authority did not have the money to employ the additional policemen.

I offer an even more startling example from Derbyshire, an authority which Conservative Members enjoy deriding.

[Mr. Hattersley]

The police authority in Derbyshire has recently been the subject of what is clearly an adverse report from Her Majesty's inspector of police. I do not know how many Conservative Members who study these matters know what the inspector said. In paragraph 2.35 of his report he stated that not enough money was spent on the police in Derbyshire because the authority

"has chosen to spend precisely the amount determined by the standard spending assessment for the police."

The complaint against Derbyshire is that the money spent on the police was what the Government required the authority to spend.

In paragraph 8.10, the inspector stated that plans to recruit extra officers in Derbyshire were abandoned

"as a result of community charge capping."

It is the Government's funding programme which must, and does, bear the brunt of the blame for inadequate policing. The Government go into their dying months without any proposals to match resources to obligations and, therefore, to mount a real assault on crime.

Nor do the Government, as the Home Secretary made clear, pathetically, have any proposals for constitutional reform. The debate on the role of Parliament, the method of voting and the power of the Executive has passed the Tory party by. In every other party, there are healthy debates on these matters. There are healthy discussions between all the other parties.

The sole Conservative contribution to the discussion on the constitution and its necessary reform has been a press conference. It was called in August with the specific purpose of announcing that the party had nothing to propose on the subject and nothing to say about it. It seems that our matchless constitution is incapable of improvement. That has been the policy of the Tory party from Wellington to Major. Even so, constitutional change will come, leaving Conservatives as outdated on the government of Britain as they are on Britain's role in Europe.

The next Queen's Speech will announce a legislative programme that will include devolved government for Scotland—a Scottish Parliament. It will include also a freedom of information Bill, but that will be only the beginning.

Mr. Keith Raffan (Delyn): The right hon. Gentleman has told the House that a Labour Government would introduce a devolution Bill for Scotland, but what about Wales? Why has Wales been left out? Will he tell us when a Bill for Wales would be introduced if the Labour party were returned to power?

Mr. Hattersley: If I had not given way to the hon. Gentleman, I could have given the waiting Principality the information that he seeks 10 seconds earlier. I said that devolved government for Scotland and a freedom of information Bill would be only the beginning. Comprehensive constitutional reform is essential to the re-establishment of genuine democracy, and that must include devolved government for Wales and the English regions.

In the summer, the chairman of the Tory party——

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hattersley: No, not at the moment.

Mr. Kilfedder: What about devolution for Northern Ireland?

Mr. Hattersley: The hon. Gentleman has got it, but does not want it.

In the summer, the chairman of the Conservative party, in a moment when he euphorically believed that there would be a November election, said that the policy of his party was to trust the people. The Labour party is prepared to trust the people so much that it proposes constitutional reform that will protect them from autocratic and insensitive central Government.

Of the Bills that the Government are prepared to risk, we shall support the Charities Bill. The Home Secretary did not, I think, mention that measure during his introduction of what is a slim programme by any standards, and we might have expected him to mention every item within it. We support the Charities Bill. We believe that it is important to reinforce the public's trust in registered charities. The Woodfield report made it clear that to achieve and justify their trust it is necessary to make substantial changes to charity law, and we certainly intend to co-operate in bringing about those changes.

As well as the Charities Bill, the Government have found time for what I suppose could be described as two major Bills. The first measure concerns the new offence of prison mutiny. It is a promise to the Tory party conference that the Home Secretary did not subsequently forget. The Conservative party has been over the ground of prison mutiny before. A White Paper—Cmnd 9920, which was published in 1986—examined the case for creating such an offence and rejected it. The Home Secretary of the day told the House that there was no case for such legislation. If I ask what has happened since then to change the Government's mind, I have no doubt that the Home Secretary will reply, "Strangeways."

Let us consider the relevance of the proposed Bill to Strangeways. At the time of the riot I supported—I still do, against the background of a good deal of criticism from both sides of the House—the sensible and moderate action that was taken by the Government. I should have known that sooner or later a Conservative Home Secretary would want to make an obeisance to bone-headed opinion in the Conservative party.

Let us recall what happened when the riot took place at Strangeways. Desperate men were on the roof trying to set the prison on fire. The Home Secretary told us that some of them were made even more irrational by a gross misuse of drugs. The ringleaders were serving life sentences for murder. The Home Secretary told us that some had attempted to murder other prisoners. Only those attending a Tory party conference could imagine that such men would look at one another round the chimneys on the top of Strangeways and say, "Hang on a minute, we've forgotten the prison mutiny Bill. We had better go straight down and surrender to the prison governor."

It is clear that Lord Justice Woolf could not imagine such a fantastic situation. At the Home Secretary's invitation, Lord Justice Woolf examined the prison system and the prison service, but did not propose the introduction of a new offence of prison mutiny. Instead, he proposed a programme of practical reforms. These included reforms to tackle overcrowding, to ensure the speedy resolution of grievances and to establish the efficient management of the service.

We welcome the end of slopping out and the increase in visiting, and support and congratulate the Home Secretary on those grounds, but the right hon. Gentleman's response to most of Lord Justice Woolf's recommendations was a series of half-promises and commitments to take action at some future unspecified date. One essential recommendation—a precise statement of every prisoner's obligations and rights—is to be tested in a pilot scheme, which will not even begin until 1992-93. Another major recommendation—a firm limitation on prison numbers and a duty on the Home Secretary to report to Parliament when the total has been exceeded—was ignored. We must therefore presume that it was rejected.

The prison system is in chaos. It is caught in a vicious circle. Judge Tumin said that Brixton was unsafe because it was overcrowded, and that the overcrowding must be ended at once. That was his recommendation. Overcrowding itself, however, has prevented the recommendation from being implemented. Brixton prisoners were supposed to be removed to Belmarsh, but the number of remand prisoners in police cells has meant that transfers have had to be postponed.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mrs. Angela Rumbold) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Hattersley: I see that the Minister of State is shaking her head. If she reads the ministerial reply to the debate on London policing that took place a week last Monday, she will find that the Under-Secretary of State told me—this is in *Hansard*—that the Belmarsh transfer had been postponed because of overcrowding in London police cells.

Despite that background, the Home Secretary makes no attempt to solve the crisis. Instead, he attempts to deflect attention from his failure by provoking confrontation with prison officers and introducing the generally pointless prison mutiny Bill. The Bill will do no harm to anything or anybody except the right hon. Gentleman's reputation. We shall therefore see it through, with whatever improvements and amendments we are able to introduce against the barrage of unthinking support that I expect for the Home Secretary.

The House will recall that the Brixton fiasco was blamed by the Home Secretary on junior civil servants, none of whom, it seems, are to be the subject of disciplinary action. I was one of the few participants in the prison debate who did not call for the right hon. Gentleman's resignation. I was chivvied and chased from programme to programme by journalists of every sort, who thought that I was negligent in my duty in not demanding that he should go. I have no doubt that the House will hear some of my hon. Friends echoing the opinion that it was a failure on my part not to demand his resignation. Not only were everybody in the media and most people in politics demanding his resignation; even the hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) was critical—and when he is critical, the Government must be in a terminal state.

I said—and I repeat today—that the Home Secretary's failures should result not in his resignation, but in his staying in office for the few remaining dying months of the Government to clear up the mess that he had made. Even today, I do not altogether give up hope of his beginning that task. He knows that it requires a great deal more to put the prisons right than a prison mutiny Bill. That Bill will be written off by history as just another one of the placebos intended to see a beleaguered Home Secretary through his party conference. It will join the short sharp shock and the electronic tag in the graveyard of gimmicks that mark the last resting place of failed Ministers.

The prison mutiny Bill has not yet been presented to Parliament, yet it was announced in the Gracious Speech—and quite right, too. Why, then, was the measure designed to deal with joyriding not included in the Gracious Speech, whether or not it was ready for presentation? Its omission has been explained in two conflicting ways. Some Ministers said that it was regarded as appropriate for private Members' legislation; others said that the Government would introduce the Bill when it was ready. Both excuses are patent nonsense, although at least on this occasion we were spared the Home Secretary blaming the mistake on junior officials in his Department. The truth must be that the Government had no intention of proceeding with the Bill until the public outcry on the day of the Gracious Speech.

I want to make the Opposition's position absolutely clear. Three years ago, the Government decided that car theft should be dealt with summarily in magistrates courts and be subject to a maximum sentence of six months. The Opposition supported that proposal, and we still do. Were we to revert to previous law, the courts and the prisons would be swamped. More important, a large number of young men who should not be sent to prison would receive custodial sentences. However, that being said, there is no doubt that the change in the law—which I repeat we supported, and for which we take as much responsibility as the Government—has resulted in a severe problem. It is a severe problem for the police, for car owners, and especially for residents in areas where cars, once stolen, are driven recklessly and dangerously.

I can best illustrate the problem for the police by again repeating what I was told last week by the chief constable of Cleveland. He said that, because of the Attorney-General's guidelines and the attitude of the Crown prosecution service, it was often difficult even to get a car thief to prison. In Cleveland, such offenders can be cautioned as many as seven times before being charged. Attempts are now being made to identify young men—some of them might more properly be described as children—who are likely to become constant offenders. Initial attempts are being made to divert them from their activities.

The Home Office has led the way in one sense. Its Standing Committee on Crime Prevention reported on the examination of 4,500 young men guilty of car theft who were required to undertake a special training scheme. Of the 4,500 so required, only 100 offended a second time. That is an essential first step—diverting the first offender from reckless irresponsibility and dangerous practice. We want the Government to promote many more such schemes, backing them with an obligation under the law.

I have no doubt that, for those who continue to offend, prison must be the final sanction. If the Government were to introduce a Bill which first backed the non-custodial sentences, but stipulated prison as the punishment for constant or aggravated offences, the Opposition would support it. I look forward to having a more constructive and concise explanation, in the near future, of what the Government really intend in that area.

I come now to the Asylum Bill, and I wish to make it clear immediately that, if the Bill's purpose was what the

[Mr. Hattersley]

Home Secretary unctuously pretended, and what the Gracious Speech suggested, no one would oppose it. No one wants or would be prepared to support the entry of bogus asylum seekers, and the fraudulent applicant must be rejected. However, the genuine applicant fleeing from persecution must be given sanctuary. That is our obligation under the 1951 United Nations charter, but if the Bill becomes law in its present form we will no longer adequately fulfil that duty.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): *rose—*

Mr. Hattersley: I must get a little futher on with my speech, but I shall bear the hon. Gentleman in mind.

Mr. Nicholson *rose——*

Mr. Hattersley: The hon. Gentleman need not get excited, as I will not forget him.

Some of the proposal's supporters will be interested to learn what the Gracious Speech actually says about the Asylum Bill. Apparently, the intention is no more than to enable applicants for asylum to be dealt with quickly and effectively. That is the version to be submitted to the European Court of Justice and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. If that is the Bill's only purpose, why does the Home Secretary attempt to make the country's flesh creep with stories about 7 million Russians moving west? That is what the right hon. Gentleman told the Tory party conference. Even here, addressing a far less gullible audience, he came close to warning us that 7 million Russians were moving out of the Soviet Union towards the democracies of the west.

The right hon. Gentleman may like to know that this year 117 Russians have applied for asylum in the United Kingdom and he may want to tell us—and I shall give way immediately if he were to be gracious enough to grant me the audience that I seek—*[Interruption.]* I shall go throught the whole passage again for the Home Secretary's benefit. It is well worth repeating. Speaking to the Tory party conference——

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Fulham (Mr. Carrington) is constantly interfering with Ministers.

Madam Deputy Speaker: It is hardly for me to interfere with Parliamentary Private Secretaries.

Mr. Hattersley: I do not want to take issue with my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton), but I am grateful for the activities of the PPS. It was clear from the Home Secretary's speech that he did not understand the provisions of the Asylum Bill, so anyone who can impart that information to him as the debate proceeds is to be welcomed.

The Tory party was told by the Home Secretary that 7 million Russians were preparing to move west. Last year, 117 applied for asylum in the United Kingdom. Which figure does the Home Secretary think is the most realistic estimate of what will happen next year—117 or 7 million? The Home Secretary sits there, knowing that he conjured these figures out of the air with the aim of worrying people about a potential problem that is the grossest exaggeration of the position that this country faces.

Mr. David Nicholson *rose——*

Mr. Hattersley: I want to avoid the hon. Gentleman having a heart attack, so I shall give way to him.

Mr. Nicholson: I assure the right hon. Gentleman that I am in the best of health. A week before my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary addressed the Conservative party conference, the right hon. Gentleman said that the Conservative party would try to

"revive its flagging fortunes with a squalid appeal to racism."

How does the right hon. Gentleman justify that appalling remark? Was he referring to the Asylum Bill, which is supported by 80 per cent. of the electorate? Is he therefore attacking that 80 per cent? In view of his remarks about my right hon. Friend resigning, should not the right hon. Gentleman resign today?

Mr. Hattersley: Had I not been aware of the facts from my hard experience, I would have known them today when the Home Secretary endorsed the front-page leads that appeared in the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Express* and *The Sun* three weeks ago. I do not believe that anyone who did not have the most squalid attitude to these matters could have done anything other than condemn those three front-page leads. If any further evidence of my assertion is necessary, the Home Secretary provided it today.

Mr. Shersby: Leaving aside whether it is 7 million Russians or 117, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that there is a serious problem facing Britain—a sophisticated racket which is resulting in a substantial number of bogus asylum seekers coming to Britain, running this year probably at the rate of about 1,000 per month? Is not that a problem which needs addressing by both sides of the House?

Mr. Hattersley: Of course it is a problem, but it is a different problem. I have made it clear that I do not wish to see and would not allow in the bogus asylum seekers. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short), not here today but usually assiduous in her attendance at these debates, has been pressing the Government to take legal powers to punish severely the agents of bogus asylum seekers and immigrants. The Government will not do that. I would, because the people who make money out of the misery of such poor people should be prosecuted with the greatest possible severity. I want to tackle the real problem. My complaint, as I propose to go on to show, is that the Home Secretary is not tackling all of the real problem and is trying to frighten the country by overstating it.

Mr. Corbyn: Will my right hon. Friend concede that the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987 and the fines on carriers of people into Britain who are subsequently not admitted have encouraged the growth of unscrupulous agents all round the world, enabling them to make a great deal of money out of the misery and sorrow of some poor and desperate people?

Mr. Hattersley: Clearly, the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act is not working. A number of things are happening. One is that unscrupulous carriers and agents are letting people in despite that Act if such people underwrite the fine that they might be required to pay. That is abominable and should be stopped. Many carriers

are not paying their money to the Government and, as I understand it, the Government are not finding out how much they owe or making them pay.

British Airways is coming to see me tomorrow to complain that, first, it is treated as an immigration official, which it does not want; secondly, it does not believe that it is capable of carrying out the task, making the point, which the Home Secretary does not understand but BA does, that someone escaping from a tyranny is unlikely to have queued in the capital of that tyranny outside the British high commission or embassy in order to get papers; and, thirdly, thanks to the absurd Act which is not working, every legitimate passenger on BA is required to pay more for his ticket in order to enable BA to pay the tax. The Act is a farce and a fiasco, but it is not the main principle to which I take such great exception.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Is the right hon. Gentleman saying that if he had responsibility for these matters he would dispense with that Act?

Mr. Hattersley: I would go for the people organising the trade. Just as I would go for drug traffickers more than I would go for drug addicts, so I would go for immigration traffickers more than I would go for immigrants. The Home Secretary's failure is that he will not go for the root cause; he just goes for the easy answer and the easy policy.

Mr. Baker: Other countries are introducing legislation on exactly similar lines. Some countries already have it and other countries are about to have it. At the conference that I attended last week in Berlin, one of the clear declarations of all the countries that attended was that they should bring in such penalties. The right hon. Gentleman must tell us clearly whether he is in favour of the common carriers' liability remaining or will he take the legislation off the statute book? Yes or no, please.

Mr. Hattersley: The question is not susceptible to being answered yes or no. The Home Secretary knows perfectly well that I have said that we shall improve a measure which is at the moment unjust and ineffective by attacking the people who do the trafficking in illegal immigration. That is how the matter should be dealt with.

I want to deal with the central issue of what the Home Secretary still claims to be his attitude of wanting no more than a fairer and faster system of asylum application adjudication. If that is all he wants, why did he talk in Blackpool of the alternative to his Bill being an open gate policy? He knows that to be untrue. Why did he speak of millions of asylum seekers wanting to come to Britain? He knows that to be absurd. The idea of Poles, Czechs, Hungarians and Romanians flooding into Britain is preposterous. By confusing the problem facing Britain with the problem facing Germany, he is simply pandering to prejudice.

I make it clear that I believe that the Foreign Secretary is right to insist that we apply our own system for the examination of asylum seekers and the control of immigration. We believe that, within the Community, border control must be a national responsibility, and we shall support the Home Secretary in that. Our situation and the situation in Europe are different. *[Interruption.]* I hear the Home Secretary crying, "Good," but it is the Home Secretary who pretends otherwise. While the Foreign Secretary is in the Hague saying that our immigration situation is different from that in Europe and we need to have our own regulations, systems and border controls, the Home Secretary is in England talking about 7 million Russians, Poles, Czechs, Turks, Hungarians and Romanians.

We are firmly on the side that the Home Secretary has rejected. The immigration situation in the United Kingdom is special to us and the distinction must not be blurred by the pretence, in the words of the Under-Secretary of State on Friday, that people will walk across the borders, the normal way of seeking asylum. No one will walk across the borders into the United Kingdom.

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): How does the right hon. Gentleman know?

Mr. Hattersley: How do I know? I simply say that I do not believe that the principles set out in the Gracious Speech—speed and justice—are the Home Secretary's genuine intention.

Mr. Kilfedder: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hattersley: No.

Were speed and justice the Home Secretary's only intention, he would have proceeded quite differently. He proposes to withdraw legal aid, the green form scheme, from asylum seekers, and that proposal is intolerable. It is made no less so by his apparent attempts to bully the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service into taking sole responsibility for the representation of refugees—a responsibility which it has already made it clear it does not want to discharge. A man who fears imprisonment, torture and death should be allowed and is entitled to the lawyer of his choice.

Similarly, the proposed changes in the appeal system are equally intolerable. Let me now explain to the Home Secretary what they are. We want to see applications processed more quickly, but the fast track system is a simple denial of justice. Applicants refused under the fast track procedure have, in effect, no real appeal at all. They are rejected by an official. They are allowed what is misnamed an "appeal" to an adjudicator, but there is no personal appearance, representation or new evidence; there is just a re-reading of the original papers, and that is a mockery of justice.

The Home Secretary claims that any other system, a judicially respectable system, would take an unacceptable amount of time. But the general council of the Bar has offered discussions in the belief that a speedy and just appeal system can be devised. Why does not the Home Secretary even now take advantage of that offer?

Last Friday, discussing the matter, as reported in *The Times*, the Under-Secretary of State made what I can only describe as a shameful admission. He said that the new scheme would exclude some genuine asylum seekers.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Peter Lloyd) *rose*——

Mr. Hattersley: I should be happy to hear the hon. Gentleman refute that.

Mr. Lloyd: That was not a point that I made at the press conference. I did not say that the measures in the Bill might lead to genuine refugees being sent home or not being able to get here. That was a misrepresentation in the report.

Mr. Hattersley: If the Under-Secretary of State gives me that assurance, I am pleased to hear it. Since it was in *The Times*, the paper of record, I hope that we shall see a letter from him in that paper tomorrow or the day after making it clear that its distinguished correspondent, Mr. Philip Webster, got him diametrically wrong. I am delighted to hear what the Under-Secretary says and astonished that Mr. Webster, for whom I have such regard, could have made such an error.

If all that the Home Secretary wants is speed and justice, why above all else does he propose to penalise asylum seekers who demonstrate in Britain against the Government who persecute them? I will gladly give way to the right hon. Gentleman while he answers me this question. Does he really mean that if Kurds in Britain, refugees from Saddam Hussein, march to their embassy to protest against Saddam Hussein's enormities, their chance of asylum will be reduced? Whether or not that is what the Bill says, does the Home Secretary really mean that to happen? The right hon. Gentleman remains in his place, and he will understand why we reacted to his attitude with what I rightly described as contempt.

If the Bill passes into law, as we must assume that it will, despite our opposition, we will introduce a proper appeals system and restore the right to legal aid. That will ensure that the genuine asylum seeker is not turned away, and will restore the reputation that Britain has enjoyed for 500 years as a country that accepts refugees as a moral duty, in the understanding that we benefit from the acceptance of those refugees' citizenship.

The Home Secretary and the tabloid newspapers that he avidly supports choose to confuse asylum with immigration. They are distinct issues. No one I know wants the open-door policy on immigration about which the Government whisper. Primary immigration into Great Britain is over for ever, but I believe that the country wants a more compassionate attitude shown towards those immigrants who want particularly to join their families in this country. They are a small group, but we act against them in a way that prejudices the lives and happiness of British citizens.

I believe that the country would support the reunion of husbands and wives, and I cite a case as evidence of the Government's callous disregard for some British families. I draw the Home Secretary's attention to it again, having already done so in correspondence.

The man in question is a British citizen whose wife has for some years lived abroad. He now suffers from a disabling and possibly terminal disease, and is almost blind with cataracts. His solicitor suggested in the application for his client's wife to join him that by her coming to this country, a net saving in public funds would be achieved—because although the wife would qualify for benefit, the husband would require less expensive hospital care.

The husband's application was refused, and on appeal the adjudicator stated that he believed that allowing the man's wife into the country would produce a saving in public funds, but since to do so would result in an extra charge on one area of public funds, the law did not allow the application to proceed. However, the adjudicator recommended that the Home Secretary use his discretion and, out of compassion for the man and common sense in respect of public funds, allow the applicant's wife to enter this country. The Home Secretary refused to use his discretion in that way. I do not believe that there is a family in the country who would regard the Home Secretary's decision in that case as anything but wrong.

Mr. Dicks: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hattersley: Certainly not. On no account.

Mr. Dicks: Is the right hon. Gentleman scared to do so?

Mr. Hattersley: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. I am terrified out of my wits of what he might say.

The Home Secretary's decision lacked not only compassion but common sense. It could only be based on the principle that people should be kept out at all costs. How can the right hon. Gentleman justify such a decision? How can he justify many of the absurdities and enormities that flow from the existing regulations? I am not sure that the country or even the Home Secretary is aware of them. Does the Home Secretary appreciate how farcical they have become?

A British citizen living in Britain does not have an automatic right to be joined in this country by his wife, but a German, French, Belgian or Dutch citizen living in Britain does. A British citizen living in France, Belgium, or Germany has an automatic right to be joined by his wife. That is because we are required by the Community to act with common sense and decency towards its citizens, in the way that it acts towards its own citizens—but we are not required to act with common sense and decency towards our own citizens. In immigration matters, our own citizens are in an inferior position to those of the rest of the Community. It is no use the Home Secretary looking bewildered again, because all that is true. The fact that he does not know it is indicative of the right hon. Gentleman's entire attitude to the job that he does.

Let me astound the Home Secretary again. I tell Irish people living in my constituency not to take British nationality, for by doing so, they will sacrifice rights that they currently enjoy, because EC nationals in Britain have more rights than British citizens. That is palpable nonsense. The new Government must end the absurdities that cause so much pain and hardship—changes that will result in a small increase in immigration but an enormous increase in human happiness.

The absurdities that I described confront British citizens. It is our intention, by our charter of rights, to guarantee equal treatment to British citizens of every race and colour. The charter will outlaw discrimination on the grounds of race or gender, and will reflect the simple truth that the establishment of rights must be reinforced by the creation of real opportunities. It is no use telling a low-income mother that every job is available to her and leaving it at that. She can take only a job that offers flexible hours, and only if nursery facilities are available for her children while she is at work.

It is the understanding that, for millions of British men and women, freedom will not become a reality unless there are greater resources that teaches us that equality and liberty go hand in hand. Those are the twin aims of the Labour party, and they will be the twin aims of the Government who introduce the next Queen's Speech.

6.16 pm

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): It must be admitted by all fair-minded persons that the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) is a very good

performer. He usually puts on a good show, but as most of us who study these subjects know, it is mostly show. It is not very impressive stuff to those of us who follow it closely—and if public opinion polls are anything to go by, the British people are not very impressed by Labour's law and order programme.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook made a strident attack on the Government's prison programme, but he hopes that everyone has forgotten that a Labour Government, with him as a member of the Cabinet, slashed the prison building programme, and did nothing to stop slopping out and other stinking aspects of the prison regime. The right hon. Gentleman was also scathing about the present crime figures, but hopes that everyone has forgotten that Labour backed the miners against the police during the miners' strike, thoroughly demoralised the police, and insulted the judges. Labour's incompetence in handling law and order matters was one of the prime reasons why the last Labour Government fell.

The right hon. Gentleman totally ignores also a factor that any reasonable observer would concede. Given that there are now 16,000 more police officers and effectively 26,000 more on the beat, of course more offences will be detected. Given also that such a high proportion of the population have telephones, that the police are more caring in dealing with offences against women, that greater consideration is shown by the courts, and that women are encouraged to report domestic or other types of assault, of course crime figures will increase. Given that an individual cannot claim insurance unless he can prove to his insurance company that he reported the matter to the police, of course crime figures will rise. So was the right hon. Gentleman telling us the whole truth, or was he putting on an act? If public opinion polls on Labour's law and order policies are anything to go by, the country certainly knows the answer to that question.

The right hon. Member jested about the prison mutiny Bill, saying that no prisoner would be deterred. We had a very good laugh. But if no one is ever deterred, why do we need criminal offences at all? Does the right hon. Gentleman believe at all in the power of deterrence? Does he think that it plays any part in the criminal system? This is the man who thinks that the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act is wrong, and ought not to be on the statute book. What credibility can there be for such a man, and such a party, on matters of law and order?

The Gracious Speech addresses three particularly important aspects of law and order. It will be widely welcomed—except, of course, by Labour. First, it is clear that something must be done to limit the number of bogus asylum-seekers: those who are certainly not in any fear of prosecution, but who pretend to be in order to jump the immigration queue.

How does the right hon. Gentleman explain to constituents who want their families to be brought into this country, as is their right under the immigration laws, but are held up by those who seek to jump the immigration queue? How, for that matter, does he explain to constituents who ask him why he has not helped them to obtain council housing that their problem is being caused by asylum-seekers whose aim is also to garner the advantages of a not ungenerous social security system?

As the world explodes socially, and as masses of people migrate from country to country, we shall all have to man our defences; otherwise we shall be swamped by the sheer weight of numbers of people, of every colour, who will enter our countries. Half a million applications for asylum are expected this year by the European Community. Last year, Germany received a quarter of a million such applications, and the number of applications received by our country has risen from between 3,000 and 4,000 to between 50,000 and 55,000 over the past two years.

People have only to claim asylum; then they can lose themselves in the community for a year or two—or three—while their claims are thoroughly checked by efficient and committed immigration authorities. By that time, of course, it is too late to send them home. When they are found, it turns out that they have married, had children and done good works in the local church: in such circumstances, it is almost impossible to reject them. Moreover, three out of four do not land in Britain as terrified, impoverished, homeless outlaws; they arrive on ordinary visitors' permits, with no mention of fear of persecution, and refer to persecution only when their time as visitors runs out. It is therefore not surprising that, according to official estimates, 75 per cent. of such applicants are bogus.

This great humanitarian nation will always offer sanctuary where it is needed, as it has always done in the past. Nevertheless, we got fed up with being taken for a ride by those who exploit our good nature. The proposals in the Bill will do something very sensible: they will speed up the decision process, promote greater efficiency and, by not raising false hopes, lessen distress for thousands of people.

I agree with my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary: it would be ridiculous to have 30,000 lawyers paid out of the legal aid fund every time an appeal was made. Let me add, however, that if that system is not to prevail, we need to fund the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service—or some other independent advisory body—far more adequately. That must be done if the human rights of people with whom we are, of course, constantly concerned are to be protected properly.

Mr. Maclennan: The hon. and learned Gentleman said that, according to the official view, 75 per cent. of applications for asylum were bogus. I have heard no Home Office Minister say that. If it is true, why have 90 per cent. of those who have applied in previous years been allowed to stay?

Mr. Lawrence: As the hon. Gentleman knows, it is very difficult to send back a person who has been in this country for two, three or four years, and who has settled into a community. That would mean saying, "You must go back to a country with which your ties have been completely cut. You will distress your wife, your children and the rest of your family." Very few Home Secretaries, however hard-hearted, could face that. Very few could refrain from saying, "All right—on humanitarian grounds, we will allow you to stay." That is the simple explanation.

Let me ask the hon. Gentleman whether he considers it remotely likely that most of the people who come here not from the place of first asylum—and not proclaiming themselves to be in fear of persecution—but on a visitors' permit to study, can possibly and conceivably be in genuine fear of persecution on their return.

Mr. Hattersley: I hope that the hon. and learned Gentleman will take it from me that, whatever the reason for not sending back asylum-seekers, it is not the reluctance of the Home Office to send men out of this

[Mr. Hattersley]

country because they have lived here happily and peaceably for three or four years. I can provide him with long lists of people who had exactly that experience. The immigration rules are constantly interpreted in such a way that men and women who have been here for some years —overstayers—are sent back. Whatever the reason for the phenomenon, it is certainly not the one cited by the hon. and learned Gentleman.

Mr. Lawrence: I do not accept that. In my experience in my constituency, more have been allowed to stay for humanitarian reasons than have been sent back; and people have been sent back only if those humanitarian reasons are not very strong.

A few weeks ago, someone came into my surgery and said, "I am an overstayer: I suppose that I will have to be sent back." I said, "I think so." I arranged for him to go to the police station—as he was quite willing to do voluntarily—but he will become a statistic on the ground that he was sent back. As he had not settled here with a family, there was no humanitarian reason for him to be allowed to stay.

Secondly, something must be done to prevent people from rioting in our prisons and walking out of them. The prison authorities seem to have had inadequate facilities, laws or organisation to stop the appalling troubles that occurred last year, when the Home Office was made to look a bit silly.

Many years ago, I dealt with a case in which three prisoners climbed over the wall at Brixton prison. For many years, the wall was not raised to stop prisoners leaving, and since then others have done the same. Surely a prison service that does not improve its own perimeter security needs some attention.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Some years ago, a dear old lady knocked on the large gate at Lancaster castle and said, "Do you realise that there are sheets hanging out from the top floor of the prison, and two men have just shinned down them?" Lancaster is now secure, and it is an excellent gaol; but that shows that such escapes can easily happen.

Mr. Lawrence: I know what is secure: the population of Lancaster, who live under the care and governance of my hon. Friend, who speaks for that city so frequently and well in the House.

There was even talk in the newspapers of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary having to resign because people were walking out of prison. That, of course, was ridiculous; in other respects, my right hon. Friend has been a most effective Home Secretary. In any event, in this Bill he is taking the right action. The new offence of prison mutiny will carry a sentence that will make potential mutineers think twice—and their helpers, too. We always forget the helpers, but it is those who help who are often deterred by such sentences—even if the prisoner, in the heat of the moment, is not. The measure will be good for all of us: the taxpayer, the police, the prison officers and, in the long run, the prisoners themselves.

Thirdly, for a long time action has been needed to deal with the unsatisfactory state of charities in Britain. More people would give to charity if they were confident that their money would go to the charity concerned. The Bill will reduce fraud by strengthening the powers of the Charity Commission, and by improving the financial management of charities. It will also reduce the amount of money—a fair amount—lost to the Exchequer, because some organisations call themselves charities without doing much charitable work. Charities are very big businesses, involving £15 billion a year. It is in the interests of everyone, giver and receiver, that these businesses are more efficiently run.

The so-called anti-joyriding Bill is not mentioned in the Gracious Speech, but I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend for making it clear that he intends to do something about it. If that is the criticism to which the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook was alluding, I agree fully with him—that the Bill should not be called an anti-joyriding Bill. It is not joy that is created when young people steal cars and kill other people. That is death riding. We ought to call it a death-riding Bill. Young people might then feel that it was less attractive to engage in such an appalling activity.

There are many more law and order matters for which no time can be found before the election, so the Queen's Speech said nothing about them. However, I confidently expect that we shall have at least five more years after the next election to deal with some very difficult problems. We shall have to think less about a larger police force and more about a more efficient police force—better managed, better trained and better organised. The report of the independent Police Complaints Commission, submitted last week to the Home Secretary, about the West Midlands police authority makes dismal reading. Something will have to be done about such management.

Our prisons need to be made more efficient, healthy and cost-effective. That embraces not just the privatisation of prison escort services, which is cheaper and takes some of the burden off the hard-pressed prison service, but the privatisation of prison buildings. There are excellent examples of that working well in the United States, of which we ought to take cognisance.

There ought also to be an expansion of the pilot scheme for privatising remand prison centres. Remand centres cause the most severe pressures on the prison service. There is not the slightest reason why those who have not yet been convicted of any crime should not be housed in privately run, decent, modern and healthy prisons. There would be less justification for letting persistent offenders out on bail to offend again while on bail—a considerable problem now—if there were more decent places to which to send them, whether private remand centres or private bail hostels.

Finally—only because this has to be a short speech—something has to be done about the appalling miscarriages of justice which seem to be coming to light on an almost weekly basis. Why do they occur? Usually because police officers lie, or forensic scientists come to false conclusions, or eye witnesses make mistaken identifications, or vital witnesses are not available or are not called or make a mess of their evidence at the trial. To prevent future miscarriages of justice, an end would have to be put, as far as possible, to such occurrences.

How do we do that? Human nature being what it is, it will probably be impossible to stop some police officers inventing confessions, or planting incriminating evidence when they believe the suspect to be guilty but have insufficient honest evidence to put before the jury.

The opportunity for wrongdoing has been greatly reduced since the 1970s, when most of these miscarriages

of justice took place. The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 is now on the statute book. It lays down strict criteria for the production of police evidence and for the protection of suspects, breaches of which are liable to ensure the exclusion of their evidence. The new technology can detect dishonest note-taking. Above all, interviews with suspects are tape-recorded, which makes it almost impossible for the police to invent confessions at the police station. Eye-witness errors are being guarded against by newer and stronger warnings to juries to require the most stringent proof of identification. The DNA technology, coupled with improvements in the quality and availability of forensic services, should further help to reduce what are, after all, human errors.

A new, practical postgraduate vocational course for training barristers is in operation now, to help to sharpen the cross-examination weapon, one of the best yet devised for protecting the innocent. If a jury mistakenly convicts, despite these improvements, the matter goes to the Court of Appeal, which has the power to quash a conviction or order a re-trial. Those powers, which are very limited, have not been fully exercised in recent years, and they ought to be. A new look is being taken at the extent of the Court of Appeal's powers.

Once an appeal has been considered and rejected by the Court of Appeal, the next stage for correcting mistakes of fact lies with the Home Secretary. The process by which he refers cases back to the Court of Appeal gives people the wholly wrong idea that political considerations may enter into the matter. It would therefore be much better if the power to make reference back were handed to a small "ombudsbody" of former judges who understand the legal rules, perhaps supplemented by non-lawyers. That body would need resources to enable the investigation of matters which might change the picture earlier presented to the courts.

If, in addition, the Court of Appeal could overcome its reluctance to interfere with the jury's verdict on principle, the chances of perpetuating any miscarriages of justice that might have slipped through the new, improved safety network would be much reduced and public confidence restored.

The conviction of the innocent is only one kind of miscarriage of justice. The other is when the guilty are acquitted. While media attention has focused on the conviction of the innocent, we shall all be just as concerned about the acquittal of the guilty. The guilty, when set free, often commit more crimes.

At first sight, it looks as though the inquisitorial system on the continent would be very much worse than the adversarial system that we have here. These matters are being looked at by the Runciman royal commission. Even now it is applying its mind to the comparative advantages and disadvantages of the two systems. I hope that it will make more proposals that lead to the avoidance or the reduction of both kinds of miscarriage of justice.

It was unfair of the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook to complain that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said nothing about these matters. Although the Conservative party would have loved to come forward with proposals on the miscarriage of justice—it would have been an excellent part of our programme in the forthcoming election manifesto—most responsibly my right hon. Friend took the only proper course: to refer all these matters to the Runciman royal commission. When it reports, we shall then, in an objective and independent frame of mind, be able to proceed much more sensibly.

When we do, we shall have to address all the problems that the report reveals and the ways in which to deal with them, in the next Parliament. I hope that we shall be able to do so in such a way that public confidence is restored in our criminal justice system—which, I am sorry to say, has received a bit of a knock in recent years. That was not the Government's fault. The occasion for many of those knocks occurred before this Government came to power. It is only under this Government that those miscarriages of justice have come to light, and they have been properly dealt with.

6.37 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I appreciate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, having been given the opportunity to take part in the debate. The hon. and learned Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) gave us the benefit of his legal experience. I pay tribute to the Home Office for the way in which it dealt with immigrants who came to Northern Ireland. According to my understanding and knowledge, those who were sent back were those who had avoided the due process of immigration and had kept others out. I pay tribute to the fairness of the Home Office in dealing with the cases that have come to my attention.

The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), who has left the Chamber, seemed to be aspiring to be the next Home Secretary, but he appears to have forgotten that there is a land frontier between the United Kingdom and another nation. Some of those who travelled across that frontier were illegal immigrants. The right hon. Gentleman served as a junior Minister in the Northern Ireland Office, but his knowledge of what goes on in Northern Ireland is rather strange. He refused to give way to the hon. Member for North Down (Mr. Kilfedder). I was utterly amazed to discover that the right hon. Gentleman thought that the hon. Member for North Down did not want devolution.

I agree with what was said about joyriding. We do not have "joyriding" in Northern Ireland; rather death, destruction and tragedy are the result of young folk indulging in the habit of taking other people's vehicles and running around in them for all sorts of purposes.

I must put on record again in the House the fact that, although the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has granted the UDR Four the right of appeal, it would appear that the Crown solicitor is still withholding information from the defence. Apparently, the Crown is not required by law to provide such information. That is a miscarriage of justice. Four people, having served their community, have been confined for some seven years and now find that their right of appeal is being hindered by some legal technicality or misinterpretation of the law.

I suspect that tensions concerning rights, freedoms and responsibilities have been with us since the earliest days of humanity. The Old Testament has enshrined rights and responsibilities. The apostle Paul in I Corinthians 9 said, "Have we no rights?" He was prepared to forgo some of his rights, but I contend that the state is required to defend those rights for the benefit of its citizens.

I welcome the concept of a new charter of rights. Reference has been made today to the rights of victims. I should like to think that such rights will be dealt with

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

speedily. Tragically, from experience, I have discovered that Government Departments have not been speedy in dealing with the rights of victims of terrorism in Northern Ireland. I suspect that higher amounts of compensation have been paid to those who have been allegedly ill-treated by the state than to the victims of terrorism in the Province.

The idea of patients' rights sounds excellent but, having read the press and listened to what is going on, I suspect that the idea promises much but will deliver little. There are already signs that the rights are to be so qualified as to become ineffective. For example, it is said that no one should be on a waiting list for longer than two years. However, the little word "normally" is slipped in, so that it can be argued that there are extenuating circumstances. The "Yes, Prime Minister" syndrome seems to be working in Government Departments.

Seven years ago, while I was visiting Togo, the chief of Porto Seguro proudly showed me a walking stick presented to his ancestor by Queen Victoria to mark the emancipation of slaves in 1832. Some think that the abolition of slavery occurred in 1807. That might have been so in this nation, but it was not the case throughout the empire. Even in 1832, slavery was abolished only within the old empire. It was as late as 1970 that Muscat and Oman abolished slavery.

Amidst the challenges of human rights, including hunger in 1991, slavery remains, in the opinion of many, the single biggest human rights issue. When people in this nation argue against a minimum wage policy, it would be salutary for them to remember that there are hundreds of domestic slaves in this country who are grossly underpaid. Child prostitution flourishes in the world, involving an estimated 5 million children. At a recent anti-slavery function, it was revealed that there are some 50 million bonded labourers, many in India and Pakistan. Such issues should concern the House and its Members when we are talking about rights, responsibilities and freedoms.

We should stress responsibilities. One person's meat may be another person's poison. For example, we have been thankful for the improvement in the quality of our air with the development of clean air zones, but we must not be complacent. Many still claim the right to indulge in smoking, but they have a responsibility to care for those who may suffer from respiratory conditions. Secondary smoking has become one of the nation's killers. Now, faced with the curbs on tobacco advertising suggested by the European Commission, the tobacco barons and their advertising colleagues are striking back. They do so all in the name of freedom.

Life is more precious than profits, and the right to life is the most precious of all rights. I speak as a representative who came into the House as a result of the murder just 10 years ago of the then Member for Belfast, South. Thousands have been denied the right to life in Northern Ireland and Great Britain as a result of a body of dedicated terrorists seeking to impose their will upon the nation. It is long since past the time when Her Majesty's Government should take political and security decisions that would deny success to terrorists.

The visitors from the media who make great play on occasional visits to Northern Ireland about so-called human rights abuses would serve humankind better by dealing with those who trade in human life—our greatest right. I know that the House is aware of the monstrous depravity manifested in my constituency on Saturday when a hospital was attacked by those who, through their elected spokesman in west Belfast, complain bitterly about so-called cuts in the health service. They have now left a hospital needing to be replaced as well as depriving people of their lives. The damnable hypocrisy of such people should be exposed by the media instead of spending time trying to blackball the upholders of law and order in the security sevices in Northern Ireland.

The House has applauded the spread of democracy in eastern Europe, the Soviet Union and even China and Africa, yet the United Kingdom Parliament continues to enforce upon the people of Northern Ireland bureaucratic and unaccountable government. Some 148 unelected and unrepresentative quangos spend £1·5 billion of the nation's money. The Leader of the House continues to thwart the will of the people and the recommendation of the Procedure Committee by refusing to bring to the Floor of the House a motion to set up a Select Committee for Northern Ireland.

I do not pretend that that would solve all our ills, but, I argue for the right of Northern Ireland to be governed as part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and for its Members of Parliament to be given a proper role in scrutinising the Northern Ireland office. I know that there are some in the House who say that, if we take part in more debates, we may have a greater impact. I have often sat here with colleagues trying to participate in major debates, and I know of the difficulty and despair as we are called back by the Northern Ireland Office and others to deal with issues that should be dealt with on the Floor of the House.

I recognise that there are some Northern Ireland Members who do not often grace the House with their presence. They have been arguing over the weekend that we should not have a Select Committee. The hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) said that it was no substitute for devolved government. I admit that more needs to be done to restore accountable democracy to Northern Ireland, but a Select Committee would be a welcome move in the right direction.

The hon. Member for Belfast, East does not attend as regularly as he might. He may prefer to be a big fish in a small pool, but I believe that he and others could be more involved if they were given a role in this place.

In a recent broadcast, the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) showed lamentable ignorance of the process of Select Committees. He said that a Northern Ireland Select Committee would be out of sight, out of mind, and that issues would be debated upstairs rather than on the Floor of the House. He overlooked the fact that the Defence, Home Affairs and Health Select Committees are sitting. Their fine work means that hon. Members in the Chamber are better informed to fulfil their role of scrutinising the Government.

It is a shame and tragedy that there is no Northern Ireland Select Committee and that the Northern Ireland Office has run its own empire irrespective of the views of hon. Members. When will Bills such as those in the Gracious Speech be applied to Northern Ireland other than by an Order in Council, which does not allow us to debate and amend the legislation?

Select Committees play a pivotal role in modern Westminster practice. It is time that the Northern Ireland Office was similarly scrutinised.

6.51 pm

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): With the exception of the speech of the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. M. Smyth), the debate has concentrated on the rights, duties and responsibilities of the Home Office. I should like to consider other aspects of that theme that are affected by the Gracious Speech.

First, and perhaps foremost, is the concept of the extension of rights and freedoms under the citizens charter, to which the House will return time and again. At this stage, I wish only to commend to the House the new approach to the enshrining of individual rights, responsibilities and freedoms by that mechanism.

I should like to concentrate on a matter that has not been mentioned, but where the rights and freedoms of individuals are as much affected as they ever were by changes affecting law and order and the Home Office. The Gracious Speech refers to a Bill that will radically transform planning procedures. I should like to use an example in my constituency to show how individual rights can be drastically altered and individual freedoms drastically curtailed without some of the processes being observed.

Last year, the Civil Aviation Authority advised the Secretary of State for Transport that an extra runway would be needed to serve the south-east—I emphasise "the south-east"—by the year 2005. One of the 10 options identified by the CAA was to use about half the runway capacity at Filton. By no stretch of the imagination can Filton be considered part of the south-east.

More than 40 years ago, Filton was considered for development as a commercial airport, but it was decided that the airport for the region—not the south-east—should be Bristol Lulsgate, which I am told by its management is still capable of considerable development. Forty years later, that decision, which drastically affects virtually everyone living in the region, is being reconsidered not because of any sudden growth in unsatisfied demand for air traffic to the Bristol region but simply because London and the south-east are not prepared to accept the traffic consequences of the airline movements that that region generates.

In the intervening 40 years, traffic patterns have adapted to prevailing airport space. Housing has been built around Filton to an extent and density that, on its own, would prove a barrier to airport development anywhere else in the world. The environment of the Severnside region has begun to be valued at its true worth, and the consequences to public health and living standards close to a major airport are beginning to be better understood.

When we consider the effects on the environment, which can only be considered under the heading of rights, freedoms and responsibilities, the answer to the noise of a major civil airport is not just double glazing—people appreciate the opportunity to sit in their own gardens. The so-called new quieter jets are by no means quiet if one's home is at either end of the runway. It is noticeable that, when one of the rare military aircraft lands at Filton, all work in neighbouring schools has to stop.

The Severn estuary is regarded in Britain and Europe as a major area of environmental excellence that requires protection. The right to enjoy the environment is an aspect of individual rights and freedoms that is only beginning to be explored, not only in this country but in the rest of the world. Yet that environment would be within the pollution footprint of a commercial airport at Filton.

If the airstrip at Filton did not exist, there would be no question of building it in the heart of the green belt, yet without any let or hindrance it is open to a Department to identify that airstrip as an area that is capable of producing untold misery for many thousands of people. Nowhere else in the world would housing development of the nature and extent that has taken place around Filton be permitted so close to a commercial airport. It has been reliably estimated that 25,000 houses would be directly affected by such an airport.

It can be argued that the planning process, even as it is proposed to be amended, is capable of dealing with such objections, but I suggest to my hon. Friend the Minister that that is not sufficient. A committee called RUCATSE —Runway Capacity To Serve the South-East—is eliminating nine out of 10 proposed airfields for the south-east of England. It will eventually make one or, at most, two proposals, and only then will my constituents have an opportunity to argue why their lives should not be disrupted, why their property should not be damaged and why their environment should not be made considerably worse by a planning process that will already have largely decided the issue by the decision to limit the consideration to one or at most two major places. It would not be so bad if the region I represent were to benefit from these proposals, but their purpose is to eliminate traffic congestion in a different part of the country.

I suggest—this is my reason for raising the issue under such a broad heading as rights, freedoms and responsibilities—that the actions of Government, which are under consideration in the form of the citizens charter and the various other charters that will emerge, need to address the extent to which people may be adversely affected by governmental decisions that are not open to public discussion from day one.

The reference in the Gracious Speech to accessibility to planning decisions, moving away from the non-consideration that frequently applies in dealing with private Bills to more matters being considered by local inquiries, is a major advance which is to be commended. Under the considerations that lead us to debate today the rights and freedoms that will be established by the citizens charter, we need also to consider how we can develop those rights and freedoms much earlier in the planning process.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I remind the House that, between now and 9 o'clock, speeches must not exceed 10 minutes.

7.1 pm

Mr. David Young (Bolton, South-East): I watched the Home Secretary on television addressing the captive audience of the Conservative party conference on the subject of joyriding. That tough speech was perhaps only equalled by the deafening silence in the Queen's Speech on that subject. "Joyrider" is just a euphemism for a potential killer in a car. Between 1 September and 30 October, 12

[Mr. David Young]

youngsters died because of joyriding—some were the children slaughtered in Liverpool, some were the people who had stolen a vehicle.

Car theft is not a new phenomenon. Some of the causes are the social deprivation and hopeless unemployment resulting from the Government's policies. That must be set against the concepts laid down by the Government—that the main thing in life is instant material satisfaction and that an individual should seek his own advancement, no matter what the cost to the community and to ordinary people. The real casualties of joyriding are people in the community: the law-abiding citizen whose vehicle is misappropriated; the nurse who comes off a late shift to find her vehicle gone; the disabled person whose car is stolen or vandalised; the lad who is trying to hold on to a job with unsocial hours, having experienced years of unemployment, and who finds his means of transport taken; and the member of a family who is slain because of joyriding.

Yesterday, I sought information from the senior police officer covering Bolton. In 1990, 3,235 cars were stolen compared with 3,764 in 1991—an increase of 16·4 per cent. The detection rate was 26·4 per cent. in 1990 and 37·2 per cent in 1991—an increase of 10·8 per cent. Even on those figures, the criminals are showing a comfortable dividend.

When I talked to the police, they said that their problem was not detection but the person who repeatedly offends while on bail or the person who has been caught and let off and who reoffends—the habitual offender. Each of the nearly 4,000 cars that are stolen represents a personal tragedy in one way or another, either to the family who own the car or to the families of those who are killed. It is about time that we gave some thought to the victims in my constituency who suffer because of joyriding.

I ask for a credible and effective deterrent. I am in favour of rehabilitation, but there must be custody for someone who reoffends. That is better than having children slaughtered in the streets by a high-powered vehicle that is out of control. The real casualties are my constituents, many of whom are not well off. They abide by the law, but their vehicles may be misappropriated or damaged.

Now I turn to the Asylum Bill. No one argues that there is not a problem because of the number of alleged refugees, but I quarrel with the Government's plan to remove legal aid. It may be that a lawyer cannot represent someone during an immigration appeal, but it is a poor immigration appeal if a case is not prepared properly. Legal advice is a key factor in providing justice.

I come from the area where a high proportion of the population orginally came from overseas. I am well aware of the excellent job done by the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service, but it is neither geographically placed—it has no office in my constituency—nor legally resourced to advise on or to prepare cases. The removal of the right to legal representation—which is what happens if legal aid is abolished—will prejudice not the person who tries, without justification, to get into this country but the person who needs to do so for the sake of his and his family's safety. A law on such terms will not be in favour of better immigration procedures but will be a blow against democracy and for those repressive Governments who make people flee for their lives.

I find it difficult to understand that in this country, the mother of democracy, we should take rights from genuine refugees in the hope of providing a fast track to get rid of people who wish to come here for safety. This approach is no help to me in a community which for a long time has successfully sought to build a multiracial society. Whatever one may say, those most affected by this proposed legislation will come from the non-white races, and that lesson will go home to every multiracial community as discriminatory.

I also find it reprehensible that we are using the airlines to do the job of the immigration service. People who work abroad for the airlines are trained to deal with tickets; they are not trained to survey immigration documents. By introducing the change, the Government are doing no favours either to the airlines or to the passengers, the cost of whose tickets will increase. More than that, the Government are doing no service to the legitimate refugee who may find that he is deprived of his life or his future because, in the interests of no longer interviewing people properly, he is refused at the point of entry. For all those considerations, I ask that the proposal be reconsidered.

Many of us come from constituencies like Bolton, that have successful multiracial societies. When the subject of immigration is emotively raised, it appears that the intention is to target those who come from the third world and from nations whose skin colour is different from ours.

7.10 pm

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): I will concentrate on one or two local matters which fit in neatly with the debate. In the Gracious Speech, the Queen said:

> "My Government will continue their fight against terrorism in the United Kingdom and elsewhere. They will vigorously pursue their policies to combat drug trafficking and misuse of drugs, nationally and internationally."

I have been sounding out the Government on the idea of introducing legislation to isolate solvent abuse and glue sniffing. These days, there are many other substances that youngsters can sniff and with which they can kill themselves, not realising the great danger. A doctor who is as concerned as I am about the problem said that such youngsters virtually drown in their own blood because they destroy the tissues in their lungs. There is a terrible second danger, because the youngsters may destroy their thinking capabilities—their brain cells—and they will be reduced to vegetables.

I have said that the problem should be put on a higher plane even than smoking. We had a very able private Member's Bill in the previous Session which sought to prevent tobacconists from selling tobacco substances to youngsters under the age of 16. It is pretty easy to identify cigarettes and it is pretty easy to put up warning notices in tobacconists' shops. It is pretty easy to make tobacconists answerable in terms of their scrutiny of various customers. The Bill was excellent and went through with all-party support.

I propose an even more serious Bill. In a hardware shop there may be 20 or 30 different canisters that can kill. There is no real warning on the cans. They must be marked with an easily identifiable emblem, whether a skull and crossbones or red for danger all over the can. The cans must be isolated from the normal shelves. The person in the shop must identify the need for the substance. If a youngster wants three or four tins of a substance, the proprietor should be on the alert. Perhaps the Government

will take up that proposal, or if any hon. Members are lucky in the private Members' ballot, they may take it up. If I were lucky, that is what I would do.

My second point does not concern joy and death riding, although I realise that it is a terrible new sport. In the vast estates in my constituency, I have been trying to combat gang warfare. There are gangs of youths who terrify all. I do not want to overstate the problem, but I have been informed that they have been able on several occasions to smash a supermarket that was kept open to 9 pm for the convenience of the shoppers in the area. I made a call on the supermarket last week. It now closes at 6 pm and there was no one in the supermarket except a cashier who looked —and I hope that I am not doing her an injustice— terrified. The gang has made a whole row of shops there put up steel shutters and it is destroying an excellent facility.

A Mr. Sheath, whose name appeared on the front page of my local newspaper, was terrorised by a gang when his car was smashed and windows were smashed. He called the police and the police did what they could, but they do not have the numbers to organise constant surveillance during the hours of darkness. We all know how difficult estates are in the summer when the children are off school, but they are even worse in the winter when the children gather. We all know of children's playgrounds that have been ripped apart. We all know of gangs gathering round the homes of old-age pensioners. We know that when we are canvassing it is a litte difficult to get people to come to the door at night, not because they are terrified of us, but because they are terrified of coming to the door. I had to make that point clear. Some people, certainly the elderly, live in great terror in certain parts of our cities.

I was heartened when the Home Secretary said at the conference that he would provide another 1,000 police. I said in an open letter to my local paper that in Southampton, we should have 250 more. Normally we apply through the Hampshire chief constable for about 50 and generally, after a Solomon-like decision, we get half that number.

The crucial point that I am trying to make is that such youngsters must be apprehended and must be dealt with by sentencing and not by bail. The overstretched social services, the probation service, the police, the parents who cannot control some of those youngsters, the teachers in the schools and everyone, including the Member of Parliament and the councillors, must work together to find a solution, otherwise some of the estates could become no-go areas in which the old get out during daylight and everyone gets back home before dark. There must be a firm process of law and order.

I was rather dismayed by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), although I realise that he has to face several ways on these emotive issues. He seemed to have a namby-pamby and softly, softly approach to the necessary law and order. We cannot allow our citizens to be persecuted after dark, and a firm Home Secretary has to make the right decisions and fight his corner with the Treasury.

We are told that there will be a new penalty of six months to two year. I hope that it is not bail, bail, bail and then perhaps six months and then perhaps two years. All hon. Members are conscious of the fact that criminals are getting younger. Some of the children's courts do not know how to deal with them. At the end of the day they go on bail and, unfortunately, they go on to commit exactly the same crime.

It should be much more difficult to get into cars and more alarm systems must be fitted. If one pays the price for an expensive car, it must have the best security that the manufacturer can fit. If insurance companies grade their insurance policies according to a car's security system, I am sure that motor manufacturers will seek to introduce better systems. I visted the motor show at Earl's Court the other day as a guest of the Association of British Insurers. That association now offers a vast number of insurance bands—about 14—and some will offer cheaper insurance if one's car is less likely to be damaged because of suitable security.

I am keeping my eye on the clock and I believe that I have about three or four minutes left.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has six seconds.

Mr. Hill: I just want to say a few words about the Asylum Bill. That legislation had to come. We all know that more and more refugees of whatever category will come to Europe. We must have a structure to enable those refugees to be given a fair hearing. That structure should not allow economic refugees——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has run out of time.

7.21 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): Among the rights that it is important to debate in the Chamber, perhaps the democratic rights of the citizen are among the most important.

Many observers of the debate will find it strange that it has been devised that, as spokesman for the Liberal Democrats on Home Office affairs, I am entitled to speak for 10 minutes only in a debate lasting the whole day. That is a reflection on the failure of the procedures of House of Commons to recognise the strength and support that the party to which I have the honour to belong enjoys in the country. I hope that they will be amended soon and in accordance with the recommendations of the Select Committee on Procedure.

It cannot be said that we live in a democracy simply because an Act of Parliament prescribes from time to time that the Prime Minister must call an election. The art of governing in a democracy involves listening. Democracy is a dialogue, not a series of barked commands issued from time to time by the Government and ended only by changing the tenant at No. 10 Downing street.

Most of the failures of the Government, and theree are many, can be traced directly to their unwillingness to listen. The centrepiece of the Gracious Speech, the introduction of a new local government tax, would have been wholly unnecessary if the Government had listened to the case against the poll tax. The right hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Patten) would not be looking for new ways in which to give London a voice if he had listened to the clear voice of Londoners who opposed the abolition of London government in 1986. Today, Ministers might not be crying foul at those who question their commitment to the national health service if they had listened to the outcry, even from their own Back Benchers, against the introduction of charging for eye tests.

[Mr. Robert Maclennan]

I ask Conservative Members to recall that it was Edmund Burke, one of their heroes, who said:

"In my causes I have known and, according to my measure, have co-operated with great men; and I have never yet seen any plan which has not been mended by the observations of those who are much inferior in understanding to the person who took the lead in the business."

The Home Secretary stands head and shoulders above his colleagues as the Min[illegible] not listen. He is the Minister who did not listen to Judge Tumin who warned that Brixton could not safely contain high-security prisoners. He was the Minister who turned a deaf ear to the High Court, when it had forbidden the deportation of a refugee from Zaire, and prayed in aid sovereign immunity. He is the Minister who has announced that he will withdraw legal aid from asylum seekers in this country. In response to my intervention, he made it clear that he has no intention of listening to the Commission for Racial Equality, which has pointed out that that proposal contravenes the Race Relations Act 1976.

We shall have other occasions on which to debate the Asylum Bill at length and I hope that I will not be so confined in my remarks on that occasion as I must necessarily be today. The Bill is deplorable and disreputable and it will almost certainly cause us to be dragged before the European Court of Human Rights. It is certainly a violation of our international obligations under the United Nations convention of 1951. It denies asylum seekers the proper right to be heard and have their cases duly considered. The Bill will rob them of the right to independent legal representation, which is a grave injustice.

The other matters with a Home Office content referred to in the Queen's Speech are minor compared to what might have been included. The proposal on prison escapes is simply a smokescreen to cover the Home Secretary's negligence in the Brixton case. Violent prisoners are, of course, already subject to the full rigours of the law. The Home Secretary, by introducing such legislation in the dying days of the Government, is simply misguidedly diverting attention from the inadequacy of his response to the Woolf committee's programme for prison reform.

In the few weeks before the Maastricht conference, I ask the Home Secretary to raise with his colleagues the possibility of strengthening our protection against racial discrimination in this country by seeking an amendment to the treaty of Rome that would state clearly the Community's competence to legislate against such discrimination.

I ask the right hon. Gentleman to seek to protect our citizens who live abroad within the Community by calling for a directive that will outline measures to combat racial discrimination. I ask him to support freedom of movement within the Community for all permanently settled third-country nationals, giving them the same rights as EC nationals with regards to employment, establishment and family unity.

The time has come for the Home Secretary to recognise that our citizens' rights are bound up with those who live in other parts of the EC. Some other countries that have not legislated on this matter should do so. Unless there is such legislation—I believe that it should result from an initiative of the Community—citizens will not enjoy the protection to which they are entitled.

It is not only the Home Secretary who is responsible for the rights or the abridgement of rights that the Government have perpetrated during their term. The Foreign Secretary, in his discussions with China, has abandoned the provisions of the joint Sino-British declaration of 1984 that guaranteed that judges from overseas jurisdiction could be appointed to the Court of Final Appeal. That international obligation, enshirined in the Basic Law, has been abridged by an agreement announced on 27 September. That agreement will curtail the right to appoint foreign judges, so our citizens in Hong Kong wil be exposed to the whim of the Beijing Government in the Court of Final Appeal, notwithstanding the Government's alleged support of human rights in that colony.

Other Ministers have also opposed the protections available under the law. The Secretary of State for Employment is currently seeking to oppose the Equal Opportunities Commission, which is seeking to protect women's rights as part-time employed people. The Minister is relentlessly pursuing through the courts the idea that equal opportunities legislation, although it is, by the admission of British judges, discriminatory, should not apply to part-time women workers.

The Government have an appalling record on rights. I wish that it could be said that we could look to the alternative, to the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), with any degree of optimism, in the hope that he would show himself more sensitive to these matters. But he reaffirmed his position in an extraordinary article in this week's *New Statesman and Society*—that the adoption of a Bill of Rights with enforceable protections in our courts was to be postponed beyond the achievement of a socialist utopia. If he were at the levers of power he would be no more sensitive than a Conservative Minister. It was noticeable today that he would not answer the question about carriers' liability, although he was pressed to do so. The House will have drawn the conclusion that he has every intention of keeping the obnoxious legislation in place and using carriers as immigration officers. Had it not been so, he would have taken the opportunity to deny it.

Until the House is prepared to adopt as superior law fundamental rights against which we can strike down legislation that curtails the freedoms and rights of citizens, we shall fail in our obligation to protect the citizens of this country.

7.31 pm

Mr. Iain Mills (Meriden): The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) spoke of dying stages. If he wants to play undertaker, I suggest that he looks at the ashes of his own party, not at the vigorous programme proposed in the Queen's Speech. We look forward eagerly to many months of debates in Committee on some of these important measures.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Can the hon. Gentleman say that with a straight face?

Mr. Mills: Absolutely. I still look forward to it after 12 years. I quite enjoy Standing Committees and discussions with the statutory Liberal Democrat spokesman, who rarely appears—but we are kind to him when he does.

The Queen's Speech introduced several important measures. I fought in the early 1980s with my right hon.

Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbitt) on trade union legislation, and the right not to strike and the new legislation that we propose are vital.

We have increased police establishments. There are arguments over resources, but efficient police authorities can cope. The West Midlands authority will cope, having achieved much through civilianisation and putting more policemen on the beat.

The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) talked about devolution and constitutional reform. His party apparently wants us in a federal Europe with a centralised bureaucracy under which we would be dictated to by non-elected people in Brussels. Yet the right hon. Gentleman talks about devolving power to Scotland, Wales and the English regions. That is illogical. Perhaps the hon. Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson), who is on the Opposition Front Bench, will ask her right hon. Friend to comment on that lack of logic when he returns. It defies logic to want devolution in this country and centralisation in a federal Europe.

Halloween has just taken place. Perhaps, in a Home Office debate, we should consider it for the future, especially the trick or treat phenomenon. I do not believe that this is a Government problem, but it is one with which communities are having to deal. On Saturday morning constituents came to my advice bureau telling me that pensioners in bungalows in Chiswick Green had bricks hurled through their windows—presumably that was the trick because the pensioners had not given a treat. Other pensioners in my usually well-behaved constituency had eggs thrown at them.

I cannot propose any real solutions yet. Perhaps there should be more national publicity warning older people in sheltered accommodation that young people who knock on their doors may cause them some harm. Perhaps greater parental control is the answer. Why are these young people out at that time of night indulging in these tricks?

I represent an area that includes the national exhibition centre, Birmingham international airport and Birmingham international station. All three have the biggest car parks in the United Kingdom, if not in Europe, and they are filled with luxury cars that are vulnerable, due to their design, to what my hon. and learned Friend the member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) and I agree are death riders.

Luxury cars in these huge car parks near the M6 are vulnerable targets. The thieves deliberately choose the highest-powered models and spray slogans on the back, such as "Chase me, Charlie", to get the police involved. They then go up to another part of my constituency, Chelmsley Wood or Castle Bromwich, where there are many walkways. There they perform high-speed runs. There has been one fatal accident and there have been many other serious ones. The death riders go to the end of the walkways, stop and run off. It is extremely difficult for the police to chase them without going in for the same sort of speeding. The fantastic Ford Cosworth and the BMW 7 series are the favourite models to steal, and the police have no chance of keeping up unless they too indulge in dangerous driving.

I seek an assurance from the Minister that the penalties that we shall propose against this vicious and dangerous crime will be severe so that they act as a deterrent. Solihull and Birmingham magistrates have told me of their frustration when prosecuting these young offenders because of the difficulties of imposing stiff enough penalties under current legislation.

Earlier this year, I tabled a parliamentary question, to which the Minister replied that the Home Office had no plans at present to increase the maximum penalty of six months' imprisonment for taking a motor vehicle without the owner's consent. He said that, when those who have taken a car are convicted of reckless driving, they are liable to as much as two years' imprisonment, or five years if they have caused a death. What are the Government's intentions? I was worrried about their absence from the Queen's Speech, but I am delighted to have confirmation from many sources that the Government are to introduce a severe penalty.

Like most Conservative Members, I have been a committed European. What concerns me is that the removal of "Economic" from the title European Economic Community and the apparent delight on the part of Monsieur Delors and others at that fact both have a real impact on the affairs that we are discussing tonight.

I am worried about the effect of a federal Europe on our home affairs policies. I am speaking not just about immigration but about many other issues of policy. The Bill fairly to assess refugees who seek asylum is wholly justified. How would a federal Europe encompassing foreign and defence policy without NATO and the Americans allow us to provide for the protection of our people and formulate domestic policy on rights, freedoms and responsibilities? Are those things to be negated by means of a great bureaucratic dream of a socialist republic?

We must maintain our national sovereignty on all key issues. Before the referendum on Europe, I worked to make sure of an economic Community. Why have we left the single market and the economic Community apparently to seek what eastern European countries are now rejecting—central bureaucratic control? They are rejecting that with joy and moving towards freedom and individuality—which raises the question of access to a totally federal Europe of people from other European Countries.

7.41 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I welcome the opportunity to discuss rights, and stress that the one about which I am most concerned is the right of my constituents not to have their lives marred by crime. Britain needs more police. My constituency certainly needs more. Yesterday, I went to see the newly appointed chief constable of Greater Manchester to plead with him to provide more police in my constituency. Of course he would love to be able to provide more police in my constituency and in the rest of Greater Manchester, but that cannot be done because of the Government's failure to provide money to increase establishment.

I was delighted to hear that tomorrow's financial statement will propose money for an extra 1,000 police. I hope that that is true. Although 1,000 extra police sounds impressive, Greater Manchester would get about 50. When that number is divided among all the areas of Greater Manchester, my constituency might receive one extra policeman for three or four days a week.

I do not want to dwell too long on resources. The Government could have done much to improve rights at

[Mr. Andrew F. Bennett]

no cost. We are all proud of the fact that we live in a democracy, but we cannot call it a genuine democracy if we deny people the information that they require to make decisions. It is tragic that the Queen's Speech contains no proposals for a freedom of information Act. Democracy is about much more than elections and votes. It is about having informed debate and, where possible, reaching consensus. There is not much point in asking people to vote every four of five years for a man in a grey suit or a dark suit, for someone with or without hair or for someone wearing a rose or a primrose. We must give them the information on which to base a decision. We will not have genuine democracy until we have a freedom of information Act.

I have often argued that it would be dangerous for the House to support a Bill of Rights which merely transferred power from Parliament to unelected judges. However, we are now in difficulties because we have signed the European convention on human rights, which means that we have a second-hand Bill of Rights providing very slow justice. That is unsatisfactory. We must search for a way to produce an effective Bill. I welcome the fact that the National Council for Civil Liberties has advanced a peoples charter with mechanisms which do not remove the sovereignty of Parliament but nevertheless try to enshrine rights. I hope that my hon. Friends will look carefully at those proposals.

The Data Protection Registrar deals with computer records, but it is a scandal that there is no system to control paper records. The police national computer No. 2 was brought into operation in the autumn without checks or safeguards. In 1978, the Lindop committee said that a national computer system for police records would have to separate factual information from criminal information and supposition. That has not happened and the Home Office does not seem to think that there is a problem. There is a major problem because, if there are 40 million records on the police national computer, it is high time we had a proper mechanism to control it and to allow people access to it. After the activities of the West Midlands serious crimes squad, it is essential to have proper safeguards for confessions on which people are convicted.

I shall now return to the subject of policing in Greater Manchester. The Minister of State, Home Office has not been particularly fair to the House in her answers to questions about what has happened in the aftermath of Strangeways. As she knows, I have tabled many questions and I have had an Adjournment debate. I received repeated assurances from Ministers that they are dealing with Greater Manchester's problems about looking after prisoners. The situation is now worse than it was immediately after the Strangeways riot. There are now 760 prisoners from Greater Manchester in police cells. Only 300 of them are in Manchester police cells; the other 460 are scattered around the country. Eighteen police forces now hold prisoners who would normally be in prison.

The Minister has been to Greater Manchester and knows that some of the cells in which people are being held are totally inadequate and unsatisfactory. That has been going on for 18 months and I understand that it has cost the Home Office £27 million. Probation reports cannot be prepared and solicitors cannot see prisoners effectively when they are being held in police cells. The system is unfair to the prisoners and their families. Some convicted prisoners have served the whole of their sentence in a police cell. That cannot continue. Although the Home Secretary addressed the issue when I intervened, he has not come up with a satisfactory solution.

Strangeways has created another problem for Manchester police. A substantial number of officers have spent the past 18 months interviewing prisoners and collecting statements. Soon they will have to appear in court and present their evidence. That work means that those officers have not been on the beat in my constituency and in other Greater Manchester constituencies dealing with crime. The Government should have provided extra resources to take account of that.

I shall now deal with car thefts—so-called joyriding. I welcome what Stockport police and others have accomplished through vehicle watch. Perhaps they could take the scheme a little further and consider having three number plates on cars. The additional one would contain a vehicle watch number and it would be removed by the owner when he leaves the vehicle. The car thief would then have the problem of having to provide a third number plate. It might not stop sophisticated criminals, but it would certainly stop many kids who are tempted to take cars.

I urge the Government to be careful and not to rush through a joyriding Bill. Their rushed legislation on dogs turned out to be worthless. It has involved the police in much more administration and has given little benefit.

Policemen in Greater Manchester who have to chase criminals who have committed serious crimes increasingly have to go to places where the criminals have rottweilers, Staffordshire bull terriers or other such dogs. It is not very nice tip-toeing up to the door to canvass, or just to put a leaflet through it, but police officers who know that they have to go into the house quickly to try to apprehend a criminal are put off by the knowledge that such vicious dogs are behind the door. The Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 has made no useful impact. I hope that the Government will not go through a public relations exercise on joyriding that will do nothing to solve the problem. This is a complex problem, which needs effective legislation.

In the debate on liberty and rights, we should emphasise that the first thing that a civilised society should have is an informed democracy in which people can make decisions based on genuinely free information. Once we can do that, we have to ensure that we confer on the people we do not like the same rights and privileges. That is extremely difficult. Too many of the policies in the Queen's Speech take away rights—for example, those of asylum seekers—and assume that other people can be subject to a different quality of life from that which we want for ourselves.

7.51 pm

Mr. Chris Butler (Warrington, South): Crime cannot be cracked and freedom cannot be guaranteed by the hard clamp of the law alone. With 5 million notified offences every year and only 40,000 prison places, prison cannot be the only answer. Nor can the harshness of punishment be any guarantee of rehabilitation. When convicts were transported to Australia in the last century and still

rebelled, their flesh was sometimes flogged off their backs to the extent that their shoulder blades shone like polished ivory, yet they still reoffended.

Our criminal justice system must be the long stop when homes and schools have failed to socialise individuals. Individuals are first taught respect for other individuals in the family unit, and if the family is weakened or derided, as it has been all too often since the 1960s, it cannot be surprising that there has been an increase in the blind selfishness of criminality. The permissive society has so often become the uncivilised society.

Many single parents are single parents through no fault of their own. Sometimes, it is a result of a personal tragedy. The majority of them strive courageously to bring up their children well, but I cannot help thinking that it is a handicap when a key archstone of the family unit is missing. When we came to power in 1979, the illegitimacy rate was 10·6 per cent. It has nearly trebled since then, to 28 per cent., which represents a social time bomb of nuclear proportions.

In some areas, single motherhood has almost become a local industry. It is embarked upon in order to obtain a council home and an independent income. All too often, these incentives seem to outweigh the long-term trap of dependency and relative poverty. The United States experience shows that things can get even worse. Broken families have become so common that whole neighbourhoods have become sinks populated by a violent under-class. Some United States politicians have developed a theory of "bridefare", in which fathers are forced to assume their responsibilities, even to the extent of being provided with workfare employment if they try to shuffle off their financial responsibilities on to the taxpayer. That is not a bad idea.

In education, we are still reaping the whirlwind of the 1960s. The louts production line in education must be stopped. Adventure methods, ill-discipline, a scorn for competitiveness and the "anything goes" attitude of the 1960s are all taking their toll. The British Institute of Management undertook a wide-scale survey of its members, in which they repeatedly said that school leavers were incompetent in mathematics, reading and writing. Those are the basic educational skills, as basic as the moral respect of one person for another. I hope that the new fleet of school inspectors will look at moral education as a priority.

If homes and schools are not made into the mechanisms of socialisation that they should be, our crime wave will continue. In the meantime, we must tailor law and order and strengthen it so as to maximise our protection. Therefore, I welcome the Bill against death racing, because that crime epitomises the selfishness of the lout.

I wonder how many of those death riders are already on bail. The Avon and Somerset police say that half the people arrested for car crime or burglary are on bail for another offence. In Warrington, 72 people arrested over a two-month period were already on bail. The chief constable of Cheshire is concerned about these bail bandits. He says that 10 per cent. of all criminals arrested are already on bail. In Bristol, that figure reaches 35 per cent. One Northumbrian youth admitted to 274 offences while on bail and the Northumbrian police believe that there would be 5,000 fewer offences per year if bail were more restricted.

The head of the Avon and Somerset police says:

"I am under pressure to reduce crime, but the law as it stands is tying one hand behind my back."

Chief Inspector Brookes of the same force says:

"It is devastating to the morale of officers to spend hours and hours, sometimes days, dealing with the same offenders only to find them coming back again and committing more crime and to receive more bail."

The chief constable of Northumbria says:

"The right to bail has to be graduated. You would not let a mad animal loose—you would lock it up."

Too often, magistrates have released supposed offenders on bail in the teeth of police opposition. There have been suggestions of a separate offence of committing a crime while on bail. The United States has an offence of habitual criminality. Perhaps that is the way for us to go.

Police magazine of August 1991 highlighted the danger for us when it said:

"the small group of offenders who, in every area, account for almost all the domestic burglaries known to the police . . . *are* being arrested, and they pass in and out of the police hands with almost monotonous regularity . . . The bail scandal is a microcosm of what is bound to happen as this Government's policy of 'punishment in the community' takes effect . . . It's the criminal who takes the liberty. It's the community that takes the punishment."

That is it. There is a link between the rise in crime and the number of persistent offenders, and it must not be ignored. If Government policy is to recycle these persistent offenders back into the community, ultimately the public will say no, and the policy will collapse.

Prison has the role of punishment and deterrence where the processes of socialisation have failed. It also has a legitimate role in containment. *Police* magazine of March 1988 summed it up when it said:

"Any sentencing procedure which allows the persistent offender to go on offending is a contradiction of the judiciary's first duty—to protect society."

That should be our first duty as legislators as well.

8 pm

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): The hon. Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Butler) typifies Conservative Members on both the Government Front Bench and their Back Benches. When there is a success, they will take the credit for it; when there is disaster, they claim that they are not responsible. Unfortunately, many of the problems that are caused by young people are the result of the Government's policy failures. In many instances these are Thatcher's children, and the Government should take responsibility for their actions.

Crime is increasing in Cumbria, including my constituency. The area does not have inner-city problems and there is still a good quality of life, which we are trying to preserve, but last year crime in Cumbria increased by 36 per cent., one of the highest increases in the country. That had much to do with the Government's policies, and I see nothing in the Gracious Speech that will help to alleviate the problem. The Government are running away from crime prevention and I suggest that we should be talking more about prevention and less about what we do when we catch criminals. Surely it would be better if crime were not committed.

The Government believe in free market economics even when we talk about crime prevention, and the people are paying the price. They realise that when their bills come through the letter box. The cost of house insurance has increased by about £100. The rate of burglaries has soared in Cumbria as it has everywhere else. Are we seeing the privatisation of crime prevention? The cost of insuring a

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car has increased by £100, or perhaps by £200, yet insurance companies are making massive losses because insufficient attention is being given to crime prevention.

If anyone had walked down the street where I live 10 years ago he or she would have seen no burglar alarms. Today, about 90 per cent. of the houses have alarms. The owners of the other 10 per cent. have large dogs. It costs £250 or even £500 for a good burglar alarm system, and then there is the cost of installing security lighting and security locks. Many citizens are paying about £500 a year to prevent criminals from entering their homes. Surely it would be more sensible to place an extra £10, £20 or £30 on poll tax charges to enable more policemen to be recruited to reduce the crime rate.

That is not the Government's way. They believe in the free market. They say, "Let the people look after themselves. If they cannot do that, that's too bad." Those who suffer from crime are, in many instances, not middle class or rich but the poor. Poorer people can ill afford to be robbed or in other ways to be the victims of crime.

The Government do not discuss providing any extra assistance for crime prevention. The Home Secretary ridiculed our proposals to give more crime prevention powers to local authorities. The responsibility for crime prevention that is with the police should remain with them, but the police will never give priority to crime prevention because they are always busy trying to solve crime. We need, therefore, to adopt a new approach.

A good doctor friend of mine did not believe in health education. He said, "If you give me an extra £10,000, I will save an extra three or four lives." If we give the police more money, more police officers will be employed to catch more criminals. As I have said, the police will not make crime prevention a priority. That is why we must give local authorities a role.

We must plan and design with a view to reducing crime when we build houses and estates. We must take crime into consideration. There is a well-designed shopping precinct in my constituency, St. Nicholas Gates, which is in a residential neighbourhood. Unfortunately, the design did not take into account the activity of boy racers, who made the life of the nearby residents intolerable. The boy racers were carrying on until 3, 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning. It has now been decided, after a great deal of fuss, that the precinct will have gates. If gates had been part of the design at the beginning, the boy racer problem would not have arisen.

I understand that building regulations will have to be altered to take account of smoke detectors and fire regulations. Surely some emphasis should be placed on ensuring that there is general security, so that there are fewer burglaries and fewer crime-related problems.

Many public car parks are not manned and are not illuminated. They present opportunities for car thieves and great worries for many women, who are terrified to enter them in the dark. Surely car parks should be manned and floodlit. That would reduce crime.

We believe that car manufacturers should improve the security of their products, and I understand that the Home Secretary has entered into serious discussions with them. There should be legislation to ensure that the manufacturers have a minimum security standard. There are minimum safety standards and we should introduce security standards. Such legislation would mean that no motor car manufacturer would be at a disadvantage. That would be a positive approach to crime prevention. As I have said, crime prevention does not rest with catching criminals.

The Government have many reasons to be disgusted with themselves. They have created an underclass, which the hon. Member for Warrington, South mentioned. There was no talk of it 12 years ago. We may have had a working class, and we were proud of it, but there was no underclass. The Government have created a society which is devoid of the social qualities which we once knew, and they should not be surprised if there is an increase in crime. Their policy of dividing the nation between the rich and the poor has had its consequences. We must not make excuses for criminality, but perhaps that is a reason for what has happened.

Some of the most hardened criminals are those who left school and went to find their place in the labour market during the first Tory slump. Police officers will say that those people are the most hardened criminals, but we must do something to try to help them. If they are using violence, intimidation, firearms and weapons generally, however, they must be locked away, and in many instances for long periods. Decent citizens should not have to tolerate the anti-social behaviour that terrorises so many in urban areas and, in some instances, rural communities.

We need a policy for the future that will start to eliminate poverty, which is the breeding ground for crime. The Governemnt created the swamp and we have to face the consequences.

The process of justice needs to be quickened. The granting of bail has been criticised, but one of the reasons for it is the overcrowding of prisons and police cells. People cannot be kept in prison because our system of justice is too slow. Surely those who have been on remand for many months must have been insulted when an actor took a newspaper to court because it had accused him of being boring. Surely we should be doing something more productive with our courts than using them to deal with such trivialities. Similarly, many of those who have suffered industrial injuries must have been insulted by the action to which I have referred. I am sure that if the allegation of being boring were to be directed to politicians, there would be many law suits. The complainant received £50,000, which suggests to me that there is something wrong with our society.

Carlisle, and Cumbria generally, needs more police officers. We are asking for them. There are problems in rural areas as well as urban areas. When the police committee asks for 24 additional constables, I hope that the Home Secretary will agree that they should be recruited and appointed. In the past, the area has done extremely badly.

8.9 pm

Mr. David Porter (Waveney): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a brief contribution to the early stages of what will probably be the longest general election campaign in modern times. Even so, this is a shortened Session, and as we must wait until next year for the start of a fourth Conservative term in office, we must now get on with the measures contained in the Gracious Speech.

In considering rights, freedoms and responsibilities, we must consider the choice already afforded by Conservative

legislation. It is freedom of choice built on the view that it is individuals—not big brother, bureaucrats, councillors or even Members of Parliament—who know best. Whether individual voters, parents, taxpayers, travellers or patients, it is the individual who counts.

There is to be an offshore safety Bill. It is a relatively modest measure which should enjoy a trouble-free passage because it is welcomed by both sides of the offshore industry. I will not make a Second Reading speech now, but simply say that a safety culture built around individuals and the operating companies' involvement and responsibilities is the only way to ensure the safest possible working environment.

In education, extended parental choice has been a marvellous idea put into practice effectively. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State's tackling of the vested interests in education and the Government's push to put children first—individual children, which means putting parents alongside them—is to be applauded. Local management of schools, giving parents more information, and the assessing of schools, children and teachers have all been good ideas.

I sound one warning note about individual choice—it works in towns where parents can be given a choice of schools, up to the physical capacity of a school, but in rural areas that choice may be only theoretical. In many country areas there is no choice of school, doctor or pub. However, bearing that in mind, freedom of choice is best stimulated by exposing schools to some element of market discipline.

One of the themes of the 1990s that we can identify for ourselves—although what history will make of it we must wait and see—is the concept of government by charter, with the underlying idea that poor public service can be remedied by better management held by force and compensation to higher performance standards. One journalist in the *Evening Standard* last week likened the rain of these "whingeing charters", as he called the current spate of them, to confetti. I take the view that the charters go in the right direction. I suppose that any idea that catches a mood and a time will have many fathers. I know that my right hon. Friend and the Downing street team, the socialists with their council contracts, and the Liberal Democrats because they know a good bandwagon when they see one—and they must have seen one, because not a single Liberal Democrat is present—all claim to have sired the citizens charter concept.

In fact, the truth can now be told. It was not Downing street, the Labour party or the Liberal Democrats who sired the citizens charter—it was me, at least in the parliamentary sense. In May 1989 I first introduced a ten-minute rule Bill—the Public Service Contract Bill—which sought to establish minimum standards of public service with automatic compensation for failure. Of course, that Bill is now confetti, but it focused on local authorities, the Post Office and British Rail. Matters have moved on since then and those ideas are now very much on the agenda, and I am delighted by that.

Something that is not on the agenda, and that is disappointing, is a commitment to privatise British Rail quickly. There is a simple statement of intent in the Gracious Speech, but of itself that is not enough to stimulate a lumbering giant like British Rail into market-style change. Unless we can achieve that, the travellers charter will, at best, be only half-hearted.

When I think of the misery, the frustration and the anger caused to my constituents on the east Suffolk line, I despair. When the promised sprinters were not delivered on time, when the fares increased in proportion to the decline in reliability, when children are stranded because trains have broken down, when Conservative-controlled Suffolk county council subsidises the late night train, and when central Government grant for British Rail goes up, yet the service is still like a lottery, I despaired, I despair, and I will continue to despair until we give individuals, travellers, employees and taxpayers a real incentive to make it work—the freedom to succeed in the private sector.

All that leads me to British Rail Bills, and the fact that only now are we talking about ditching the procedures of 150 years ago. That is symptomatic of our failure sometimes to move on. The dawn of the railway age brought in that bizarre, cumbersome process of private Bills for new and altered rail lines and other works. I speak as an hon. Member who has served time on four such Bills during the four years that I have been in the House—the City of London (Various Powers) Bill, the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill, and the London Underground Bills Nos. 1 and 2. Therefore, I can speak of the experience when four hon. Members sit in quasi-judicial godliness hearing the arguments for and against.

We are all familiar with that quaint parliamentary phrase, "It may be for the convenience of Members", and then some information is imparted that is often for anything but the convenience of hon. Members. Sitting on a private Bill Committee is in practice, if not in theory, designed for the maximum inconvenience of Members, especially when the learned counsel are paid by the hour—at least, it feels like that—or by the ream of Committee paper. Of course safeguards are necessary for the environment, for local residents, for local communities and for the right to a decent quality of life, so I warmly welcome the transport and works Bill, which will defend the safeguards but speed up the decision process.

On the proposed council tax, I have just one point to make on the theme of individual freedom. The basis of the tax—a two-person household—is wrong; it should be one person. If it must be two, the 25 per cent. reduction for one is insufficient. In addition to the single people who choose to be alone, there are many hundreds of thousands of widows, widowers and unmarried people who do not choose to be alone, but are. They should have a 50 per cent. reduction if the tax is to be as fair as it needs to be.

I have not homed in on the word "rights" in my remarks. We used that word a great deal in the 1960s, when I had shoulder-length hair and many of my colleagues had even some hair. It is a word that trips too lightly off many tongues—often the tongues of those demanding rights without considering, in the same breath, the responsibilities. The theme of today's debate shows something of Labour party values. It promises the people the earth and excites them with talk of rights; it pays lip service to freedom and choice and to freedom of choice, and then it lets someone else have the responsibility of paying for it.

I support the programme in the Gracious Speech. I do see it not as the fag end of an old Parliament, but as the threshold to continuing non-socialist government in this country.

8.15 pm

Miss Joan Lestor (Eccles): I want to refer to the Asylum Bill and to some of the comments made by the Home Secretary. *The Guardian* has nicknamed the Bill the national humbug Bill. Unless the Home Secretary or the Minister can answer a few questions, that nickname may remain.

I am not surprised that the number of people seeking asylum in this country or elsewhere has increased. We all know that repression, war, political persecution and many other matters in various countries throughout the world have now been forced to the forefront. The Home Secretary did not answer the question: what is the point of this country's encouraging people to resist that sort of persecution and to stand up and fight for their rights if, when things get too hot for them and they want to become political refugees, we say, "You can't come here, we don't want you"?

The Home Secretary and the Minister must know that, if someone is fleeing persecution or political oppression, that person does not have his documents with him. He does not run back and say, "Where is my passport? Where is my visa?"—*[Interruption.]* I wish hon. Members would not mumble when I have only a few moments to make my speech. Such people are caught in a terrible trap. If they try to falsify their documents, as many do, they are excluded.

If the Home Secretary is over-zealous in not allowing entry to someone who he believes is not a genuine refugee, and actually sends back a genuine refugee either to roam the world looking for somewhere to live or to persecution and possible death, he must face the reality of life for such people.

Next Wednesday, the Princess Royal will meet refugee children seeking asylum at the centre at Heathrow airport. She will later attend a seminar. She, more than most people in this country, knows something about refugee children and the problems facing them. I do not know whether she will be accompanied by anybody from the Home Office. I hope that she will, and I hope that that person listens to and understands the suffering and the plight of those children.

There are no special provisions in the Bill to deal with unaccompanied refugee children, but that does not surprise me. In June last year, the Refugee Council put forward proposals for a new voluntary agency to provide care and assessment for children newly arrived in this country. Although, in fairness, the Home Secretary whispered to me behind the Chair that discussions were taking place, the council is still waiting for a reply. At that time, we were talking about 30 to 50 children a year, but in August and September last year some 170 children fled from the fighting in Eritrea and their arrival in this country brought into sharp focus the appalling lack of resources, knowledge and skills that local authorities need to look after the children properly.

A Refugee Council survey of 17 local authorities revealed that 25 children were held in detention by the immigration service. It is disgraceful that a child should be detained in that way and I want an assurance from the Minister that that practice has now ceased.

Seventy children had to wait up to three months for a local authority to respond to their needs, many being moved more than three times in that period. A substantial number of them had no contact with people of their own culture and language during that time.

Those children were sent to Britain by loving families and friends who were anxious that their children at least should escape to a better future, free from the traumas of war and persecution. They arrived in Britain frightened, confused and lonely, and they look to us to do something for them.

We should not forget that, when war broke out in Britain, hundreds of our children were sent to Canada and elsewhere to escape the traumas of war. We have not yet ratified the convention on the rights of the child, but I hope that we shall. We are a signatory to the convention on refugees, but the convention on the rights of the child gives children the right to escape the oppression of war and its consequences. I hope that we shall honour that.

Because of the exceptional leave arrangements, those children were denied the right to be united with their families. We owe it to them to provide them with safety. We need a properly funded care agency to co-ordinate plans for their future. They need an expert allocated to them on arrival to act as an independent advocate, someone who can promote the rights of each child. They need to have their cases dealt with quickly and fairly.

The Government must recognise their responsibilities in the matter to local authorities through increased financial support for projects which can benefit refugee children such as day care, housing and language classes. They must also recognise their responsibility to the international community and especially to the third world through adherence to the spirit and letter of the United Nations convention on refugees and the convention on the rights of the child. Above all, they must recognise their responsibility to the children who experience the traumas of war and separation from close family only to be met in Britain by suspicion, inflexibility and a lack of compassion.

I hope that the Minister will explain why there is no mention of those children in the Bill, since that is what the Refugee Council understood it would deal with. I understand that the feedback from the Department of Health has been positive, but the Home Office said a short time ago that the Refugee Council would have to wait for the thorough review of the asylum procedures which has resulted in the Bill.

As the Bill does not address the problem and it is crucial that Britain should consider it, will the Minister give an assurance that a positive response to the Refugee Council's proposal is on its way and that we will be taking seriously our responsibilities to the world's refugees who are children?

8.22 pm

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): Two of the most fundamental of human rights are the right to a fair trial and the right of appeal. Those two fundamental rights are enshrined in clauses 1 to 4 and in clause 5 of article 14 of the United Nations international convention of 1966 to which Her Majesty's Government are a signatory. That convention applies to both civil and political trials.

Political show trials follow a classic structure. First, they are preceded by a secret inquisition or inquiry, at which the prosecution case is established. The accused is then paraded in front of the public for a sham trial, in which the accused is not permitted any of the normal rights of defence. The prosecution holds sway and the jury is fixed.

What is typical of almost all show trials is that there is no mechanism for appeal. That, in itself, is a breach of one of the most fundamental human rights enshrined in clause 5 of article 14 of the United Nations convention.

We are accustomed to thinking that political show trials happen only in foreign countries under regimes such as those that existed in Nazi Germany or communist Russia. The fact is that they do happen, very occasionally, even in our own country. The late Lord Boothby was subjected to one before the war, and one was slipped past the nose of the House on 7 March 1990. It is important that the House and country know something of what happened.

The accused was charged with no crime, just technical errors. He was therefore given none of the legal protections that the law normally affords to all those accused.

In examining my case, the Select Committee on Members' Interests systematically denied me almost every basic human right to natural justice. All its sessions were held in secret. None of the evidence was heard on oath. The onus of proof was placed squarely on the accused.

Contrary to Standing Orders of the House, I was not allowed even to attend and therefore to hear the evidence of the complainant or any other witness. I was therefore unable to cross-examine any witness in person.

I was specifically denied the authority to call witnesses in person for cross-examination. No representation was allowed to the accused. I was given no rights of discovery in order to put stolen documents selectively submitted against me into proper context.

No statute of limitations was imposed, with the result that great injustices were done by the vague but heavily coaxed recollections of witnesses of events some seven to 12 years earlier. Time pressures were allowed to affect the evidence sessions.

No prosecution case was ever made for me to answer. I was therefore given no structure and no knowledge of what points were considered important by the Committee. It was a vast case, involving some 20 companies over a period of some 12 years.

I was allowed to make no verbal defence to the Committee, but merely to answer almost 1,000 rapid-fire questions put by 11 prosecutors at random during long sessions. No declaration of interests was demanded of members of the Select Committee regarding their own relationships with witnesses. No requirement was made of members even to attend the evidence sessions on matters upon which they would vote.

Despite that catalogue of injustice, I was allowed no appeal. Again, that was in direct violation of article 14 of the United Nations convention.

The subsequent debate in the House was also subjected to quite deliberate and finely engineered pressures of injustice. In particular, there was no official Government-sponsored motion of clemency offered to Members upon which to vote. From the outset, hon. Members were encouraged in the normal parliamentary manner to follow the Leader of the House and vote for his amendment, thereby upholding the prestige of the House.

I was allowed to make not a speech but only an uncontroversial statement which the House was to hear in silence. I was therefore given no opportunity whatsoever to defend myself in the debate and was specifically denied the ability either to question or to challenge the speeches and interventions of other hon. Members in the debate. The speeches of the Leader of the House and the Chairman of the Select Committee in particular were seriously misleading, but went unchallenged.

Despite all that, the tone of the debate was for clemency. However, the vote of the House was along strictly party lines and was fixed or whipped with the Government operating a payroll and informal Whip. We had the spectacle of hon. Members, despite the pretence of a free vote, not being free to vote according to their consciences even in a judicial vote upon a fellow Member.

Finally, to rub salt into the wound, the House changed the rules retrospectively immediately after my sentence. However, there was no mechanism for appeal against that judgment. Again, that is in direct violation of the United Nations international convention.

Here, for example, I ask the House to consider the dreadful implications of the undeclared interest of a member of the Select Committee. Sitting in judgment over me was a member of the Select Committee who was a friend of Mr. David Leigh, the chief complainant, and had a close working relationship with him, with an implied pecuniary relationship.

None of that was declared either to the Select Committee or to the House. In columns 935 and 936 of *Hansard*, the hon. Member even resisted the declaration. That Select Committee member pressed me very hard about a libel case that I had out against Mr. Leigh on the Sama and Chidiac affair. The libel case was sub judice——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I am obviously listening carefully to what the hon. Gentleman is saying, and I know that he feels strongly about the way in which he has been treated, but he is now getting close to casting aspersions on other hon. Members. If he intends to do so, can he assure me that he has given those hon. Members notice that he intended so to do?

Mr. Browne: At the end of the previous parliamentary Session, I signed early-day motion 1210 drawing particular attention to the matter.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am asking the hon. Gentleman whether he has given personal notice that he intended to make these remarks this evening.

Mr. Browne: Only by means of the early-day motion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Then I must ask the hon. Gentleman to move on to other matters and to leave that one. He has had a good run on that point.

Mr. Browne: I was referring of course to the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), who is identified in early-day motion 1210.

My unintentional transgressions resulted in no financial gain to me, harmed no one, and neither influenced nor changed any Government policy. I was, however, subjected to a sustained denial of human rights and to deliberate injustice.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I ask the hon. Member to respect my judgment. He is now casting serious aspersions against other hon. Members. I am glad that he was frank with the Chair in admitting that he had not given notice of his intended remarks to the hon. Members concerned, and accordingly he must desist from that line of argument.

Mr. Browne: I respect your decision, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was offered a guarantee, described more fully in

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early-day motion 1211 of the last Session, that I would not be punished by the House in any way, provided that I stood down from my seat. That offer was entirely unconstitutional, in that it sought to deny to my constituents the right to vote for or against their sitting Member of Parliament at the next general election. Worse still, it was a grave abuse of judicial power.

The House was grossly misled throughout that political show trial. I place on record the fact that I do not hold the vast majority of Back Benchers to blame in any way, for they voted and even spoke in complete ignorance of what was happening and of the facts.

The deliberate injustice of a political show trial still exists, even in our country.

I have submitted a formal appeal to my right hon. Friends the Leader of the House and the Prime Minister, in the hope that they, as honourable gentlemen, will move quickly and decisively in investigating my case and will bring it back to the House in Government time, so that such a thing will never again happen to another right hon. or hon. Member, as it happened to me and to the late Lord Boothby.

I hope that my right hon. Friends will respond positively to my request that the United Nations convention be allowed to operate freely in our country.

8.31 pm

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): A subject mentioned only briefly in tonight's debate is that of constitutional reform—or as I prefer to describe it, the break-up of the Westminster system. Tonight's debate falls on the anniversary of another attempt to blow up the Westminster system, but I stress that it is my intention to change it by democratic means and the force of argument, and by no other method.

Our debate concerns in part the question of freedom, whose definitions include autonomy, self-government, and independence. By those definitions, the Scottish nation remains unfree while we debate freedom in the context of the Queen's Speech. Scotland remains neither autonomous, self-governing, nor independent. It could have chosen otherwise. The Scottish people could have opted, of their own free will, to remain part of the unitary Westminster state and of the indivisible whole that is the union of the United Kingdom. They have long had the perfect political vehicle for doing so, and it is called the Conservative and Unionist party, whose Members of Parliament form the majority in the House, and which is now the only political force in Scotland that still stands for the status quo.

The freedoms that the Tories offer come wrapped inside the Westminster state. They are the freedoms to choose private medicine, benefit from the assisted places scheme in private education, and personal tax cuts. They offer the freedom to say, "I'm all right, Jack", provided that is done under the Tories and under the Union Jack of the Westminster state.

Where is the evidence that the Scottish people want those freedoms within such a political state? It cannot be found in the opinion polls, which regularly show that a huge majority of Scottish people oppose the Conservative and Unionist party and are in favour of some form of autonomy, self-government, or independence. Neither can the evidence be found in the results of the last general election. Although this may be painful for Government members to recall, they represented nothing less than a wholly unambiguous rejection of the status quo.

The evidence cannot be found in the parliamentary by-elections held in Scotland since 1987. Whatever else might be said about the constituencies of Glasgow, Govan, Glasgow, Central, Paisley, North or Paisley, South, they can hardly be described as ringing endorsements of faith in the Westminster state. The Conservative candidates in all four by-elections polled just 10,000 votes from a total of 110,000 cast. The other 100,000 votes were cast against the principles for which the Government stand.

It may be argued that Glasgow and Paisley are not representative of the whole of Scotland. They certainly are not representative of those parts of Scotland that the Tories claim to represent. However, what about the constituency of Kincardine and Deeside, which has traditionally been a Tory seat in a traditionally Tory and prosperous part of Scotland, having little unemployment, and situated well outside Scotland's central belt? It is precisely the kind of seat that should be susceptible to Tory scaremongering about a Scottish Parliament dominated by Strathclyde, yet there is little comfort for the Unionists in Kincardine and Deeside.

The latest opinion polls from that constituency scream out a message that must be heard even within these walls —that by majorities of three and four to one, the voters there intend to support parties that are committed to radically reforming the Westminster state and to establishing a Scottish Parliament. Soon the Unionists will be reduced to the third party in a four-party country and a political irrelevance, and they are on course to becoming an even greater irrelevance after the next general election.

Where is there any recognition in the Queen's Speech of those political realities in Scotland? It recognises that freedom is bound up with acceptance of national identity and the right of small nations to self-determination. The Gracious Speech commits the Government to settling the Palestinian problem and therefore to recognising the inherent right of the Palestinians to self-determination. Similar recognition is extended to Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania.

The Government promise to work for democratic institutions in central and eastern Europe, and even to help build a democratic society in South Africa. They pledge their support also to national self-determination and democratic institutions everywhere in the world, except in the United Kingdom and Scotland. One searches the Queen's Speech in vain for any reference to Scottish freedom, Scottish democracy, or Scottish nationhood. The Queen's Speech is silent on all three. That cannot be right, and neither can it be defended—for the Government's defence is non-existent.

The Government begin by telling the Scottish people that we do not know what is good for us; that autonomy, self-government, and self-determination are bad for us and for our country. It does not seem to matter that we vote time and again for some form of Scottish autonomy, because the Government say that the Scottish people do not know what we are about and that they know what is best for us. That is the worst kind of imperialist and colonialist arrogance, but sadly it is typical of the Government who have dominated the House for the past 12 years.

We are told also that the elected national parliament that we seek will be just another layer of bureaucracy between the people and the kind of country that they want. The Government ignore the 10,000 Scottish Office bureaucrats who are wholly unaccountable to the Scottish people's elected representatives. A Scottish parliament will not create an additional layer of bureaucracy, but will make accountable to the Scottish people an existing level of bureaucracy that currently does not answer to them. In doing so, it will extend the fabric of democracy in our country.

We are told that the democratic forums created in Scotland outside the formal Westminster structures are not democratic. Ministers describe as self-appointed the Scottish Constitutional Convention—a body that contains the majority of Scottish Members of Parliament. It also ranks among its numbers representatives of all Scottish local authorities, all of whom were individually elected by the Scottish people, Scottish political parties, Churches, trade unions, and other Scottish bodies. Yet they try to tell us that that convention is self-appointed and undemocratic.

We are expected to believe that democratic legitimacy rests with the Tory rump here in Westminster—a rump that holds less than one seventh of Scotland's parliamentary seats, and controls not a single council or local authority in Scotland; a rump that cannot even find enough Conservative Back-Benchers to staff the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs. The Government who are responsible for that undemocratic debacle have the nerve to lecture us in Scotland about democracy, freedom and the rights of our people.

Dealing with the Asylum Bill, the Home Secretary described my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) as harbouring an abiding contempt for the views of ordinary voters. He advised my right hon. Friend as follows: when he found himself in a hole, he should stop digging. Let me ask the Home Secretary which party harbours abiding contempt for the views of the Scottish voters, and which party is digging itself into an ever-deepening black Scottish hole. It is not the Labour party; it is the Conservative and Unionist party, which refuses to listen to the democratically expressed views of the Scottish people.

Ministers would do well to heed their own advice, and to stop digging themselves into an ever-deepening Scottish hole. They would do well to begin to climb back into the daylight of mainstream Scottish political life from which they have been excluded for so long. They will have to understand something that they are beginning to understand already in a European context: that political unions depend on the consent of the parties to those unions. If that principle applies at European level, it must be said to apply equally at United Kingdom level.

The survival of the United Kingdom depends on the consent of the Scottish people to the union that created it; that consent in turn depends on constitutional reform, and, specifically, on the establishment of a Scottish Parliament. Unless that is forthcoming, the Scottish people will withdraw their consent from the union that this House represents.

8.41 pm

Mr. Keith Raffan (Delyn): The issues for debate today are rights, freedoms and responsibilities. Like the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion), I wish to address them in the context of constitutional reform of the future government of Wales, at both local and national level.

It may be thought that my party would be wise to approach all matters relating to the reform of local government—its functions, format and finance—with considerable caution. It is now widely accepted on both sides of the House that the reform of local government structure during the Administration of my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) was an unmitigated disaster. This time we must get matters right, and get them right once and for all.

Because of the political necessity of replacing the poll tax, and of doing so before the general election, we are, in my view, dealing with local government reforms the wrong way round—indeed, in reverse order. Surely it would have been more logical, and would have made more sense, to start with functions and internal management, then to go on to format and structure, and finally, move on to the vexed issue of how to finance the new structure with its revised functions. That would have been the common-sense approach; but, sadly, political necessity has dictated otherwise.

The Gracious Speech refers to the introduction of legislation to establish a review of local government structure in England, but makes no such reference to Wales. The Principality is not to have an independent local government commission, the reason ostensibly being the virtually unanimous view in Wales that unitary authorities are desirable.

It is true that the local authority associations are divided. The Assembly of Welsh Counties wants a commission, whereas the Council of Welsh Districts does not. Despite that, I am not sure that the Government are wise not to set up such a commission in the Principality. By not doing so, they open themselves up to the charge that Wales is not receiving equal treatment with England; their action also goes against the words of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, who said on 25 June:

> "We will not repeat the errors of the 1970s. Then, local views were ignored when local government boundaries were redrawn. That must never be allowed to happen again. Under our proposals, we intend to give local people the opportunity to say what sort of structure suits them best. So there is no question of central Government dictating how local government should be organised."

Those are sensible words, but, in Wales, central Government will dictate how local government should be organised.

Yet it must be desirable for the new structure to command as wide a consensus as possible, so that future Governments do not continually tamper with it. That is why I believe that we need an independent local government commission for Wales, as in England, to take evidence, encourage informed debate, do justice to what are, indeed, complex issues and so reach objective, independent conclusions.

The number of authorities and their boundaries must be decided independently. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales for his assurance that the local government boundary commission will draw

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up the boundaries for the new authorities in Wales, but the commission must have complete freedom to create coherent local authorities. The building blocks for those authorities should not be limited by the Welsh Office to existing district council areas. Community council areas make more sensible building blocks and would give the commission more flexibility to create coherent, integrated authorities.

Obviously, the local government boundary commission will have to consider a wide variety of views. It would have been much easier for the commission if it had had at its disposal views collected, collated and analysed by an independent commission.

Unitary authorities will not be fully effective without an all-Wales tier to discuss major infrastructure, transport, strategic planning and other all-Wales issues. Contrary to what the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) said, constitutional matters are discussed within our party; indeed, half the Welsh Conservatives in the House have said that they are in favour of some form of devolution.

Issues such as the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill, which I am delighted to see included in the Gracious Speech,and a Welsh language Bill, which I am sad to see has been excluded, could be discussed much more fully by an all-Wales tier. We need such a tier to respond to the distinctive needs of the Principality and its people. So far, the Government have opposed such a tier, on spurious grounds.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall) looks astonished. I have expressed such views in the House before. Perhaps he is not here very often; if he listens, he may learn a little.

The Government have opposed a Welsh assembly on the spurious ground that the Secretary of State's position in the Cabinet might be somehow threatened as a result. It will be threatened only if the Government want it to be. In the week of the Conservative party conference, the party chairman, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Patten), said that the Government were now considering a new voice for London—a Londonwide strategic body to address Londonwide issues such as environmental, economic, planning and transport problems. I would agree with such a proposal, but if such a body is needed in London, it is needed just as much in the Principality.

At a fringe meeting at the same party conference, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales said:

"If there is one core belief which we all share, it is surely a rejection of centralisation and a firm belief that the source of Europe's strength has always been the diversity of its peoples."

That is the source of Britain's strength, too. If we reject centralisation in Europe—here I agree with the hon. Member for Dundee, East—we should also reject it here in the United Kingdom.

The supreme irony is that, in the European context, the Government are determined to resist the centralisation of power in Brussels at any cost; yet, in the United Kingdom context, they will defend such centralisation in Whitehall as sacrosanct.

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West): Vote Labour, then.

Mr. Raffan: It is not just the Labour party that proposes devolution. Many other parties do. Indeed, my party proposed devolution way back in the late 1960s—almost before the hon. Gentleman was even thought of, and certainly before the present policy of his party was thought of. He may wish to refer to the declaration of Perth, and the Scottish devolution policy that the Conservative party then very wisely proposed I am only sorry that it was not accepted.

In Paris in September, the Prime Minister said:

"We must heed the way the world is moving—towards more decentralised, more accountable structures."

My right hon. Friend was, of course, right; but what is applicable to Europe is also applicable here at home.

8.48 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): The Gracious Speech refers to the implementation of the citizens charter. I doubt whether all the measures contained in the citizens charter will be implemented. In particular, I doubt whether the railways will be privatised in this Session.

The citizens charter is based, in part, on schoolboy humour, which befits something that is put forward by the Prime Minister. Its name apes the people's charters of 1838, 1842 and 1848. The citizens charter has been linked to some extent with the socialist tradition. It is even printed in red, or perhaps puce. It carries the slogan "Raising the Standard". It must have been lifted from the famous phrase

"We will raise the scarlet standard high."

This schoolboy humour technique puts all these things together; they are supposed to be part of the Prime Minister's wish to foist upon us a classless society, built upon the principles to which he adheres. Good fun is intended by pinching socialist traditions and turning them on their heads. However, the joke falls flat when we examine the content of the citizens charter rather than its glib presentation.

Before I deal with the charter, I shall refer to the tradition upon which it is intended to be based and which it is trying to subvert—the people's charter of the 19th century, which was very much concerned with rights, freedoms and a responsible society.

The charter contained six points, the first being universal male suffrage—an ideological slip. The suffragettes added to that the notion of female enfranchisement. The notion that the right to vote should be extended to all males and therefore to most families was a fantastic breakthrough.

The charter's second point was that there should be secret ballots to ensure that the franchise was exercised freely. Two attempts were made to ensure that the House of Commons was more representative of the people than hitherto—first, the ending of property qualifications for Members of Parliament and the payment of MPs. During the early days of the Labour party in Parliament, the make-up of Parliament began to alter due to those changes.

Another point in the charter was that constituencies should have equal electoral districts to overcome the remnants of the rotten boroughs. The final point—never fully implemented—was that there should be annual Parliaments, annually elected. In 1911, there was a move in the direction of more regular Parliaments, when the septennial convention was changed. Provision was then

made for elections to take place within five-year periods. Recently, the tradition has grown up of elections every four years. However, the Government have found themselves in difficulties over that. They have therefore pushed themselves into a corner. The Parliament Act has therefore had to be brought into operation.

What have today's "pretend Chartists" done to the rights that were fought for by the original Chartists? They do not seem to be too keen to hold elections on a regular basis. Even more seriously, however, the Government have undermined the basic principles contained in the 19th century charter—the universal male franchise and, with it, the equality of electoral districts. When redistribution takes place it can take place sensibly only if there is a full and universal franchise.

We know, however, that 1 million people are not on the electoral register. According to an official survey conducted by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, that represents 2·5 per cent. of the electorate. People in Scotland first began to disappear from the electoral register. That pattern was repeated in England and Wales, but it has not been repeated in Northern Ireland. That is due to the introduction of the poll tax. According to the citizens charter, there are to be charters for patients, parents, tenants, job seekers and the social services. However, there is to be no charter to enfranchise people and to ensure that they have the right to vote. That should worry Members of Parliament. The electoral register is in a ghastly state.

What do the Government intend to do between now and the general election to ensure that the missing 1 million return to the electoral register so that there is full enfranchisement at the next election? People died in this country so that the franchise could be extended. People have died in Russia and the Eastern bloc to achieve universal suffrage. They are dying in South Africa to achieve the same objective. We should ensure that there is complete enfranchisement.

What about the citizens charter? What are the six grand points that will stand comparison with the charter of the 19th century? Will people wish to struggle and die for the citizens charter? Does it contain anything that resembles the six points in the 19th century charter? I am afraid that it does not. It is based upon principles that are to be found on page 5 of the citizens charter. It refers to the fact that there will be more privatisation. There is no mention of the national health service, but reference is made to British Rail and London Buses. The buses are to be deregulated. Deregulation in my constituency led to massive petitions about the inadequacy of the bus services in Barrow Hill. Deregulation is to be extended to London. The citizens charter states that there is to be wider competition. The Post Office letters monopoly is to be destroyed. The advantages of the economies of scale within the postal service are to be destroyed due to the competition principle that the Government put forward at every opportunity, whether that principle is relevant or irrelevant.

The citizens charter also states that there is to be additional contracting out, with services bought from the private sector. That is to apply to the NHS, already seriously destabilised by many of the Government's actions. There are to be even more agencies. Fewer questions about public services will be asked in the House because those services will be shunted off to other bodies. No direct answers will be given to those questions. More and more destruction of local government provision will take place.

I do not have time to talk about the remaining points of the charter that will destroy many of the existing provisions in this country. However, I can simply say that the fourth point is that there will be more performance-related pay. The fifth point is that there will be published performance targets, and the sixth is that the standards achieved will be published. I could criticise each of those points in the same way as I criticised the first three. If we are to have charters, they should be based on solid traditions and should not subvert previous charters in the way that this one does.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. The winding-up speeches are expected at 9.20 pm. I hope that the three hon. Members who wish to speak will agree to divide the time between them.

9 pm

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): In the light of the speech of the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes), I welcome the measures in the Gracious Speech to extend competitive tendering. I welcome also the measures to extend privatisation to British Coal. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and my hon. Friends will examine carefully all the arguments put to them about the privatisation of British Rail. We have heard at Question Times and in previous debates about the unsatisfactory situation facing passengers and those wishing to use British Rail for freight. Some Conservative Members and other hon. Members need to be convinced that a measure of privatisation would improve passenger and freight transport.

I welcome various measures in the Gracious Speech, which I regard as an extension of the citizens charter. I welcome particularly the charities legislation. The southern regional office of the Charities Commission, which extends over an area from Cornwall to Sussex—a generous definition of the southern region—has just been established in my constituency. When it was opened by Sir Philip Woodfield, who was responsible for the report on the work of charities, there was concern about whether a measure to implement the report would find its way into this year's legislative programme. I am delighted that it has done so, and I wish my right hon. and hon. Friends success in trying to improve the supervision and financial management of charities, enabling the Charity Commissioners to concentrate on their supervisory role and ensure that only deserving causes receive charitable status.

Following my earlier exchange with the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), I must say that I welcome the Asylum Bill. British citizens need to have their freedoms and rights guaranteed against inflows of people who are not refugees or asylum seekers.

I welcome also the suggestion that joyriding is to be made an offence. As far as I am aware, joyriding has not occurred recently in my constituency, but I know that people there have been killed through reckless driving as a result of alcohol. There is a problem of car theft in my constituency, and I welcome the measures to prevent that.

Mr. Randall: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Nicholson: Time is limited.

I welcome the measures to extend rights in education. The Somerset college of arts and technology in Taunton is looking forward to the freedoms and opportunities it will obtain under the legislation for further and higher education which will transfer further education and sixth-form colleges from local education authority control. I welcome particularly the proposals that were debated yesterday—I tried to intervene during the speech of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science—to extend the parents charter in schools.

It has become clear to me locally that an annual written report on the progress of children is highly desirable. Sometimes parents are not aware that their children are not performing well at school until they receive a written report which exposes the problems. I welcome the fact that schools will be inspected frequently, that a short straightforward summary will be available to parents and that an action plan from the governors will be sent to all parents explaining how they will tackle problems pointed out by the inspectors.

Housing has not been debated extensively today. There is a case for extending the citizens charter to the exchange arrangements for housing to give people the right to know within a certain period whether they are accepted for exchange or, if they are turned down, what the reasons are. People should have the right to receive regular progress reports on where they are in the queue.

My local authority and many other efficiently run Conservative-controlled or until recently Conservative-controlled local authorities in southern England are experiencing considerable problems with waiting lists, because of the shortage of accommodation. I hope that the various nods and winks that we here have recently seen from Ministers—and which building employers' organisations have observed—about changes to allow councils to use more receipts from council house sales will be translated into action because that will be of much importance in the run-up to the general election.

I applaud my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's endorsement of the philosophy and style of Stanley Baldwin. This country needs a period of quiet and caution, which Baldwin typified in the 1920s and 1930s. I am conscious that, in moving the Loyal Address, my right hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker) paid tribute to Leo Amery, who vigorously criticised Baldwin for not using his power effectively enough. No one who has sat through debates in the past four years or has studied the politics of the past 10 years would say that those who have held power have not used it.

I said in the debate on freedoms, rights and responsibilities a year ago that there is a case for rather more caution and care in implementing the power that is wielded here. I am glad to see the assurances in the citizens charter and from the numerous statements of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister that that is how he intends to use his power.

9.6 pm

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): I am delighted to see my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on the Front Bench. I congratulate him on his excellent opening speech, particularly the way in which he stressed that law and order is a top priority of the Government. His speech was in sharp distinction to that of the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), who made it clear that more immigration is the top priority of the Labour party. All he said on law and order was that the police should be put under the control of local councils. That has rightly been rejected by the public, who remember what happened to the police when Labour was last in power—their numbers were reduced and their morale sabotaged.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will be interested to hear that I recently conducted a survey of opinion in my constituency. Not surprisingly, law and order emerged as the top issue. In the summer recess, I had six meetings with many constituents who were anxious to know what could be done to improve law and order. Meetings were attended by as many as 160 people, who made it clear they are fed up with high and persistent crime and particularly with gangs of juvenile delinquents. There is seen to be a problem with bored youth and I hope that our proposals on the local management of schools will help to deal with it.

I know that a Home Office working party is studying the causes of crime, but I should like to invite my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to visit Bolton to see the police station on a Saturday night and to meet our 14-year-old Houdini who has committed more than 140 crimes while supposedly under the care of the local authority. The police are fed up with arresting juvenile delinquents and returning them to the care of the local authority.

I suggest to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary that some new initiatives are needed. A reply to a parliamentary question that I tabled says:

"My right hon. Friend is exploring what more can be done to develop policies for reducing the number of crimes committed by young people." [*Official Report*, 24 July 1991; Vol. 195, c. *580*.]

The Home Office should open a branch in Bolton so that it can see what is happening and become involved.

What would that branch do? For a start, there are 1,200 neighbourhood watch schemes in Bolton. The police say that they do not have the resources to supervise and organise them, so why does not the Home Office have a branch in Bolton to supervise and direct the efforts and energies of the people involved in those schemes? That would give the Home Office direct involvement in crime prevention. If it opened a crime prevention shop, I am sure that those premises would have many callers with all sorts of suggestions about what should be done to reduce crime.

Such a branch could also advise on setting up local action groups. That was suggested in the Home Office report "Safer Communities", which was published during the summer. It said that local action groups should be encouraged. Let us have someone on the ground who can advise local communities what they can do. Perhaps the Home Office could also encourage the recruitment of special constables. The police force does not seem to give every encouragement to the idea of recruiting more specials.

The police in Bolton have told me that more research should be carried out. They would like the Home Office to fund a study by Manchester university into many of the causes of crime, especially into what happens with bail offenders. I believe that a report on bail offenders will be published tomorrow.

The police in Bolton would like the research study also to look into the issue of juveniles having the right to silence. The subject of unruly youngsters needs to be considered. Mr. John Watson, who has responsibility at the town hall for crime prevention, does not think that offenders should be released until they have shown proper remorse. That would certainly be a new line on youth custody. Many offenders who come out of youth custody centres go back in—I believe that recidivism is 80 per cent. If we did not let people out until they showed proper remorse, perhaps the rate would not be as high.

The courts, not social services, should decide what is to be done with unruly youngsters. At the moment, social services say that they can take care of those youngsters, but those people merely commit more crimes. The absconding level is far too high. A police survey in the neighbouring county of Lancashire showed that last year 950 people absconded from care. I do not know the figures for Greater Manchester or Bolton, but I am sure that they would be even higher. That matter was touched on by my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) in an Adjournment debate on 16 October.

I am in favour of stiffer sentences and unlimited fines being imposed on those who repeatedly commit car offences. With corrective courses, people would be encouraged to do something positive with their time instead of committing more offences. Recently, someone set light to five vehicles in one night—I do not know whether it was our friend Houdini, released from social services. That 14-year-old has already fathered one child, perhaps more.

Conscious of the time, I should like to wind up. I ask my right hon. Friend the Minister to comment on the idea of having a branch of the Home Office in Bolton. I do not have time to speak about other possibilities for that branch, such as involvement in immigration control and in issuing the new driving licences, with photographs attached. I am sure that there would be plenty of work to keep it extremely busy.

9.13 pm

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): I, too, wish to compliment my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on the measures which were announced in the Gracious Speech to improve the prospects for law and order. We know that we will never get far into a debate on those terrible twins, law and order—"Laura and Nora"—before we hear of the single parent, the mother on her own who, according to the mythology, is responsible for many of the problems in our society—not least all the unruly children who are constantly blamed for many of the problems.

I do not believe that there are many men in this place who believe in anything other than immaculate conception. We never hear about the fathers of these children. We never hear talk of ways to control the promiscuity of males in this place or outside it. All we hear about is irresponsible young women who produce children who then run around the streets stealing from cars and stealing from shops. We are given to understand that it is that small group of women who cause all the problems.

It is salutary to remind ourselves that there are more than 10—I think that it is more like 100—males in our prisons for every woman. There are well under 1,000 women in prison, and the number of those who have committed serious crimes can be counted almost on the fingers of one hand. I wish that we could say that for the male population. To suggest that, with the male population largely controlling our society, women are somehow responsible for all the law and order problems is not only insulting, but ridiculous. On behalf of Sharon and Tracey in Essex, and on behalf of all the other women who are frequently insulted and who are held up as loose-living women, I say that the law and order problem is a problem of males.

While talking about that subject and while talking about young women, who often bring up children on their own, we should not accept the criticism that we always get from the Opposition—that all the problems are somehow down to capitalism, the profit motive and market forces. Quite the contrary: it is the welfare state, introduced with the best of motives, which is largely responsible for taking away from individuals their responsibility for their actions and for bringing up their children.

The welfare system rewards unsocial behaviour, if that is what one says about women who bring up children on their own, because it gives them benefits that trap them in that position. In many ways the system does not allow them to get out of that situation because, if they want to work and help themselves, they are penalised for doing so. That is the first aspect of the welfare state that contributes to the problems of women raising children on their own.

We then have the system of destroying the private landlord in our society, which has led to the establishment of low-income estates where people of comparable incomes are herded together. The children in those conditions, often because their mothers—and sometimes fathers—are not very well off, are often left in groups on their own for long periods. That does not happen because the parents want it, because they often have to go out to work to help support the children. What such families need is a helping hand with places for those children to go and things for them to do. My solution would be to enable such people to pay for more help and child care, either before the children go to school or when they come out of school and need more supervision. It is possible for us to construct policies that will enable individual parents to obtain such child care and to pay for it themselves.

We then have the problems of our state education system. Many of our schools are no-hope institutions in which children feed on each other, learning bad behaviour and feeling that while they are in the school, there is not much point in trying to behave and to learn because the curriculum does not cater for their lifestyle or their needs.

The attitude towards women and responsibility needs to be looked at carefully. Most women would like the freedom to be able to take more responsibility on their own shoulders. I know that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office, shares my concern that we should do more to assist women who want to go to work, not to pay for tights or lipstick, but to help to contribute to the family income and to be independent. I hope that my party will introduce policies that will enable more women to do that. They could contribute through their own earnings to nurseries or creches, or for child minders before school, after school, or in the school holidays. All those are intimate problems for women in our society which is often not appreciated in the House.

I would like us to have policies that give women the freedom to shop when they need to. The Opposition are very backward-looking on the issue. They do not want shops to open in the evenings and at weekends when

[Mrs. Teresa Gorman]

women can go shopping. We need such freedom for women. We need support for the opening of shops at times other than between 9 am and 5 pm, when many women are at work and cannot use them.

Women would also like the freedom to go to the doctor's in the evening and to do all sorts of other things such as taking the kids to the dentist. Such activities require a much more flexible society so that women have more freedom to avail themselves of such services. That would make life easier for women. It would not make them more irresponsible, but would enable them to take on more of the responsibility for raising their children. Child rearing is part of women's nature and they do not need any lectures about it from this place.

This debate is about rights, freedom and law and order. As a woman, I get sick and tired of the idea of men handing down rights to women. It is a matter of giving us this and that to keep us quiet. Women represent half of our community and they contribute a good 75 per cent. to the running of our society. They raise the children and they see that all you chaps get your shirts washed and ironed and that there is dinner in the oven. By and large most children in our country are brought up decently and nicely. We should remember that when we go on about the problems of children in the streets.

I want policies—I am sure that my party will introduce them—that increasingly reflect the needs of women so that they have the ability to make choices for themselves. The rights of women should not be handed down to them: they should be an integral part of our society. When women can take on more responsibilities—because we have made that possible—we will hear less of the type of condemnation, which always features in such debates, of women, particularly single ones, who are held responsible for so many of the problems in society.

Let us always remember that, for every child who is brought up by a single woman, there is a man out there who has shuffled off his responsibilities. It is to the great credit of the Conservative party that it has been the first to introduce a Bill to pin such fellows down and make them contribute, as they rightly should. I look forward to the day when we have genetic fingerprinting so there will not be any argument from men as to who is responsible for raising the child.

9.21 pm

Ms. Jo Richardson (Barking): Today, a number of my hon. Friends have expressed their regret at some of the omissions from the Queen's Speech. However, I was riveted by the speech of the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson), who welcomed a measure that he thought was in the Queen's Speech. I am sure that it will highlight his constituents' day when they read the record of the debate and learn that their representative cannot read. I hope that he will study the Queen's Speech.

I remind the House that we have had a debate on rights, freedoms and responsibilities for many years. In many respects, we all regret that, because we had all hoped that, one day, the Government would see the light and get the balance right when distributing rights, freedoms and responsibilities. Sadly, we still have to keep on reminding them.

It is about time that the Government accepted their responsibility for all sorts of things—for example, the rising unemployment levels, the rundown of the health service, the lack of measures to reduce homelessness and the failure of their economic policy to generate growth and investment to end the recession so that we can build a better Britain.

The fundamental difference between Conservative policy and philosophy and our own is at its sharpest when we talk about freedoms. The Government have eroded our freedoms dramatically. Power has been concentrated in the Cabinet and in the hands of the Prime Minister, with very few checks and balances.

Public confidence in the judiciary is at an all-time low—hardly surprising, considering recent miscarriages of justice such as the Guildford Four and the Birmingham Six cases. Now doubts have been cast on the justice meted out to the Tottenham Three, and who knows what other cases will come to light? I have an interest in the case of Sara Thornton, and I hope that at some stage the Home Office will relent and review that case. It is grossly unfair that she should have been sentenced to life having been provoked by her partner over a period into killing him.

The Government have been responsible for much of the secrecy surrounding many of their policies. They attempted, for instance, to suppress the publication and reporting of "Spycatcher". This Government instigated the raid on the BBC to confiscate the Zircon tapes. They badgered and bullied the broadcasting service to stop the showing of "Real Lives" and "Death on the Rock". This Government removed the right to belong to a trade union from the workers at GCHQ, and they abolished the democratically elected Greater London council. That is a sorry record of the erosion of civil liberties and the curtailment of freedoms.

As my right hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary emphasised, a Freedom of Information Act which we would introduce would go a long way to improving all our freedoms. We should have, and we will have, a right to know. Devolved government in the form of Scottish and Welsh assemblies and regional government will make for much more open government than we have had in the past 12 years.

The only freedom that the Government appear to understand is the freedom of the market even though it has so patently failed to deliver enough housing, child care or training. The Opposition understand—Conservative Members appear not to—that there can be no freedom without equality, and equality is underpinned by rights.

The hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) referred to more genuine equality for women. I hope that the Government will listen to some of what she had to say and enshrine it in law.

Most women are not convinced by the Prime Minister's new role as the champion of women's rights, not least because he was the first Prime Minister in 25 years to fail to appoint a woman to his Cabinet. He claims that there are women "poised in the wings". If so, why not invite them in? Why wait until after a general election? There are women Tory Members on the Back Benches now, so why not appoint them? That would be a good move—but far be it for me to advise the Prime Minister on that point.

The Prime Minister also says that it is a disgrace that there are not more women on public boards. Since he became Prime Minister he has had a chance—his predecessor had a chance, too—to increase women's

representation on such boards, but between 1985 and 1990 we know that their representation rose by a dismal 0·3 per cent. What a record! The Prime Minister has suddenly discovered this problem and intends to put it right——

Mr. Maclennan: Would the hon. Lady have supported the resignation of the Home Secretary over the escapes from Brixton? That would have enabled space to be cleared.

Ms. Richardson: No, I would not.

Women are not convinced by the Prime Minister's conversion. It is all very well to discuss with industry the promotion of women to board rooms and senior managerial positions, but in general women see that, if the Government do not tackle low pay and unequal pay and provide some help with child care, women will not in any sense be equal or have any kind of equal rights. There is no point in merely asking industry to promote equal opportunities policies. Many such policies have to be enshrined in a legal framework to ensure that employers implement them.

As the hon. Member for Billericay said, the lack of child care is an enormous obstacle to women's participation in the work force. The Prime Minister believes that employers should provide it or that women should be able to afford it. That leaves out of account many millions of women in low-paid and under-valued jobs. Any notion of the Government playing a role in increasing the provision of child care seems to escape the Prime Minister.

I was at the recent launch of Opportunity 2000, an excellent initiative by Business in the Community. The Prime Minister was quick to claim the credit for abolishing the tax on workplace nurseries. He failed to shoulder the responsibility, which Government should shoulder, for imposing the tax in the first place. He also failed to acknowledge that there are other forms of child care which should form a list of options available to women to enable them to combine their home and work responsibilities.

The Prime Minister said that over half the population "go through life like a hobbled horse in a steeplechase." He again failed to acknowledge the part that he could play in reducing the odds which are stacked against women and shackle them in the way that he described. The Government have pursued policies which have added to and certainly not loosened women's shackles.

Instead of providing a legal framework, the Government have blocked the legislation that is on offer to them. For example, they have argued against almost every EC directive which would have improved women's poor position in the work force, increased their opportunities and given them increased freedom to work. They have blocked directives on parental leave, on part-time workers and on maternity rights. They have removed the right of women who work in small firms to return to work after childbirth and, by changing the law, they have blocked the right of married women on employment training to claim child-care. They have removed the right of women to have child-care costs taken into account when claiming income support, and they have prevented those women from having the freedom to take up part-time work to improve their incomes.

The Queen's Speech mentions the Government's intention to enhance competitive tendering for local authority services. If the Government are serious about promoting equal opportunities, I challenge them to reintroduce contract compliance, which they outlawed and which provides genuine incentives and practical advice to firms that wish to follow equal opportunities policies.

Many hon. Members spoke about crime. I place firmly in the Government's lap the responsibility for failing to tackle crime. The fear and the reality of crime constrict many people's lives. The British crime survey shows that many women are afraid to go out alone at night. A disturbingly high number, particularly of elderly women and women from ethnic minorities, are scared to go out during the day as well. Effectively, that means that women of all classes, sizes, shapes and backgrounds are prisoners in their own homes.

I am sure that hon. Members have talked to constituents, many of them young women with children, who say bitterly that they feel trapped in their environment and dare not go out at night, even to have a cup of tea with a friend. That is a serious situation, for which the Government must take some responsibility, because they have not introduced policies to correct it. They promised a crackdown on crime, but crime has doubled. With the crumbling of housing estates, ill-lit and hostile city centres and a dirty, rundown transport system that has reduced the numbers of guards, conductors and station staff, the growth of crime has been fostered. We must not lose sight of the fact that such decay contributes to crime, and that is something that the Government acknowledge.

The Government have failed to provide us with a comprehensive crime prevention strategy that includes tackling the causes of crime. When we come to power next year, the Labour party will start to reduce poverty and deprivation and begin the regeneration of our cities. We shall encourage local authorities to introduce safe lighting, improve public transport and promote effective partnerships between the community and the police. That will be a real start on reducing the level of crime.

I could talk about many more rights, but the last one that I shall mention is the right to a decent home. I am surprised that there is nothing in the Queen's Speech about increasing house building or about plans to get the homeless into a home of their own, thereby giving them a right that they do not now enjoy. I believe, as I am sure that other hon. Members do, that one of the basic rights of every individual is that to a place to live. While we live in a society in which many millions of people, for all sorts of reasons but mostly because of the lack of decent housing on offer, are homeless, we are denying them the basic right to live decently and properly.

The Government have been talking about taking measures against squatting. Nobody approves of squatting, whether it is in privately or publicly owned property, but the fact is that the majority of people who squat do so because they have nowhere to live. Therefore, the Government would be creating an offence that is not based on the person's intentions. We must look at these things in the proper perspective.

The Government insist every year that we have a proper balance of rights, freedoms and responsibilities, and they are now littering the country with charters that outline the rights of individuals. Unfortunately, citizens have fewer rights and fewer real freedoms than ever before. At the same time, the Government heap responsibilities upon them with which they cannot cope. These are the responsibilities of finding a home, of finding a job without proper training, of keeping a job and of paying a mortgage, which some people can no longer afford. The

[Ms. Richardson]

Government believe that it is right to heap all these responsibilities upon individuals, and the Labour party believes that there should be some backing and support from the Government rather than leaving responsibility solely with the individual and the family.

We believe that everyone has the right to be treated equally and fairly, with decency and respect. When we have a Labour Government—as I have said, 1992 will bring one—we shall embark upon the road of giving every citizen the dignity that he or she deserves.

9.41 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mrs. Angela Rumbold): The title of the debate—"Rights, freedoms and responsibilities"—obviously offers opportunities for participants heavily to focus on their own point of view. It is not surprising that the debate has followed that pattern in true form. On the whole, Opposition Members have tended to concentrate on rights while my right hon. and hon. Friends have concentrated on freedoms and responsibilities as well as on rights. I would say that the acquisition of rights and the exercise of freedoms in any democracy automatically entails the necessity of individuals to shoulder responsibilities. With that in mind, I want to take up the various issues that have been raised in the debate.

The issues fall into five different subjects—citizens' rights, prisons, the crime of joyriding as we have loosely described it, political asylum and women and womens' rights. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have put before the House the various rights that they would like it to consider. The hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) who I am sad to say is no longer in his place, my hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr. Raffan) and the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) are looking for a change in the way in which our democratic processes are exercised. The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) set out what a putative Labour Government might give, for example, to hon. Members representing parts of Scotland or Wales, or even Northern Ireland, if such an Administration were ever to be elected.

I have to remind hon. Members who represent Scottish constituencies that they have not done too badly under a Conservative Government for the past 12 years. Considerable amounts of public money have gone into Scotland's coffers. The opinion polls have not responded with an admission, as it were, of the Government's generosity. I suspect that England's generosity will be recognised a little late when those who represent Scottish constituencies discover that it is easier to manage with the helpful hand of Government than on one's own. I suspect that the same warning should be given to those colleagues who wish to have the same sort of devolution brought in elsewhere.

My hon. Friends the Members for Waveney (Mr. Porter), for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) and for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) concentrated on different aspects of the citizens charter. It is interesting that the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton on housing were somewhat reflected by the remarks of the hon. Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson) when she replied to the debate on behalf of the Opposition. Their observations should be noted by my ministerial colleagues in the Departments which have housing responsibilities. I undertake to draw that to their attention.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) made an interesting point. He had looked closely at his constituency, which is a microcosm of what happens across the country, and it was no surprise to me when he said that law and order featured highly in the concerns of his constituents. I suspect that they feature highly in the concerns of everybody's constituents. It is something that any Government or any Member of Parliament would be foolish to ignore.

My hon. Friend cited some good examples of matters that he believes to be worth pursuing. I am glad to note that there are 1,200 neighbourhood watch schemes in his constituency. It is an excellent record, to which many of us should aspire within our constituencies. He spoke of the importance of special constables, so he will be glad to hear that we are encouraging an increase in their numbers. I very much liked his idea of a crime prevention shop, and I shall certainly discuss that with my colleagues, the Minister of State and the Secretary of State at the Home Office.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West made an important point about his local airport.

The hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) spoke about the Chartists and drew an interesting parallel with the citizens charter. I do not share his gloomy view. He must know only too well that our citizens charter will give back power to the people who use public services. It will put the citizens, not the bureaucrats, first. It will make and measure the public standards that the individual has the right to expect. The rights of users of public services will be set out clearly and concisely.

The hon. Gentleman should not fear the other measures that the citizens charter will bring forth. More competitive tendering will, as it has in the past, improve the quality of public services. It will certainly make a considerable difference to the individuals who receive those services. I know that the hon. Gentleman has considerable interest in franchise and enfranchisement. We do not have any plans to force people to register or, indeed, to vote. I suspect that the hon. Gentleman would find a great deal of resistance to any such measure, were he to introduce one.

I do not want to omit any hon. Member who has contributed to this debate, but I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne) will understand if I do not comment on his speech. It is important to draw it to the attention of hon. Members, but I can go no further than that.

I was a little surprised by the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook's attack on the prison mutiny Bill. I agree with my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) that deterrents are an important aspect of the criminal justice system. Without them, where would we be in trying to maintain any form of criminal justice? It is an important Bill, which also incorporates further offences relating to people who abscond or who mistreat and maltreat prison property. Again, that is something about which we feel strongly.

I must tell the right hon. Gentleman that the Woolf report, which was published earlier this year—and which we spent a great deal of time studying—has resulted in my right hon. Friend bringing forward a White Paper that accepts virtually every one of the report's recommendations. It is a bit rich of Opposition Members to criticise the

Government's track record on what has happened to prisons. We inherited a disgraceful prison estate. It was in a filthy, decrepit and ruined state. The previous Labour Government made no investment in the prison system. We have had to invest billions of pounds in order to improve the prison estate.

Under no circumstances would we want to leave such an inheritance for those who have to go into the prisons and we have no intention of doing so since we have a programme based on the Woolf recommendations which we shall pursue in order to improve not only the prison estate and the prison buildings but the regimes within the prisons. Those improvements are set out clearly in my right hon. Friend's White Paper and we shall look forward to completing that programme in the next 10 years. It is important that, quite apart from the Criminal Justice Bill in which measures are being taken to ensure that those people who need not be sent to prison can do purposeful community service, we should also look carefully at what happens to those people who have to go to prison.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) talked about the number of people in police cells. My right hon. Friend clearly said that he does not welcome the current situation. It is not one that we wish to see continuing. A number of things can be done about that and those steps are being taken quickly and treated seriously.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: The Minister told me all this at Easter when she promised me that the numbers ccontained in police cells in Greater Manchester would go down during the next six months. In fact, the numbers have gone up. What can she do tonight to convince the police officers of Greater Manchester who look after the prisoners in police cells that the situation will not continue for another 18 months?

Mrs. Rumbold: I accept and I am not surprised by the hon. Gentleman's criticism. Contrary to all the predictions of the experts and statisticians, we have seen an unprecedented surge in the number of people entering custody. That, I think the hon. Gentleman will accept, is not something that one could easily handle in a short period. A substantial amount of prison estate will be coming into operation in the next two or three months which will alleviate the great difficulties that the police are currently experiencing in Manchester. I should put it on record that we are grateful for the assistance that the police have given us in this matter. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we have every intention of taking note of that.

Joyriding is an important matter to which a number of hon. Members have drawn attention. The hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Mr. Young) and my hon. Friends the Members for Meriden (Mr. Mills), for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill), for Taunton and for Warrington, South (Mr. Butler) have touched upon that unpleasant crime. I give the House the categorical assurance that a Government Bill will be introduced to deal with that as a matter of urgency.

It is important that we increase the penalties for taking vehicles without consent when that offence is aggravated by damage or dangerous driving. We are considering a maximum sentence of two years' imprisonment and an obligatory disqualification where appropriate. It is important that that message is clearly understood by all hon. Members. I am grateful to all those hon. Members who have brought the matter to our attention.

The subject of asylum was of great interest to many hon. Members, not least to the hon. Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor). I emphasise again that there is nothing in the Government's proposal that is detrimental to the interests of genuine refugees in Britain. The new appeal rights and faster recognition of their status represents clear benefits for genuine refugees. At present, as has been acknowledged by Opposition Members, there are those who manipulate the system and evade the normal immigration controls. It has to be said on behalf of all residents in Britain that that is detrimental to all who live here and we cannot allow it to continue out of genuine fairness to those who have settled in Britain within the law.

There can be little doubt that that is an important measure and it is in no way the alarmist measure that Opposition Members were at pains to try to portray it as. That is a scandalous thing to do. The hon. Member for Belfast, South said as much, and the hon. Member for Eccles raised a point about refugee children.

There is a problem with children who arrive in the United Kingdom on their own. If parents are granted refugee status, their children will automatically share it. However, if children arrive by themselves, they must go through some process or another, as would any asylum seeker, regardless of their age. They will be taken into care and looked after by the social services. I hope that that information satisfies the hon. Member for Eccles. We should see fewer such cases, and eventually none at all, at immigration centres.

Some children who arrive in the United Kingdom with adults are abandoned, and are found wandering around the airport. They must be fed and given shelter as a matter of urgency. Children form only a small percentage of those seeking asylum. Over the past two to three years, they numbered about 200 out of a total of 85,000 asylum seekers. We are examining the Refugee Council's recommendations and will consider them with the Department of Health. Equally, we are examining the convention on the rights of the child, as the hon. Member for Eccles wants us to do.

The hon. Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson) was encouraging about the Operation 2000 launch that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister attended last week, at which he gave his blessing to a considerable initiative by the private sector, in which 60 blue chip companies committed themselves to examining targets for women and ensuring that women achieve a better place in business, receive the correct training, and are encouraged to climb the ladder and to go through the so-called glass ceiling.

I refute the hon. Member for Barking's claim that Britain's progress with women's rights is not as good as elsewhere in Europe. The Government have been taking seriously their responsibilities in relation to European directives. We have negotiated on each of the points that the hon. Lady mentioned, and are working hard to ensure that directives do not impinge on or impair the hard-fought battles that women have won in respect of their employment.

It is important to note that Britain has the highest number of working women in the European Community. Admittedly, most of them work part-time, but that is because they want to do so, because that happens to fit in

[Mrs. Rumbold]

well with the domestic responsibilities that a substantial number of British women prefer to have. Opposition Members should recognise that women are working slowly but sensibly towards the benefits that they want to enjoy, and that they do not want to be subjected to the patronising and paternalistic attitudes that are adopted by some socialists, who would tell women, "This is what you must do." That point was sensibly made by my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman).

As to the eternal argument we have about women making their mark in Parliament as elsewhere, I will say to Opposition Members that the way in which they will get more women Members of Parliament is to work hard to ensure that 50 per cent. of Members of Parliament are women, rather than just the one or two who must be positively discriminated for, so that they are selected as candidates. Hon. Members should remember that, for 11 out of the 12 years of Conservative Government, we have had a woman Prime Minister. They should also remember that, out of 14 women on the Conservative Benches, four are now Ministers of State—one of the highest ranks in government. That is a good record.

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

Funeral Expenses

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sackville.]*

10 pm

Sir John Hunt (Ravensbourne): I am very glad to have the opportunity to raise a matter that was first brought to my attention at my constituency surgery on 6 July this year. That morning I received a call from Mrs. E. M. Serbey, an elderly widow living in Hayes, in my constituency. She told me of her distress that her claim for a social fund payment to meet the funeral expenses of a Mr. William H. Newlyn had been rejected.

Mr. Newlyn, who was disabled, had been a lodger at Mrs. Serbey's home. When he died, she paid for his funeral out of her own pocket and out of the goodness of her own heart, simply because no one else would take on the responsibility. It therefore came as a great shock to her when she was subsequently informed that her claim for reimbursement of the funeral expenses had been rejected by the Department of Social Security—a decision which, I concede, was later upheld on appeal.

The problem, and the complication, is that, although Mrs. Serbey was in receipt of community charge benefit both before and after the date of the funeral, and continues to be so entitled—and thus eligible for funeral payment—it seems that, owing to an oversight, she failed to complete the reapplication form for the benefit when it was sent to her by Bromley council in August last year. As no form had been received by Bromley council by 11 November, her claim expired.

Mrs. Serbey's benefit payments were then not restored until 14 December. There was thus a gap of approximately a month, during which Mr. Newlyn's funeral took place. The crucial point, as I see it, however, is that Mrs. Serbey remained technically entitled to community charge benefit throughout that period. As far as I am aware, that is not in dispute.

I therefore wrote to the Minister on 9 August, setting out the facts of the case and asking whether, in view of the special and unusual circumstances, a payment to Mrs. Serbey could be authorised to cover the funeral costs. Although my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, who replied, was sympathetic to Mrs. Serbey's predicament, I am afraid that her response was otherwise negative and disappointing. She declined to make the ex gratia payment for which I had been asking.

It was at that point that I decided to pursue Mrs. Serbey's claim by means of an Adjournment debate. In the meantime, she is being pressed for payment by the funeral directors, Messrs. J. and R. Killick, who have shown great patience but who are now understandably anxious for their account in the sum of £803 to be settled.

As a result of an act of kindness, Mrs. Serbey is being subjected to very considerable stress and anxiety. She assures me that she has no other way of raising the sum of money involved. Moreover, she tells me that she is having sleepless nights because of her worries about how the money is to be found. I look to my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, whose kindness and consideration in these matters is well known to the House, to redress what I regard as a great unfairness and relieve the anxieties of an elderly widow living in my constituency.

10.5 pm

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Nicholas Scott): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Ravensbourne (Sir J. Hunt) for the clear and measured way in which he has set out the case for his constituent. He is well known for his sympathetic attitude to cases such as this, and he has stated Mrs. Serbey's case in a very compelling way. It is an unfortunate case. When these problems arise, they are usually combined with grief and worry for the person concerned. I take this opportunity to extend my sympathy to my hon. Friend's constituent in her bereavement and the subsequent difficulties she has faced.

There is no dispute between my hon. Friend and me as to the facts of the case as he outlined them. There are, however, two important points that I wish to make clear now. First, Mrs. Serbey's claim is still the subject of an appeal that has been adjourned, pending further information which is being obtained from the London borough of Bromley.

Secondly, and in parallel with that, one of the members of staff from the district office of the Benefits Agency who is dealing with Mrs. Serbey visited her recently to see whether it might be possible to help her further immediately. The visit was arranged because Mrs. Serbey's circumstances have changed since her original claim. The final outcome is still not settled, but I can assure my hon. Friend that officials are doing everything that they can to help his constituent in her present difficulties.

I will, if I may, briefly set out the background to the Government's general policy and arrangements for help with the cost of funerals. My hon. Friend will be aware that there has been a series of different arrangements. The original death grant was a fixed sum benefit, introduced in 1949. Only those who had paid the relevant contributions were eligible. The death grant was eventually abolished in 1987. Then there were exceptional needs payments and later single payments to people who received supplementary benefit. The payments made special provision for a small number of low-income households which had responsibility for the funeral of a close relative.

After 1987, those schemes were replaced by the current social fund funeral payments scheme. In my view, it has a number of important and valuable features. It provides a more effective way to target resources than the previous schemes. At the same time, it has extended the range of people on low incomes who are eligible for help. The move to include people on family credit, housing benefit and community charge benefit, as well as those on income support, has meant a significant increase in the number of low-income groups who receive real help with the cost of a funeral. It is a self-indexing scheme. No longer do we have to set an amount and uprate it by some index. Because entitlement is to the cost of a simple funeral, as the cost of funerals rises, the sum to which those people are entitled rises automatically.

The other point, which is of significance in the case of Mrs. Serbey, is that it is a regulated, not a discretionary system. It is not up to adjudication officers to use their discretion. If the regulations are followed, a person who qualifies will receive a funeral payment.

In general, the scheme is working well. There were almost 50,000 awards in the last financial year, costing about £30 million. The average cost per funeral was just over £600. Over a third of these awards went to people who were not on income support but on one of the other benefits, usually housing benefit, but in the case of Mrs. Serbey it was community charge benefit.

No matter how well a scheme works—I believe that the scheme is working in a sensible and sensitive manner—there will always be difficulties for some individuals, and that is the case for my hon. Friend's constituent. As my hon. Friend has pointed out, Mrs. Serbey was not awarded a funeral payment, because she was not receiving a qualifying benefit at the appropriate time—her qualifying benefit was community charge benefit.

As I have said, I regret that there is a limited amount I can say about this case at this time, as there is still an outstanding appeal against the decision of the adjudication officer. It would not be appropriate for me to comment in detail prior to the outcome of that appeal. This appeal has been adjourned until further information is obtained from the borough which is responsible for the award of community charge benefit. As I have already said, our local office is trying its best to see whether there is any other way in which they can help Mrs. Serbey.

The main reason why the problem arose—there is no difference between my hon. Friend and myself on this—is that, for a brief period, Mrs. Serbey did not claim community charge benefit. However, as my hon. Friend said, there was no lack in her underlying entitlement to the benefit. I am always sorry when someone loses by claiming too late, benefit to which they might have been entitled. The Department and the agencies do everything possible, through forms, leaflets, freeline services and other methods, to alert people to the benefits available and the time limits for claiming them. Local social security offices, citizen's advice bureaux and other organisations co-operate with us in trying to achieve that.

However, I think that my hon. Friend will agree that it is for the individual concerned to ensure that they have claimed all the benefits appropriate to their circumstances. In this case, the benefit is administered by the local authority. As I understand it, the authority sent a reminder to Mrs. Serbey to renew her application, but no such renewal application was received.

Our social security system must be tied to precise dates of claim and time limits. If claims were not linked to precise dates or there were no time limits, it would be possible for people to assert their right to a particular benefit some considerable time after the event. In many cases, it would be impossible to decide whether the entitlement conditions had been satisfied. The extra administrative burden involved in deciding such cases could undermine our ability to pay benefit promptly to those making their claims on time.

I am satisfied that the local office is doing its best to assist Mrs. Serbey. I am satisfied that the information available to her is adequate and that she is being closely advised. Until the outcome of that work and the outcome of her appeal are known, there is little more that I can add. I reiterate my understanding of and sympathy for my hon. Friend's constituent in her difficulties and my hope that they will be resolved swiftly.

Sir John Hunt: I am grateful for my right hon. Friend's sympathetic response. Can he give any indication of when the result of the appeal is likely to be known? This matter has been hanging over Mrs. Serbey for so long that it would be helpful to know when the result is likely to be known.

Mr. Scott: I must be careful, because these matters are decided by independent adjudicating authorities. Before the weekend, the local office delivered to Mrs. Serbey a form for a fresh application. It was hoped that she would sign and return it to the person who delivered it. That was not possible. The sooner she can return it, the sooner the matter might be resolved by the adjudicating authorities in, I hope, her favour, but I cannot guarantee that.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fourteen minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 6 November 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT

Council House Sales

1. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council houses have been sold to sitting tenants in England since May 1979.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Michael Heseltine): Between April 1979 and June 1991 almost 1·3 million tenants bought their homes from English local authorities and new towns.

Mr. Knox: Does my right hon. Friend agree that that figure is a measure of the popularity of selling council houses? But should not more of the proceeds from such sales be devoted to building additional houses, particularly for the elderly and one-parent families?

Mr. Heseltine: I know of my hon. Friend's concern, which is shared by the Government. My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that the Housing Corporation's spending is set to rise from £1·1 billion in 1990-91 to more than £2 billion in 1993-94. Many of the people to whom he referred will gain from that.

Mr. Winnick: Why not take care to ensure that homes which have been sold off are replaced? Is not the Secretary of State concerned that nearly 7,000 families per month are losing their homes because they cannot keep up their mortgage repayments? Under the proposed scheme many such people will be unable to remain in their homes. Will the Secretary of State recognise at long last that there is an acute housing crisis in Britain? He talks about the number of dwellings that are sold off, but we want to ensure that people who are in such desperate plight can live in affordable rented accommodation.

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman wants to keep people living in council houses, which they want to own, under Labour control for Labour party benefit. We were elected to pursue different policies and that is what we are doing.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that he will be visiting Norwich on 15 November? When he does so, will he take the opportunity to persuade Norwich city council to take a more imaginative approach not only to the sale of council houses but to provision for the homeless and to housing matters generally?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend is right that I shall be visiting Norwich and I confirm that it is part of a series of visits being paid by me and my ministerial colleagues responsible for housing so that we can talk face to face with local authorities about the housing that they provide, in the presence of representatives of their tenants' associations.

Mr. Trimble: The Secretary of State will agree that a great achievement of the current Administration has been the sale of many public authority dwellings to their tenants. In the light of that, will he suggest to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland that it would be a retrograde step for him to repeal the right-to-buy legislation in Northern Ireland, as he proposes?

Mr. Heseltine: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman so admires our foresight in introducing the right-to-buy legislation in the early years of the present Administration. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is a man of great wisdom and he will make the appropriate judgments with regard to Northern Ireland which I shall support.

Planning

2. **Mr. Favell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the role of the European Commission in the planning process.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tim Yeo): A number of Community measures affect the planning process, including in particular the directive on environmental assessment. The Commission has the duty to ensure that member states properly apply Community law and it is in this connection that they have recently initiated infraction proceedings against the United Kingdom on the environmental assessment directive. We will provide a full response to its complaint, but are confident that our implementation of the directive is fundamentally sound.

Mr. Favell: The A6, which runs through the middle of Stockport, causes untold misery to my constituents, who have been waiting for a bypass for many years. They are now told that the bypass is likely to be delayed by the Commission. Does my hon. Friend agree that, like the channel tunnel rail link, this is a nook and cranny into which the Commission should not poke?

Mr. Yeo: I entirely understand my hon. Friend's concern. The Commission's role is clearly confined to ensuring that environmental procedures are properly followed. Decisions about the merits of any individual case remain a matter for the appropriate United Kingdom authority—and that is how we intend to keep it. I sympathise with my hon. Friend because the bypass to which he refers was first proposed in the 1970s. In my view, the lengthy delay reflects how careful we are in this country properly to examine any major planning scheme.

Mr. Simon Hughes: May we have less humbug from the Government about environmental impact assessment directives? Was not the project commended to a Committee by the present Secretary of State for Health, when he was a Minister of State in the Department of the Environment? Did not the European Commission alert the Government in January and then write to the Government

on 24 March? Therefore, when the Prime Minister said in Harare, "We had no prior knowledge of it and the facts were not discussed with us," was not it simply untrue?

Mr. Yeo: When it comes to humbug, we cannot compete with the hon. Gentleman and his party. No notice was given by the Commissioner of his strenuous efforts to obtain extensive publicity for his letter on 16 October. No warning was given at all. The fact that such strenuous efforts to obtain publicity were made by Commissioner Ripa di Meana suggests that he was more concerned with publicity and propaganda than with protecting the environment.

Mr. Dykes: Did not the Commissioner behave irresponsibly in releasing his press release himself, rather than through the Commission's normal channels, after receiving the approval of the presidency and other Commissioners? Does not that situation illustrate the advantages of majority voting? There was a unanimous vote for the directive, including by the British Government, whereas if there had been proper majority voting, we could have organised a lobby of all member states to outvote it.

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the manner in which Commissioner Ripa di Meana issued his press release. That was the subject of a letter from my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to Mr. Delors, who acknowledged in his reply the sensitivity of the issue. The British Government's record on the directive is outstandingly good. We were the third-fastest country to implement it and we have the fourth-best record of compliance with European legislation in the entire Community.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: With regard to the notice given by the Commission of its action, has the Minister read *Hansard* for 12 July, when I and my hon. Friends raised the question with the Minister for the Environment and Countryside? We recognise and appreciate the Under-Secretary of State's comment that the Commissioner's powers are confined to ensuring that procedures are followed. Will he therefore dissociate himself from the Foreign Secretary's remark that the Commissioner is trying to dictate through which field a road should run?

Mr. Yeo: The House knows full well that the Labour party has totally reversed its attitude to the Community on no fewer than five occasions over the past 30 years. On past form, we are due for another U-turn in the early 1990s. The hon. Lady's frantic attempts to suck up to Brussels on all occasions, regardless of how far the British people are pushed around, are unlikely to cut any ice with the Commission, but will certainly be noticed by the people who believe that British authorities should determine the merits of individual planning applications in this country.

Mr. Jessel: Is not it intolerable that foreign officials should decide either on the procedure to be followed with or the merits of British planning applications?

Mr. Yeo: It is no part of the British Government's policy to allow any foreign officials to decide the merits of planning cases in this country.

Methane Sites

3. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on Government plans to assist local authorities that discover methane sites in their areas.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tony Baldry): The Government have set aside £28 million in the current financial year for allocation as supplementary credit approvals to local authorities carrying out gas control projects at closed landfill sites.

Mr. Vaz: I thank the Minister for the positive response of the Minister for the Environment and Countryside at a meeting at the Department yesterday afternoon, at which the Government gave Leicester city council permission to borrow £25,000 to survey the Appleton Park site in Rochney Mead. That will come as a comfort to local residents. Can the Minister give an assurance that the council will receive an equally favourable response next February, when it may ask for permission to borrow £400,000 to secure the site?

Mr. Baldry: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his thanks.

The cost of subsequent remedial works will, of course, be eligible for supplementary credit approval. As was made clear by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside, we shall consider such an application once the cost has been determined following the present survey.

Local Government Finance

5. **Sir John Farr:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to include the banding of property values in assessing new methods of local government financing.

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. Michael Portillo): Our proposals for eight bands of property values are set out in the Local Government Finance Bill.

Sir John Farr: When making his assessments and calculations and increasing local government taxes, will my hon. Friend bear in mind the fact that those who live in larger properties are not necessarily able to pay more than people who live in much more modest surroundings?

Mr. Portillo: An integral part of our arrangements is, of course, limiting the tax ratio, so that people living in more expensive properties pay more than those in cheaper properties, but not too much more. The maximum that can be paid in the most expensive property in a given area will be three times the amount paid in the cheapest. That is in marked contrast to Labour's proposals: Labour wants to return to an "envy tax", forcing those living in more expensive properties to pay exorbitant amounts. That is what happened under the rates.

Mr. Salmond: Can the Minister confirm that my calculations are correct? Under the banding proposals for the new council tax, is the Secretary of State for the Environment likely to pay about £270 for his central London accommodation? That is rather less than the

amount likely to be paid by a young couple of first-time buyers in Aberdeen, who will probably pay £280 for a £35,000 house or flat.

If those calculations are correct, will the Minister ask the Secretary of State whether he mentioned them in his speech yesterday evening in Aberdeen?

Mr. Portillo: People who live in local authorities that spend prudently will have lower council tax bills than those who live in authorities that spend less prudently. If my right hon. Friend has a residence in Westminster, he is likely to benefit from the low-spending policies of that excellent council, under the community charge, council tax or any other system.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will my hon. Friend bear in mind the problems created for tenants, forestry workers, estate workers or clergymen who live in tied houses that are bigger than the houses that they would normally be able to afford and whose incomes are not reflected in their banding? This is a serious matter and I ask my hon. Friend to take note of it.

Mr. Portillo: I appreciate what my hon. Friend said. I have a feeling that we shall have considerable discussion about such issues when we debate the Local Government Finance Bill in Committee. That is one reason why I am so keen for the time for discussion to be allocated sensibly, allowing all such serious matters to be discussed fully.

Beaches

6. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress is being made towards achieving EC directives on cleaning up beaches by 1992.

Mr. Baldry: The £2 billion programme of improvements for bathing waters identified under the directive is on target to bring virtually all bathing waters into compliance by 1995.

Mr. Jones: As the seaside holiday season is so short, does the Minister agree that, in view of the quality of many of our beaches, the work must be done quickly in time for the next holiday season? Is not it time that the Government took the lead? A vast amount of resources is required to clean up our beaches and much of the work is done by privatised water companies, local authorities and volunteers.

Mr. Baldry: As I have made clear, a substantial sum is being invested by the water companies. About £2 billion is being spent on improvements to ensure that our beaches are brought into compliance with the directive as soon as is humanly possible.

Mr. Michael Brown: Will my hon. Friend note that, contrary to what the hon. Gentleman has just said, only last week the Anglian water authority launched a massive investment programme for the specific purpose of cleaning up the whole of Cleethorpes beach, thus ensuring that Cleethorpes can go forward as a tourist centre worthy of its name?

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Every water company with coastal waters is spending millions upon millions of pounds on ensuring that all our bathing waters comply with the directive as soon as is humanly possible.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: The Minister knows that there are two compliance standards under the European Community directive: one, for total coliforms, is 10,000 per 100 ml of water; the other, for E Coli, is 2,000 per 100 ml of water. According to the latest information for summer 1990, the figure for the bathing beach at Aldingham near Barrow-in-Furness was, for the filthiest sample, over 1,600,000 E Coli per 100 ml of water and, for the same beach, over 1,800,000 total coliforms. Does the Minister bathe there often?

Mr. Baldry: The method for testing bathing water here is exactly the same as the Commission uses to assess compliance in all member states. The method that we use to test water was fully supported in recent reports by the National Rivers Authority and the Select Committee on the Environment. We have the most comprehensive sampling regime in Europe and look at bathing water quality throughout the year.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the level of investment by the water industry, now that it has been privatised, is very much greater than when it was under public ownership? Does my hon. Friend agree that it is hypocritical of Opposition Members to call for more investment without saying how they would pay for it?

Mr. Baldry: Yes, Sir. It is worth recalling that the Labour party so mismanaged the economy that at the behest of the International Monetary Fund it had to slash, overnight, investment in the water industry.

Mr. Win Griffiths: Will the Minister admit that the privatised water companies are diverting the funds that they have available into buying hotels and waste companies instead of speeding up the implementation of the directive? The construction industry is in such a bad shape that there are plenty of opportunities for speeding up the programme to clean our beaches. Is not it important to make sure that annex 5 of the international convention on the prevention of pollution from ships is properly policed—in British waters at least?

Mr. Baldry: I am not confident that the Opposition understand the concept of £2 billion. Millions of pounds are being spent by the water companies. To take only a 40-mile section of the Yorkshire coastline, £30 million is being spent at Scarborough, £15 million at Filey, £9 million at Sandsend and £6 million at Robin Hood's bay. Millions of pounds are being spent to enhance and improve water quality and to ensure that our bathing waters comply with the European Community directive as soon as is humanly possible. The expenditure of a sum of money as large as £2 billion would not have been possible under a state-controlled nationalised industry.

Housing Association Tenants

7. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to enable housing association tenants to own their own home.

Mr. Heseltine: Secure tenants of housing associations normally have the right to buy, unless their landlord is a charity or a fully mutual co-operative. Housing associations, including charities, can also give grants under the Housing Corporation's tenants incentive scheme to

help tenants move out and buy a home of their own, thereby releasing vacancies for reletting to homeless families.

The Government are discussing with the Housing Corporation the introduction of a programme of do-it-yourself shared ownership, under which tenants would find property on the open market which they would then buy jointly with a housing association. This scheme would be targeted on existing tenants in order to release property for reletting to the homeless.

Mr. Bowis: Although that is welcomed in most parts of the country, does my right hon. Friend agree that, because of property prices in London, it is difficult for people to move to other properties within the area? Palms would be laid before his feet if he came to Battersea in the near future with the keys of home ownership for housing association tenants under the right-to-buy scheme—something which they were promised in an earlier Parliament, but which was delayed by an unholy alliance in another place. Will my right hon. Friend look again at that possibility, particularly for London?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend realises that there was a formidable political dialogue about that issue and we have no plans to reopen it now. I am always pleased to receive invitations to visit Battersea and I think that I have always accepted them.

Mr. Fearn: Following the Minister's comments in the House on 12 July about commonhold, will he say whether his right-to-buy policy will be extended to long leaseholders who, at present, are not covered by legislation?

Mr. Heseltine: As the hon. Gentleman will know, I have no further announcements to add to my statement on commonhold. I have clarified the position on housing association tenants in the terms of the consultation to which I referred today.

Sir Anthony Grant: In addition to housing association tenants, will my right hon. Friend consider the position of tenants of Crown estates, many of whom have lived in their houses and taken great care of them for many years? Is not it only fair that they should have the same rights as tenants of council houses?

Mr. Heseltine: I cannot promise my hon. Friend that we will extend the rights to cover that area. I shall look at the matter again in view of my hon. Friend's interest, but I would not wish to give any further commitment.

Local Government

8. **Mr. Watts:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many of those responding to the local government structure review favoured an increased number of unitary authorities.

Mr. Portillo: Of those who commented directly on the principle of moving to a single tier of local council, the vast majority expressed support for it.

Mr. Watts: What representations has my hon. Friend received from Slough? Is he aware of the strong cross-party support in Slough for the abolition of Berkshire county council and its replacement by unitary authorities based on existing boroughs and districts?

Mr. Portillo: We received a representation from Slough. As my hon. Friend says, it made the case for unitary authorities in general and for that solution to be applied in Slough. My hon. Friend will be pleased that we propose to set up a local government commission so that such views can be considered seriously in due course.

Mr. Hardy: Ministers and hon. Members on both sides of the House have expressed support for unitary authorities and the term is now used frequently. Does the Minister realise that it causes a great deal of anxiety among members of parish, town and similar authorities? What is the Government's attitude to parish councils and so on, which have had to put up with a fair amount of inadequate concern from Her Majesty's Government in recent years?

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State recently addressed a conference of town councils. The Government have not neglected them by any means and we think that parishes have an important role. The concept of unitary authorities is in no sense meant to detract from the good work that the parishes do.

Mr. Cran: My hon. Friend will understand the enthusiasm of my constituents for a return to a single-tier, all-purpose local authority based on the borough of Beverley. To do so, we have to get rid of Humberside county council. Will my hon. Friend clarify the statement that he made yesterday and tell the House whether Humberside will be the first local authority to be considered by the new local government commission, or whether it will be among the first? If it is the latter, what does that mean?

Mr. Portillo: It means precisely that Humberside will be in the first batch of authorities that we will recommend for consideration by the local government commission. To clarify that a little more, it means that the local government commission will have a regional structure. It will be able to consider more than one place at a time and I believe that Humberside should be one of the areas in the first batch. It will be one of the first places to be considered. I hope that that makes the position clear to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Gould: Why have the Minister and the Secretary of State in their Local Government Bill passed up the chance of proceeding on the basis of consensus? The Opposition would support a local government commission and we support the idea of flexibility to meet local needs. Why, therefore, are the Government insisting on a process that is apparently piecemeal, long-drawn-out and manifestly open to political gerrymandering? Are they serious about putting local government through the further chaos of creeping restructuring, which can only add to the confusion already felt by so many in local government about who does what? Have not they already done enough damage to local government without this further turn of the screw?

Mr. Portillo: As usual, the confusion is in the hon. Gentleman's mind. Our consultation document, which the hon. Gentleman welcomed when it was issued, was perfectly clear and the Bill that we have published is in line with it. I am unaware of any response from the hon. Gentleman, because he does not wish to consult the

Government. His remarks are wholly inconsistent not only with what he said before but with what his colleagues in another place are saying.

Mr. Latham: Is my hon. Friend aware that, after their constructive meeting with my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), my constituents are optimistic that they will have Rutland back as a unitary authority under the re-elected Conservative Government?

Mr. Portillo: After meetings with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary most people are pleased, because of his renowned courtesy. It was important that we set out that the guiding principle of the local government commission should be to establish the proper services to be provided to local people, in line with their sense of local community —the sort of community with which they wish to identify. That is a welcome concept and I believe that, despite what the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) said, it will be greeted warmly throughout the House.

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

9. **Ms. Primarolo:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects the extension of compulsory competitive tendering to come into effect.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert Key): Our consultation paper, "Competing for Quality: Competition in the Provision of Local Services", which was published yesterday, proposes that compulsory competitive tendering should be extended to a range of local authority services, and should come into effect at different dates from late-1992 onwards.

Ms. Primarolo: Is the Minister aware that, for hundreds of thousands of women who work in local authorities, compulsory competitive tendering has meant that their pay has been cut, their hours lengthened and their terms and conditions considerably weakened? Given the Prime Minister's commitment to the cause of women's equality, will the Minister give an undertaking that compulsory competitive tendering will be cancelled as a gesture towards improving women's pay and conditions of work?

Mr. Key: Compulsory competitive tendering is non-discriminatory and I have no intention of going down that path. I reassure the hon. Lady that the value for money that is emerging has nothing to do with sex.

Mr. Squire: Will my hon. Friend confirm that, contrary to the views expressed by the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo), his independent review of the operation of CCT included statements from the chief executive of a Labour authority that compulsory competitive tendering had created a much more efficient and slimmer organisation and had highlighted inefficiencies that it had not previously seen? Is not the real answer that on this issue, as on so many others, the Labour party is in thrall to the public sector trade unions?

Mr. Key: Yes, I could not have put it better myself.

Mr. O'Brien: The report published by the Department of the Environment, to which the hon. Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) referred, giving the findings of the Institute of Local Government Studies at Birmingham university on the first year of competitive tendering in local government only adds to the confusion that the Government have created about the role of local government in providing services to poll tax payers. There is no reference in the report to the quality of services to be provided under the competitive tendering procedure. Is not it time that the Government stopped messing about with the provision of local government services and delayed any further introduction of compulsory competitive tendering until the procedures and the quality of services have been resolved?

Mr. Key: No. It is astonishing that the hon. Gentleman insists on looking backwards whenever we have questions in the House. The report has informed the Government's policies and if he would be so kind as to read the consultation paper, which we issued only yesterday, he would find that a quality threshold is specifically included in the extension of CCT to services such as architecture.

Mr. Summerson: While my hon. Friend is doing his best to persuade Labour councils of the virtues of competitive tendering will he point out to them that the provision of services to community charge payers is for the benefit of the entire local community and that it is not merely to provide a multiplicity of overblown, unproductive jobs in town halls?

Mr. Key: Yes, that is entirely the point. One of the advantages that Ministers gain in visiting a large number of local authorities of all shades of political opinion across the country is to learn of the unanimity of opinion that compulsory competitive tendering is good for the charge payers and for the recipients of services and that it is also good for the career structures of many of the jobs that go with it. It would be retrograde to go back on that.

Local Government Finance

10. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to visit Halifax to discuss local government funding.

Mr. Portillo: I regret that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no such plans, but I am sure that Ministers will wish to visit Halifax in force over the coming months.

Mrs. Mahon: Will the Minister join me in congratulating Labour-controlled Calderdale council, which was named recently in a report of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy as the second most efficient metropolitan council? Does not he think that that is a remarkable achievement as its standard spending assessment has, for some reason, been set lower than the metropolitan or national average? Does the Minister think that that is a good way to repay an efficient council which, if the same criteria are used this year for the SSA, will face £7 million of cuts? Is it not time that he abolished poll tax capping and allowed councils to get on with the job?

Mr. Portillo: I always find it puzzling, when the Government increase the standard spending assessments markedly year by year, to hear that that leads to cuts by local authorities. Calderdale's SSA increased by 18 per cent. last year. We do not yet have the figures for next year, but we know that the average increase in total standard spending will be 7·2 per cent. As the Government have increased the money ahead of inflation, I find such talk of cuts rather tiresome.

Mr. Batiste: When my hon. Friend takes the opportunity to visit Halifax to discuss local government funding, will he consider the future of the joint committees in West Yorkshire which were established following the abolition of the West Yorkshire metropolitan county council? Will he consider especially the police authority and the growing concern in West Yorkshire that there must be better ways to fund that important service?

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend raises important matters. However, he will know that in the Local Government Finance Bill which we published yesterday we have bitten off a considerable amount of possible change with the establishment of the local government commission. I think that the matters that we have laid—or intend to lay—before the commission are already sufficient and I think that some of my hon. Friend's concerns may have to wait for another day.

Northumberland County Council

11. **Mr. Amos:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received on the future of Northumberland council council.

Mr. Heseltine: Six principal local authorities and one other organisation from Northumberland responded to the consultation paper "The Structure of Local Government in England". Of these, four commented on the structure of local government in Northumberland, including the role of Northumberland county council. The other three responses were general comments on our proposals.

Mr. Amos: As all colleges and most schools will soon be free from local authority control, as more services will be put out to contract and as organisations such as Newcastle airport will be put into the private sector, where they properly belong, does my right hon. Friend agree—and I am sure that he will, because he is a reasonable man—that Northumberland needs a unitary authority, especially as Labour-controlled Northumberland county council constantly says that it does not have enough money to decorate schools but recently managed to find one third of a million pounds to give its senior officers a double figure salary increase and company cars?

Mr. Heseltine: I know that my hon. Friend will put those points with his customary eloquence to the local government commission that we are about to set up and that he will welcome the fact that we have set it up so that he is able to do so.

Mr. Bellotti *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Northumberland is a long way from Eastbourne, but let us see what the hon. Gentleman can do.

Mr. Bellotti: Will the Secretary of State assure us that new structures for local government in East Sussex and in Polegate and Willingdon in particular, will not be imposed on local communities against their wishes. Also, if local communities do not like the results of the local government commission, will he consider local referendums? If not, what will he propose?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman will know that one of the objectives of our local government commission is to consult local communities deeply and widely. It is designed to attract a structure of local government which is based on local loyalties and which reflects community interests. It is important that the House should have a chance to consider those matters, and the legislation that will come to us from another place will provide precisely that opportunity.

Housing Associations

12. **Mr. Moate:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authorities have now transferred their housing stock to housing associations; and what steps he is taking to encourage such transfers.

Mr. Yeo: During the past two years, 16 local authorities have transferred their stock of more than 76,000 properties to housing associations, with the approval of their tenants. Two more proposed tranfers, at Bromley and at Tunbridge Wells, have been supported by tenant ballots and many more local authorities are known to be considering this option.

Mr. Moate: Is my hon. Friend aware that in my constituency the borough of Swale has transferred its whole housing stock to the Swale housing association, involving £55 million of assets? With all-party co-operation, the transfer is working extremely well and there is a high degree of tenant involvement. Does my hon. Friend agree that we should look forward to the time, very soon, when all local authorities arrange such transfers and generally move out of direct housing management?

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend rightly draws attention to the enormous benefits that accrue from such large-scale voluntary transfers. There are benefits to the tenants in the form of improved stock condition, better repair services and guarantees on rents. The research that we have carried out on the early transfers shows that tenants feel that their landlords are taking a closer interest in them. If only the Labour party was not so slavish in its attachment to the out-of-date idea of councils as monopoly landlords, tenants in Labour-controlled local authorities might also be able to enjoy those benefits.

Mr. Steinberg: Does the Minister agree that the transfer of council houses to housing associations will not solve the housing crisis? My district council, Durham City, has sold 3,000 houses under the right-to-buy scheme and we have 4,000 people on the waiting list. When will the Government lose their dogmatic policy and allow councils to build new houses so that people from those lists can be housed? So many people want rented accommodation provided by local authorities.

Mr. Yeo: It is clear that it is the Labour party which has dogmatic policies, as it sees the local authority as the only answer to housing provision and it refuses to learn the lesson of Southwark, of Lambeth and of Hackney, where tenants are suffering from exactly that policy. The whole purpose of getting local authorities to sell houses is not only to allow the tenants the chance to enjoy the security of owner-occupation, but to be able to reuse the capital receipts in areas in which they are most needed. We redirect the borrowing power to those areas in which the housing need is greatest. The Labour party's proposals would not produce any more cash, because, as fast as the Front-Bench spokesmen go round the country whispering

to any pressure group that is willing to listen that Labour will spend a bit more cash, their colleague, the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), rushes down to the City to say that that is exactly what Labour will not do.

Sir Michael Neubert: Will my hon. Friend confirm that of the £162 million available to councils as a proportion of the receipts from the sale of houses to housing associations, less than half has been reapplied to housing? Would not it be a good thing for more of that money to be directed towards housing, especially towards the upgrading of existing housing stock, which would give a much-needed boost to the building industry?

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend is right to say that £75 million out of the available £160 million received from the large-scale voluntary transfers has been directed towards housing. It is entirely for the local authorities to decide how they will use the capital receipts. I should be reluctant to take even greater centralising powers to direct or force them to spend the money on housing stock. However, I have no doubt that in the areas in which housing need is considerable, my hon. Friend and other hon. Friends will talk to local authorities and try to influence the way in which they spend the money, in accordance with local need.

Bolsover Coalite

13. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will ensure that an environmental study is carried out in the area around Bolsover Coalite; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution has investigated emissions from the chemical incinerator at the Coalite works. Extensive studies are continuing. HMIP's investigations have shown that dioxins are present in the stack gases from the Coalite incinerator. Concentrations measured in the current emissions would probably account for only a part of the dioxins that have been found in the milk on the affected farms. The company is not in breach of the law in the manner in which it has operated the incinerator. The company is undertaking an urgent review of the incinerator design and will incorporate substantial modifications so as to meet the latest stringent standards. The modified incinerator will be capable of operation with minimal emissions of dioxins. The management has agreed that in order to commence the programme of engineering work, the incinerator will be shut down at the end of November. I shall write to the hon. Member once decisions on further work have been taken.

Mr. Skinner: Now that the Minister has half admitted that there is a direct correlation between Bolsover Coalite, dioxin and the contaminated milk, does he accept that it has taken six months' probing to get someone at the Dispatch Box to contribute even that little bit to the argument? Will he now consult the Secretary of State, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and all the other relevant Departments to ensure that there is a proper environmental assessment and a public inquiry into the link between Coalite and the dioxin-contaminated milk? If there is to be any more waffle about the citizens charter, it is high time that the Government did something about this issue in Bolsover.

Mr. Baldry: The hon. Gentleman is wrong to seek to draw those inferences from the information that I have given. His comments are also less than fair; extensive studies, including environmental studies, have been carried out. Those involve the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, which has been carrying out work at the affected farms, the National Rivers Authority, which has measured dioxin levels in fresh-water sediments from the area, and HMIP, which has investigated the emissions from the chemical incinerator at the Coalite works. Many agencies have sought to obtain as much information as possible, but it will be some time before the full results of the investigations at the farms are available. However, results will be published in the normal way, and I assure the hon. Gentleman that they will be made public.

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

14. **Mr. Lofthouse:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what evidence his Department has acquired on the impact of the extension of compulsory competitive tendering on the quality of local authority services.

Mr. Heseltine: We have published our proposals for extending compulsory competitive tendering to professional and other services in our consultation paper, "Competing for Quality: Competition in the Provision of Local Services". Our consideration of policy has been informed by research into the effects of the Local Government Act 1988 carried out by the Institute of Local Government Studies, and by a study of relevant local authority experience carried out by PA Consulting Group.

Mr. Lofthouse: Will the Secretary of State confirm that there is evidence of deterioration in the quality of services? Will he confirm that some schools have had to close because of a lack of cleanliness, and that some contractors who bid low in order to defeat local authority tenders have had to pull out half way through the contract and let the local authority pick up the mess?

Mr. Heseltine: Obviously, we are concerned to ensure that any infringements of safety standards or standards of health affected in such matters are carefully considered. If the hon. Gentleman would give me specific examples, of course I should treat them seriously.

Mr. Dickens: Will my right hon. Friend tell the House truthfully whether, if his house needed painting, he would rather have the local council direct labour force or a private contractor paint it? We all know the answer. Why should the Opposition wish to inflict second best on their council tenants?

Mr. Heseltine: I am a Tory; how could I tell I lie? If I wanted to have my house painted—every so often, like everybody else, I do—I should get competitive prices. I know that in doing so I should get the work well done and at the lowest possible price. If Labour authorities would understand that, we should get better value for money out of local government.

Poll Tax

15. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received for funds for local authorities to allay costs associated with the poll tax.

Mr. Portillo: We have received a number of representations from local authorities.

Mr. Cohen: Has the Minister looked up the statement made by the Secretary of State on 21 March? According to column 403 of the *Hansard* report, the right hon. Gentleman said that the Government would pay grants to local authorities which had lost income in collecting the poll tax, and would

"cover authorities' additional administrative expenses".

In the case of my local authority, that would amount to about £14 million—it has cost other local authorities millions of pounds, too. When I wrote to his ministerial colleague I was told that the Minister did not even know that such funds were available. Will the Government now pay up to the local authorities?

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman misquotes from the column in question. What my right hon. Friend said was that we would

"pay grant for the administrative expenses arising as a consequence of the Bill"—[*Official Report*, 21 March 1991; Vol. 188, c. 403.]

He was talking about the Bill that brought about the £140 reduction in the community charge. We are paying grant both in respect of the income forgone because of the £140 reduction and in respect of administrative expenses incurred by authorities that had already sent out bills—authorities that had to send bills out twice. We are paying Waltham Forest money under the first heading. We have not yet had a claim for it in respect of its administrative expenses, but if it cares to send one in, we shall consider it.

Mr. Ron Brown: The Government wrote off debts in excess of £15 billion when the public utilities were privatised. Is not it a bit odd, therefore, that, according to them, an amnesty cannot be granted to those who clearly cannot afford to pay this tax, which benefits the rich at the expense of the poor? If the Prime Minister can go to the third world—and the Minister must always remember that we have a third world in this country—and talk about writing off its overall debts, which I applaud, surely the debts of those in this country who are suffering unnecessarily because of a tax imposed upon them against their will can also be written off.

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman should have declared an interest in calling for an amnesty, as I believe that he is one of those who refuse to pay community charge. I welcome this opportunity to say that there will be no amnesty for those who have not paid their community charge—even though some of them have been so badly misled by those whom they elected to the House.

Mr. Gould: Is not it clear that the greatest burden on local councils in respect of the poll tax is the 20 per cent. contribution rule—a point made forcefully, as the Minister will know, by the Audit Commission and by virtually the whole of local government? The Government have recognised that that rule was a mistake, as they have demonstrated by doing away with it for the council tax. Why will they not act on the same principle for the poll tax? Why do they insist that, by virtue of that rule, local authorities spend money that they have no hope of recouping and issue more than 7·5 million summonses in what is rapidly becoming the biggest debt collection exercise in the history of the world?

Mr. Portillo: When we introduce a new system of taxation—which we hope to do with the co-operation of the Labour party, although we are not sure about that—we shall introduce a new system of rebates, but as long as we have the community charge, and as long as social security benefits are uprated by sums appreciably above the average amount of the 20 per cent. that people have to pay, it is right that those people should pay and that local authorities should take enforcement action. The hon. Gentleman would have done better in his question to condemn his colleagues who have been urging non-payment and to make it clear where the Labour party stands on that issue.

Repossessed Homes

16. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received concerning the standard community charge for repossessed homes in 1990-91; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: We received a number of representations following the introduction of the community charge and, as a result, we created an additional statutory class of property so that no standard charge could be levied on a repossessed home. This took effect from last April.

Mr. Burns: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply and congratulate him on making what was obviously the correct decision. But may I draw to his attention the problems facing those whose houses were unfortunately repossessed in the financial year prior to April 1991, many of whom now face community charge bills amounting to twice the personal community charge? As local authorities cannot now change that, will my hon. Friend's Department examine the problem and help people who would have been exempt had their houses been repossessed this year rather than last and who would thus not have faced a financial burden on top of the misery of repossession?

Mr. Key: We have looked at the matter carefully, and I am sorry to say that I cannot give my hon. Friend much hope, although I pay tribute to him for the assiduous way in which he has looked after his constituents' interests. We have had copious correspondence about Mr. and Mrs. Pegrum in his constituency. We have now changed the arrangements. Of course, until last year, Chelmsford was a Liberal-controlled authority. I am glad that the Liberals are no longer in control. We trusted local authorities to be serious and sensible, but they were not. That must have been one of the things that caused the electors in my hon. Friend's constituency to chuck them out.

Mr. Tony Banks: Is the Minister aware that there could be 100,000 repossessions of houses this year? Is he aware of the suffering and misery that that means for many people, which, in many respects, is caused by the Government's economic policies? What monitoring is the Department of the Environment carrying out in respect of repossessions? What additional resources are being made available to local authorities which have to rehouse people whose houses have been repossessed by the building societies? What discussions are taking place between Government Departments, the banks and building societies to see what can be done to alleviate the suffering?

Mr. Key: My hon. Friend the Minister of State has had detailed discussions with the Council of Mortgage Lenders and recently announced his new initiative with the council with regard to repossessed properties being passed to housing associations for temporary letting to homeless families nominated by the local authorities. That brings empty properties back into use and provides homes for families. It also restores confidence in the market. Incidentally, it also means that the balance of rental income after the administrative costs to the housing association goes back to the lender and that helps to keep the defaulter's debt down as well.

Council Tax

17. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with the computer industry concerning the implementation of the proposed new council tax.

Mr. Key: The Department has had preliminary discussions with major suppliers and has commissioned a study of the feasibility and desirability of a national software specification. Now that the Local Government Finance Bill has been published, we will be discussing the computing aspects in detail with all interested parties.

Mr. McAllion: As the computer industry, council finance officers and many other non-partisan critics are sending the same messages to the Minister and to the Government that the new tax is ill-prepared, the timetable for its introduction is too tight, it will require a poll tax-type register and will be even more risky and difficult to introduce than the poll tax, why do not the Government for once follow a sensible course and scrap the poll tax, abandon their proposals for the new tax and leave it to the next Parliament and a Labour Government to introduce a fairer rates system?

Mr. Key: The hon. Gentleman is not only scaremongering, he is wrong. Sadly, not all those involved are unanimous in their approach. Some organisations, including the local authority associations, do not want a national specification and that does not make it easy. However, I can offer some reassurance to the House, because we hope that we will have some of the regulations in draft by Christmas. We will discuss the regulations and the Bill with the local authority associations tomorrow.

Local Government Finance

18. **Mr. Robert B. Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether it his intention to continue to take firm measures next year to protect local taxpayers from overspending by local authorities.

Mr. Portillo: Yes. We intend shortly to announce for 1992-93 provisional capping criteria which will be in a similar format to the criteria adopted for 1991-92.

Mr. Jones: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. However, is he aware that when a finance system is changed, it results not simply in the headline-grabbing activities of a few local authorities, but in excessive spending by many local authorities? Therefore, if he wants to ensure that the people of this country receive value for money for their local authority contributions, those controls should apply throughout the country and not just to the extremes.

Mr. Portillo: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. When the community charge was introduced, many local authorities took the opportunity in the upheaval to increase their spending. I am determined that, when we change the system again, no such opportunity will be provided.

Mr. Loyden: Will the Minister end the rhetoric about local government and begin to address the real problems in our towns and cities which, since the Government came to power, have experienced a reduction in spending to a point at which they are now compelled to sell off the heritage of the people of those cities and towns? When will the Government realise that they are presiding over the downfall of our towns and cities?

Mr. Portillo: The future of Liverpool—if that is what the hon. Gentleman is referring to—is now in rather better hands after some of his friends from the Labour party lost control of Liverpool city council. The prospects for Liverpool have been vastly increased by the City Challenge announced by my right hon. Friend which, I am pleased to say, Liverpool has embraced with enthusiasm.

Mr. Butler: What protection will my hon. Friend offer to local taxpayers of councils such as Warrington and Halton which award themselves contracts far in excess of private sector tenders?

Mr. Portillo: The measures that we announced yesterday in the Local Government Bill and in the consultation document that we issued at the same time show our determination to extend compulsory competitive tendering and to make sure that there is a more level playing field so that there will be fair play between direct service organisations and outside contractors bidding for local authority work. I hope that that is reassuring to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Blunkett: Given that the year-on-year increase in central funding for local authorities next year is only 4·7 per cent., and given that the Chancellor is going to announce nothing this afternoon for the education of children in schools or the care of the elderly, children or the disabled in social services, does the Minister agree with the Secretary of State's comment on Radio 4 on 20 October that there are no cuts in local authority services and will be no cuts next year? Does the Minister agree that the Secretary of State knows perfectly well that there are cuts and will be cuts and therefore is a knave, or is he simply a fool in making such a statement when people's lives are being affected day in and day out by the cuts in education and social services which the Government have inflicted on them?

Mr. Portillo: Despite the hon. Gentleman's colourful language, the figures and the arithmetic are against him. We are increasing total spending next year by 7·2 per cent., and the grant that is being made available by central Government is also increasing by 7·2 per cent. The Government are able to increase funding by more than the rate of inflation, and that is made possible only by the economic policies being pursued by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor.

Autumn Statement

3.31 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Norman Lamont): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement.

Cabinet agreed the Government's expenditure plans this morning, so I am now able to inform the House of the expected public expenditure outturn for this year; the plans for the next three years; our proposals for national insurance contributions in 1992-93; and my forecast of economic prospects for the year ahead.

As usual, the main public expenditure figures, with the full text of the economic forecast, will be available from the Vote Office as soon as I sit down. The printed autumn statement will be published next Wednesday.

This year's public expenditure survey has been a difficult one. There is no more challenging task in government than to choose between competing expenditure priorities, while keeping public spending as a whole under firm control. But there is also no greater test. Let me at once pay tribute to my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary, who has shown great skill and judgment in bringing the survey to a successful conclusion.

Firm control of public spending has been, and will remain, a key element in this Government's economic policy. From its peak in the early 1980s, we have reduced the ratio of public spending to national income by over five percentage points. This has been achieved by reducing the size of government; by a rigorous search for greater efficiency and value for money; and by prudent management of the public finances, which has led to a large saving in debt interest.

Over the past decade, this careful and responsible approach has enabled us not only to cut tax rates and reduce public borrowing but to make substantial and well-targeted spending increases in areas of priority; and it is this approach that will continue to underlie the Government's plans over the years ahead.

The prospect now is for renewed economic growth, but the recession has inevitably added to the pressures on public spending both this year and next. I expect public expenditure within the planning total to be almost £205 billion in the current fiscal year, slightly below the revised level I set in the Budget. An increase in programme spending, largely the result of weaker activity, will be offset by additional privatisation proceeds.

After four successive years of debt repayment, I made it clear in the Budget that we would see a return to public sector borrowing this year. I now expect a PSBR in 1991-92 of £10·5 billion, about 1·75 per cent. of GDP. Our fiscal position compares well with other Community countries. It remains the Government's policy to balance the budget over the economic cycle.

Last year, we made provision for substantial increases in expenditure over the next few years. So our objective in this year's survey has emphatically not been to make significant across-the board additions to existing plans.

But I have judged it right to allow expenditure to rise to meet the unavoidable consequences of weaker economic activity. Our priority has been to meet in full our commitments to the most vulnerable members of society; to maintain the expenditure programmes which contribute most to the long-term strength of the economy; and to improve the quality of public services.

For next year, the planning total has been set at £226·6 billion, some £5·5 billion above the figure published in the Financial Statement and Budget Reports. The planning totals in the two following years have been set at £244·5 billion and £258 billion respectively.

The planning total for 1992-93 assumes privatisation proceeds of £8 billion, the same level as we now expect in the current year. For the two following years, the level assumed is £5·5 billion, the same as in the last year's plans.

The new plans also include reserves of £4 billion, £8 billion and £12 billion respectively. These are higher than the corresponding figures in last year's plans, but by no more than I judge prudent and realistic. I am determined to contain pressures next year within the reserve.

Let me turn now to the individual spending programmes. First, health. Once again, we have provided for substantial improvements to patient care. Planned national health service spending in the United Kingdom in 1992-93 has been increased by £1·5 billion. Additional capital expenditure will enable the health service to make faster progress in upgrading buildings and equipment. Total national health service spending in England will rise by 4·2 per cent. in real terms between this year and next, and spending on hospital and community health services will rise by a full 5 per cent.

These latest increases will bring the total real increase in national health service spending since 1978-79 to well over 50 per cent. In England alone, this has funded an increase of 1·5 million acute in-patient and day cases a year, with 16,000 more doctors and dentists, 51,000 more nurses and 500 major capital schemes completed. At a time when tough decisions have been necessary across a range of public service programmes, we could not have made our commitment to the national health service more clear—*[Interruption.]*—We will not take any lectures from the Labour party, the party which in 1977-78, cut national health service spending by 3 per cent. and which cut capital spending by no less than 22 per cent.

The investment programmes of British Rail and London Transport amount to more than £2½ billion next year and will contribute substantially to the efficiency and competitiveness of the economy. But their income from passengers and asset sales has been adversely affected by weak trading conditions. We have therefore provided for increases in finance of over £1·4 billion in 1992-93 to support that investment. Public transport has rightly taken priority within the transport programme, and provision for expenditure on roads has been held to its planned level.

Social security represents over a quarter of all public spending. We have added £4·25 billion to plans in 1992-93. This reflects both higher unemployment and increased take-up of other benefits. In addition to full indexation of benefits, the new plans allow for higher rates of income-related benefits for disabled pensioners and those over 80, the Budget increase in child benefit, and the two new benefits for disabled people which come into operation next April.

The July local authority grant settlement made provision for an extra £1·4 billion of central Government funding next year to maintain the new balance between local and central funding of local services that I announced in the Budget. The Government are determined that this generous level of support should not be used to fund massive extra spending at the expense of local taxpayers. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the

Environment has made it clear that he will be prepared if necessary to make full use of his recently extended powers to cap local authority budgets.

Approaching half of local authorities' revenue spending is on education, so the settlement should allow for a substantial increase in current spending on schools. Provision for capital work on all maintained schools next year will increase in real terms by 10 per cent. Taken together with lower construction costs, this will allow for a significant increase in school building work.

Public funding for universities and polytechnics will rise by 4·6 per cent. in real terms next year. This will help to finance a further increase in student numbers, enabling one in four of our young people to enter higher education next year compared with one in eight in 1979. By the end of the decade it should be one in three—a remarkable achievement. The proportion of students completing their courses in Britain is one of the highest in the industrialised world—a testimony to the quality of our higher education institutions.

The science budget, which pays for basic and strategic science carried out by the research councils, will rise by around 3 per cent. in real terms between this year and next. By 1994-95 it will be more than 7 per cent. higher than it is now.

We have made additions to nearly £500 million to employment spending in Great Britain next year. Overall, publicly funded expenditure on training, enterprise and vocational education will be two and a half times as high in real terms as in 1978-79.

The plans for defence include an increase of £830 million in 1992-93. They provide for the continuing costs of the Gulf conflict—in particular, the replacement of ammunition and equipment. They also meet the transitional costs—redundancy payments and works—needed to implement the new force structure and to secure the longer-term savings.

Full details of the new plans for other programmes are being made available separately.

We recognise that we cannot expect the private sector to control its costs if the Government do not do the same, so the plans we have made assume further improvements in efficiency and firm downward pressures on pay and other costs across the public sector. That underlies the tight settlements that we have made both on programmes and on running costs.

Reflecting the economic cycle, I expect public spending as a proportion of gross domestic product to rise slightly in 1992-93, before resuming its downward trend. Even at its peak, the ratio of public expenditure to national income will be significantly lower than the levels that had to be financed following earlier recessions. That is good news for taxpayers, both present and future, and good news for the economy. It is a testimony to the Government's prudent and disciplined approach to the public finances over the past 12 years.

I come now to national insurance contributions. As usual, the review this year has taken account of advice from the Government Actuary on the income and expenditure of the national insurance fund, and of the decisions on benefit rates set out by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security in his statement to the House on 21 October.

The lower earnings limit at which national insurance contributions begin will rise by £2 a week to £54 in April, while the upper earnings limit for employees' contributions will go up by £15 a week to £405. The contribution rates for both employers and employees will remain the same, and the profits-related contribution rate for the self-employed will also be unchanged.

My economic forecast for 1992 was published today. Developments since the Budget have broadly confirmed the forecast that I made in March.

Over the past year, we have made dramatic progress on inflation. Retail prices index inflation has been more than halved, from almost 11 per cent. a year ago to about 4 per cent. in September. Measureas of underlying inflation have fallen too, though less sharply. RPI inflation, excluding mortgage interest payments, is down fromn 9·5 to 5·75 per cent. Producer price inflation, excluding food, drink and tobacco, is down from 6·5 per cent. to 4·75 per cent.

Also encouraging is the evidence of much greater realism in wage settlements. Average earnings growth has fallen from a peak of more than 10 per cent. to 7·75 per cent. in August; and those figures almost certainly understate the speed of the turnaround. According to the CBI, settlements in manufacturing industry averaged 5·5 per cent. in the third quarter, the lowest figure since the summer of 1987. Unit labour costs in manufacturing have actually fallen over the past three months. All that augurs well for the future, and suggests that the British labour market has benefited substantially both from our trade union and our supply side reforms.

As special factors drop out of the calculation of the RPI, inflation as measured by the RPI may rise slightly early next year, but it is forecast to fall back to 4 per cent. in the fourth quarter. Underlying inflation will continue to fall. Producer price inflation, excluding food, drink and tobacco, is expected to be 3·5 per cent. at the end of 1992, the lowest figure since the 1960s. The increase in the gross domestic product deflator, the widest measure of inflation in the economy, is also expected to fall next year.

I have never wavered from the view that the defeat of inflation is a necessary condition for economic success. The best performing economies are low inflation economies. Our objective is to match those economies, or better them. Our achievements on inflation are essential steps along the way.

To achieve that objective, we have followed a prudent and cautious monetary policy whose credibility has been underscored by our firm commitment to the ERM. The success that we have achieved on inflation has allowed us to cut interest rates without jeopardising sterling's position in the ERM. Interest rates have fallen 4·5 per cent. since last October, and are now below the average of the past 12 years. Our interest rate differential with Germany is at its lowest for 10 years.

As inflation and interest rates have fallen, it has become increasingly clear that we are emerging from recession. Consumer spending fell in the year to the second quarter of this year, but has been rising slowly in recent months. Service sector output seems to have stabilised in the second quarter, and manufacturing output may also now be picking up, though again slowly.

The monthly rate of increase in unemployment peaked in March and is likely to moderate further in the next few months as recovery gets under way. Consumer confidence has increased throughout this year as mortgage rates and inflation have come down, and it is likely to go on rising

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as the fear of unemployment begins to abate. I expect to see personal consumption rise by 2·5 per cent. in 1992, providing impetus to the recovery.

As I forecast in the Budget, output is likely to fall by about 2 per cent. this year. However, that fall is now behind us; the economy may have already started to pick up. I expect GDP to rise 0·75 per cent. in this half year.

With consumer spending expected to go on rising, an end to the business investment recession in sight, and the rundown in stocks likely to slow, I expect GDP to rise by 2·25 per cent. next year. Growth will gather pace through the year. The increase in output from the second half of this year to the second half of next is expected to be 2·75 per cent.

The performance of our exporters this year has been remarkable. Our exports of manufactures have shown renewed vigour, up 5 per cent. in volume terms over the past year. Our volume share of world trade in manufactures looks as though it may rise again in 1991, for the third year running.

The current account deficit in the first nine months of this year was less than £5 billion. For the year as a whole, we are on track for a deficit of about £6·5 billion, or 1 per cent. of GDP, half the size of the deficit in 1990 and closely in line with my Budget forecast.

Some rise in the current account deficit is to be expected at this stage of the cycle, but I expect the rise to be moderated by a continued good performance on exports. The current account deficit is forecast to be £9·5 billion, or 1·5 per cent. of GDP, in 1992. With prudent financial policies in place, I foresee no difficulty in financing it.

Turning to companies, business investment has fallen over the past year. That is never welcome, but it must be set in the context of the boom in the late 1980s. Investment rose by 45 per cent. in the three years to 1989 and was at a record level in the first half of 1990. Even now, after the fall over the last year, business investment is nearly 40 per cent. higher than in the first half of 1979; and the share of the country's resources going into investment remains higher than at any point in the 1970s.

Investment usually lags the cycle in total activity, but it is likely to rise from about the middle of next year as profitability recovers, company finances improve, and the general pick-up in activity gathers pace.

The last few months have seen a surge in business optimism in nearly every sector, nearly every region, in businesses large and small. *[Interruption.]* The October CBI survey was just the latest—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is an important matter.

Mr. Lamont: —but the most authoritative—of a whole succession of recent surveys to confirm this. Business confidence is at its highest level for three years. Output expectations are up, investment expectations have improved, export optimism is rising. This gives powerful support to our view of the recovery.

The spending plans that I have announced not only honour our commitments in full; they also provide substantial additional resources for health, public transport, and education. Once again we have demonstrated that there is no inconsistency between prudent fiscal and monetary policies and high-quality, well funded public services.

Those are the policies that have allowed us to reduce inflation and to cut interest rates. They are the policies that have enabled us to increase spending on the health service, more than by half since 1978-79, to help the most vulnerable, and to invest in the young people who are Britain's future. They are the policies which are leading Britain to a sustained, non-inflationary recovery, and I commend them to the House.

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): The autumn statement, as always, reviews the prospects for the economy for the year ahead as well as revealing public expenditure proposals. The House will recall that just 12 months ago the Prime Minister, who was then Chancellor of the Exchequer, gave an upbeat and optimistic forecast of the economy for 1991. He told us:

"the British economy is coming back on track".—[*Official Report*, 8 November 1990; Vol. 180, c. 125.]

The word "recession" did not cross his lips. I remind the House of what the then Chancellor of the Exchequer said about economic growth. He said that it would resume early in 1991 and that the economy

"is expected to grow by over 2 per cent. in 1991".—[*Official Report*, 8 November 1990; Vol. 180, c. 121.]

In fact, the right hon. Gentleman's successor told us today, rather diffidently, that growth for 1991 is minus 2 per cent.

According to the Prime Minister a year ago, fixed investment would experience what he called a modest downturn of 1·75 per cent. Today's statement shows that it has plummeted by 10·75 per cent. In last year's statement, unemployment was assumed to be 1·75 million in 1991. Today, we know from the Government's own figures that it is 2·46 million.

Far from "coming back on track", we have experienced a deep and damaging recession. Let us look at the cost in human terms. There have been 45,000 business failures —a record level of 860 every week; 85,000 house repossessions—a record level of 635 per week; and unemployment has risen by 750,000. That is the price that the Chancellor thinks is worth paying by the people of this country.

Today, the Chancellor provided the evidence that condemns the Prime Minister's economic forecast as no more and no less than a gigantic confidence trick. The House and the nation would be well advised to treat with scepticism any economic forecast that the Government produce, let alone one that covers a period that must include a general election.

Given the Government's past performance, it is no surprise that once again they are promising good times just around the corner, but in the detail of the Government's own predictions, and in the forecasts of independent commentators and institutions, there is revealed disturbing evidence of the real state of our economy.

According to the International Monetary Fund's most recent survey, the United Kingdom will be the only country among the G7 nations in which investment will fall during 1992. Both the Confederation of British Industry and the National Institute of Economic and Social Research predict an even deeper fall in manufacturing investment of between 8 per cent. and 9 per cent.—that is, a further fall on top of the precipitous decline this year.

Earlier this week the average of independent forecasts conveniently compiled by the Treasury revealed that in 1992 employment growth will fall by 1·2 per cent. and unemployment will rise to 2·8 million. I ask the Chancellor

how we can be expected to believe his forecasts of successful and sustained recovery if in the year ahead investment continues to fall and unemployment continues to rise.

Why is it that next year the United Kingdom will be the bottom of the G7 league table for investment and employment growth? When the Chancellor's own forecast shows a £3·5 billion widening in the balance of payments deficit, is it not clear that our economy continues to suffer from a serious imbalance, which can only be corrected by investment in manufacturing industry, new technology, and training?

In that context, why is it that the autumn statement confirms continuing cuts in the Department of Trade and Industry's budget, which after the statement will be only half the size it was three years ago? When training is properly regarded as crucial to our prospects for recovery, why is it designated a non-priority area? Is it not the case that there will be no increase in real terms in the budget for youth training and employment training? Is it not the case also that the increase in the Department of Employment's budget is almost entirely to deal with the cost of extra unemployment and not with any real addition to training?

The Government claim to have increased spending on education by 8 per cent. in cash terms. Will the Chancellor confirm that the increase in real terms is half that amount —4 per cent., or about £290 million? Can it seriously be argued that education is a Government priority when the latest available figures for all education spending show that the proportion of gross domestic product committed to education has fallen from 5·5 per cent. to 4·6 per cent.?

We welcome any additional expenditure on health; it is much needed. The Chancellor claims a cash increase of £2·7 billion; but, if we apply the GDP deflator, is it not clear that the real increase is £1·2 billion?

Does not the Chancellor appreciate the scepticism that is aroused by public spending increases in a pre-election period, given the Conservative party's recent history in this regard? Before both the 1983 and the 1987 general elections, the Government made expansive announcements about public expenditure increases; yet, as we know —and as is clear from our national accounts—the following years were years of cutback and recession.

An example of that technique is contained in the public transport proposals. I note from the detail of the Government's figures that the external financing of British Rail is forecast to increae by £500 million in the next year 1991-92.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): We are not borrowing it from the IMF.

Mr. Smith: Let me remind the hon. Gentleman who interrupts me that the Government are forecasting a £500 million increase in 1991-92. The forward plans, however, show that external financing will be cut by £1 billion in 1992, 1993, 1994 and 1995. Is not that abundant evidence of yet another confidence trick in the making?

The public must be aware that, at the same time as giving the impression that they are committed to increasing public expenditure, the Government are making promises to cut the standard rate of income tax, not merely to 20p in the pound, but below that. Both the Prime Minister and the Chancellor do that on every possible occasion.

The Government's record on economic growth is pathetic: and average of 1·75 per cent. annual growth from 1979 to 1991. *[Interruption.]* Let me repeat those figures, in case Tory Members did not hear them because of the hubbub that they were creating. Average annual economic growth between 1979 and 1991—as is revealed by the Government's own answers—was 1·75 per cent. The Government cannot, therefore, reconcile their commitment to increase public expenditure with a simultaneous commitment to make dramatic reductions in income tax —unless, of course, they plan large increases in value added tax.

In both their economic forecasting and their public spending proposals, the Government are engaged in a process of deception, which, as they will soon discover at the election, will not fool the British public.

Mr. Lamont: The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) implied that the plans that I announced were optimistic. He quoted selectively from what the IMF was saying, and from its projections for economic growth in this country. What he did not tell the House was that the IMF is predicting that Britain's economy will grow as quickly as the G7 average, and will actually grow faster than Germany's economy in the second half of next year. That has been predicated, not by the Government, but by the International Monetary Fund.

What the right hon. and learned Gentleman ignored was the fact that our forecasts are in line with those of independent organisations such as the IMF, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the London Business School. Those institutions have confirmed that our forecasts are realistic, and cautious as well.

This time last year, the right hon. and learned Gentleman did not believe that we would get inflation down to 4 per cent.; but we did. He does not acknowledge what he was saying a year ago.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman talked again about investment. As I explained to him in my statement, investment is already at a high level. It has fallen during the recession, but we experienced three years of sharp increases in investment. The ratio of investment to gross domestic product is higher today than it was under any Labour Government, including the last Labour Government.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman asked about the Department of Trade and Industry's budget. There are cuts in that budget, and rightly so. What matters to industry is the environment—the conditions for and the profitability of industry—not the DTI spending money. The Government's innovation programme will at the same time be maintained and over the survey period will increase.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman asked about the Department of Employment's budget. That will be increased by £480 million, including £178 million for Employment Action. As a result of the package that I have announced today, nearly I million people will be helped by the Department of Employment's programme next year. That is the increase we are making, and the right hon. and learned Gentleman ought to have welcomed it.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman implied—as did his hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), the shadow Chief Secretary, on radio—that in

[Mr. Lamont]

the past we have announced expenditure plans that sometimes were not implemented. If he is more worried about that than the control of public expenditure, which I am much more worried about, that must mean that he thinks that recovery in activity is going to be stronger. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. and learned Gentleman does not understand the point. Public spending would be reduced if expenditure on social security and losses in some of the nationalised industries were lower as a result of a recovery.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman tells us that the rate of growth will not be achieved. He points to what he thinks is the Government's poor record compared with that of the Labour Government. He ought to look at his figures more closely. Between 1974 and 1979, non-oil GDP grew by 1·2 per cent. under the Labour Government. Between 1979 and 1991, non-oil GDP grew by 1·7 per cent. under this Government. We are not making the comparison at a particularly favourable moment—in the trough of a recession. There is little evidence that the policies of the right hon. and learned Gentleman will achieve any growth. His most revealing comment was that he welcomed any increase in public spending at all. He can tell us that again. He is committed to an increase of £35 billion a year on top of the plans that we have already announced, which are realistic.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind hon. Members that we have a debate tomorrow on this subject and that there will be a public expenditure debate later. Therefore, I ask for brief questions, please, to the Chancellor of the Exchequer so that as many hon. Members as possible may be called.

Mr. Terence L. Higgins (Worthing): Does the Chancellor of the Exchequer recall that, in its report on the Budget, the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee stressed that it was important that the so-called automatic stabilisers should be allowed to operate fully and that there was a case for supplementing them with discretionary increases in public expenditure? Can my right hon. Friend confirm that what he has said this afternoon is in line with that? Is it not important, however, to stress, particularly for the benefit of the foreign exchange markets, that some increase in the public sector borrowing requirement at this stage in the cycle is entirely appropriate and in no way reflects any weakening of his determination to win the battle against inflation?

Mr. Lamont: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. The increase that I have announced today to some extent reflects weaker trading conditions and the recession. That causes part of the increase in social security and part of the increase relating to the transport nationalised industries. Over half the increase in programme spending arises in three areas—social security, transport and the national health service. We are following precisely the policy that my right hon. Friend suggested. We felt it right to accept the inevitable costs at this stage in the economic cycle and not to cut back on long-term plans that will strengthen the economy.

This is a prudent and moderate settlement. Because of shouting by Opposition Members when I made my statement, I was not able to point out that the increase in the ratio of total Government expenditure to gross domestic product, both central and local, is only half a percentage point next year. That will bring it to 42 per cent., which is way below the peak in previous cycles and way below the proportion of public expenditure to GDP under the last Labour Government in similar conditions.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Does the Chancellor recognise that his optimism about 2·25 per cent. growth is not shared by all commentators and that if he is proved wrong these figures will be shot to pieces? How can he believe that the fear of unemployment will go away while unemployment has continued to rise?

Does the right hon. Gentleman recognise that the figures that he has announced for training and education will go nowhere near far enough to fill the skills gap? The figures for railways might sound encouraging, but, when looked at in detail, they fall away sharply in the subsequent two years. The most eloquent comment was when he talked about his desire, once the election is out of the way, to resume the downward trend. Having seen the decline in public services over the past decade, I hope that he never has that opportunity. Is this not a quick election fix rather than a programme of long-term investment to improve our competitiveness?

Mr. Lamont: I explained to the House why I believe that the forecast that I have made is both cautious and realistic. I explained that it is in line with forecasts being made by the IMF, the OECD and the London business school. We are expecting that the British economy next year should grow in line with the G7 average. All we are expecting at this stage is modest growth in this half year. I see no reason why we should not accelerate again up to the average of the G7 countries. It has happened before and, with falling inflation, we will achieve the growth again. We did it before, and we have the same conditions again.

The increase in growth will come from exports, which have done remarkably well by increasing their share of world trade for three successive years. We are expecting exports to rise by 6 per cent. again next year. Also, some of the growth will come from consumer demand.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) referred to the increases for transport. What I have announced today are additional to the existing base line. Last year's published plans already show substantial increases in investment. For example, investment for transport nationalised industries will double over the next three years compared with the past three years. Spending on roads will double from the period 1988-89 to 1992-93. We must look at the existing base line plans, not just those announced today. The hon. Gentleman does not seem able to make that simple distinction.

Sir William Clark (Croydon, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the moderate increases in health, transport and education will be widely welcomed throughout the country, if not in all parts of the House? Does he agree that the public sector borrowing requirement for this year and next year should be set against a background that, over the past three or four years, the Government have repaid some £27 billion of the national debt? That is what we should look at when we are talking about the public sector borrowing requirement. In 1979, the public expenditure burden on the taxpayer was some 44 per cent. of the national income. Even with the

moderate increases announced today, the figure is very much lower—about 41 per cent.—and is proof positive that the Government still have a firm control over public expenditure.

Mr. Lamont: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He is correct in intimating that, if we make international comparisons, the fiscal position of the Government, even at this stage of the cycle, compares well with that of other countries. At 42 per cent., the ratio of public spending to GDP is well below the European Community average. The public sector borrowing requirement is also below the level of Germany, which is about 5 per cent. now. Our PSBR is less than in previous recessions and at comparable points in the cycle in the past. Under the Labour Government of 1975-76, the PSBR was 9·5 per cent. of GDP—the equivalent of £55 billion today. It is now a different world, and we intend to stick to it.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): I may be a little old-fashioned, but I can never rejoice in a definition of a recession that includes vastly increased unemployment. Will the right hon. Gentleman make it quite clear where the money is coming from? Will not the extra money come from more privatisation? He is selling more of the family silver year by year, but when it has gone what will he do?

Mr. Lamont: The right hon. Gentleman, whom we all respect and like, knows that the way in which we treat privatisation proceeds is in accordance with the way in which they are treated by other Governments. Of course the costs of recession are unpleasant, and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Sir W. Clark) said, they have been reflected in the increased borrowing requirement. That is where the main adjustment has been made.

The right hon. Gentleman asks where the money is coming from. We continually ask Labour Members that question.

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): If my right hon. Friend's spending plans are to have the most beneficial effect on the economy, will not it be essential to contain all public sector pay settlements well within the target rate of inflation?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend makes a good point. He will recall that in my statement I stressed the need for the Government to look after their own running costs and pay settlements in Government Departments. His comments apply to the public sector more generally and more widely; we cannot let the burden fall on the private sector. The less the discipline in the public sector, the more it will hit the private sector. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend, and I am grateful for his drawing my attention to that point.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Is the Chancellor aware that a recent survey showed that the cost of basic foods in British supermarkets was one of the highest in Europe? Does he realise that he has done nothing today to help the millions of people who are living in poverty because of the Government's inaction in dealing with high interest rates and unemployment?

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Gentleman says that we have done nothing to deal with poverty and the more disadvantaged members of the community. He will be aware that a large part of the social security increase that we announced will be spent on unemployment benefit, but perhaps he was not here when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security made his announcement, which included help for older pensioners and a number of measures designed to help the weaker and most disadvantaged members of society. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would welcome that.

Sir Ian Stewart (Hertfordshire, North): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on sticking with his policies of getting inflation down and keeping control of public expenditure, despite the background to the economy in the past year. Will he confirm that reducing the proportion of GDP that goes on public expenditure to its present level, which is much lower than in previous recessions, gave room for the reductions in personal taxation in the past 10 or 12 years? That is the main difference between economic management under a Conservative Government and the Labour Governments that went before.

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend is right. Our past prudence in public expenditure gives us a considerable advantage today. Because we controlled public expenditure in the past, the burden of debt interest is less, and in the longer term that enables us to devote a little more to programme expenditure. We intend, as my hon. Friend advocates, to continue to reduce public expenditure as a proportion of GDP. That policy is not incompatible with increasing and improved provision for basic state services.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): An increase of £21 billion in public expenditure is certainly welcome, but the right hon. Gentleman has not yet told us what is to be the size in 1992-93 of the PSBR. Will he confirm that it will be above 4 per cent. of GDP? Is he aware that if it were above 3 per cent. of GDP he would not be able even to make his statement in the House if he signed the present draft of the treaty of economic and monetary union in Maastricht which would limit not only this Chancellor but any other Chancellor to spending not more than 3 per cent. of GDP through public borrowing? What does he say about that?

Mr. Lamont: The right hon. Gentleman should realise that it is not normal in the autumn statement to make a forecast of the PSBR for the coming year. As with various other matters, an assumption is published and the assumption in the documents is for a PSBR of 3 per cent. next year. That assumption reflects the lagged fall in corporation tax receipts, which tends to continue even after recovery has begun.

The right hon. Gentleman refers to prospective rules that might emanate from Europe under provisions for a single currency—binding rules on budget deficits. No such rules have been agreed and, in any case, we intend to stick very closely to maintaining a tight fiscal position. As I explained, our fiscal position compares well with that of other countries. Our proportion of public expenditure to GDP is well below the average of other European countries.

As for the PSBR, I dread to think what the right hon. Gentleman thinks he could do to that with expenditure plans of £35 billion. Will it rise to 9 per cent. of GDP, as it did last time?

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the very pleasing results of his announcement today is that it is confirmation that, despite

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the recession, the Government have managed to sustain the health, welfare, social security and education programmes throughout the recession without any significant cuts and, indeed, with significant increases in expenditure? Is that not in complete contrast with the problems of the previous Labour Government, when the only solution to the economic crisis in which they placed the country was to cut, cut and cut again from the health and welfare programmes? Is this not a major achievement by the Government?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The previous Labour Government did what the right hon. Gentleman is threatening to do again: they overspent and overborrowed, had too high inflation and were forced to do what they professed that they did not want to do. They cut back massively on state services and on capital investment in them. As a result, total spending on the national health service is now 5·7 per cent. of GDP, compared with 4·8 per cent. when the Opposition were in power. Even as a proportion of public spending in total, spending on health in 1992-93 is 15 per cent. of total public spending compared with only 12 per cent. in 1978-79.

There can be no gainsaying the fact that we have made considerable increases over the years in spending on the health service. There has been a 54 per cent. real increase since 1978-79. As I said, for hospital and community health care services there is a 5 per cent. real increase next year, which everyone who is impartial and able to consider the issue with an unbiased and fair mind would regard as a very generous and well-intentioned settlement.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): Surely the Chancellor today told us that he expected public expenditure to rise by about £53 billion over the next three financial years—an increase of more than a quarter of the current financial year's expenditure. Is he also prepared to say that he expects tax revenues to rise sufficiently to meet that increased expenditure—or does today's statement really represent a decisive shift from the doctrine of balanced budgets?

Mr. Lamont: It is an extremely important point that our intention and our policy are to balance the budget over the cycle. The hon. Gentleman is quite right. As he knows, corporation tax is paid a year in arrears and corporation tax receipts, therefore, very much lag behind the cycle. That is why we expect the public sector borrowing requirement to continue to be high next year, even though the recovery will be well under way. The plans that I have announced today and what I have said about the PSBR are consistent with our firm policy of balancing the budget over the cycle.

The right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) referred to public sector borrowing of 3 per cent. next year. We had a public sector debt repayment of 3 per cent. at the peak of the cycle. We balanced it over the cycle and we will balance that 3 per cent. just as we balanced the previous 3 per cent.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the only way to accelerate recovery now is substantially to reduce interest rates? The very slow increase in both credit and the money supply show that that is both safe and wise. My right hon. Friend is prevented from taking that necessary measure simply by our membership of the exchange rate mechanism.

Mr. Lamont: I sometimes suspect that my hon. Friend is not quite as stern and unbending as he likes to pretend. We could not have got on top of inflation and reduced inflation in the way that we have—more successfully than any other country in the past year, because we have had the most dramatic reduction in inflation—if we had followed my hon. Friend's advice. If we had let the exchange rate go, that would simply have added to inflationary pressures. It would have lowered living standards and it would have done nobody any good. I realise that a projection of 0·75 per cent. growth in this half year is modest, but we normally come out of recessions gradually, and I have every confidence, based on what we already see about consumer spending and on the figures that we have seen for output, that the forecast that I have outlined to the House today, which is in line with many other forecasts, will be realised.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): Have the increases in public expenditure announced in the autumn statement in November been influenced in any way by the fact that a general election will take place in the first six months of next year?

Mr. Lamont: I have explained to the House that the targeted increases are ones that, for the most part, we believed we had to make because of weaker activity. I explained how more than 50 per cent. of the increase in the planning total came from social security, from the transport nationalised industries and from the health service. I should be very surprised if the right hon. Gentleman were suggesting that the increase in the health service was in any sense unjustified. Given what I have told the House about the ratios and about our PSBR compared with that of other countries, I believe that the increases are prudent and cautious, and can in no way be described, as the right hon. Gentleman seems to imply, as some sort of cynical giveaway.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): Does my right hon. Friend appreciate that he deserves considerable congratulation, first, on the decision that he and the Prime Minister took last year to join the exchange rate mechanism, which enabled us to bring down interest rates by 30 per cent. and inflation by 60 per cent. over 12 months—an extraordinary achievement—and, secondly, on getting his forecasts consistently right? He got the balance of payments outturn more or less exactly right. He said that growth would resume in the second half, and we are getting growth resuming in the third quarter—right now, in this quarter. He got the inflation rate for the end of the year right to the last decimal point. That is a very impressive record.

Mr. Lamont: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He knows that I am always very cautious about economic forecasts, and always treat all forecasting with some scepticism, as is right, and as we emphasise in our published forecast. But it so happens—perhaps surprisingly—that my forecast in the Budget has proved extremely accurate on both inflation and output, and, as my hon. Friend said, on the current account. I am grateful to my

hon. Friend for what he said about inflation and interest rates, and I believe that the progress that we have made has been welcome to the country.

Mr. James Lamond (Oldham, Central and Royton): Does the Chancellor recall that, about a year ago, from a comfortable job and home, he told us that the only acceptable way out of the mess that his Government had got into over the past 11 years was for people to sacrifice their businesses, their homes and their jobs in order to reduce inflation? After hundreds of thousands of people have done just that, today the right hon. Gentleman tells us that inflation will creep up again. Would not any reasonable person, hearing that, decide that the Government should not be returned at the next election?

Mr. Lamont: I have always made it clear that there is no conflict between fighting inflation and fighting unemployment. We know that, if we let the spectre of inflation get worse, it would be disastrous for our exporting companies and for employment, so there is no contradiction involved in wanting to fight inflation, too. That is the priority that we must have, and that is the battle we have had to fight—with very little support from Labour Members, who are not remotely interested in inflation.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the more he increases public expenditure the more the Opposition demand further increases, especially on health? Will he tell the House to what extent the increases announced today will delay both a return to a balanced budget and further reductions in taxation?

Mr. Lamont: As I have explained to the House, our policy remains to achieve a balanced budget over the cycle. I believe that the plans that we have announced this year are compatible with that. When setting the PSBR for next year, I shall bear our objective in mind. My hon. Friend is right to stress that objective, because it is and must remain our policy, and we should not depart from it. We have made it clear that our medium-term objective—not necessarily over one Parliament—is further to reduce the rate of income tax. I believe that that would be compatible with the policies that we have followed and will continue to follow.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Will the Chancellor confirm that the rate of growth that he suggests for the first six months is only half that needed simply to stop unemployment from continuing to rise? Will he also confirm that his full-year rate of growth is less than the likely rate of increase in productive potential, and that he is therefore planning for rising unemployment throughout the next 12 months? Will he come clean and tell the House what assumptions about unemployment underlie the expenditure plans announced today?

Mr. Lamont: I do not accept for one minute what the right hon. Gentleman says. The monthly rate of increase in unemployment has come down sharply. In March it was 110,000; last month's figure was just over 35,000. *[Interruption.]* I am answering the right hon. Gentleman's question. I expect the monthly trend to continue to decline.

As for whether the rate of growth that I project will be sufficient to stop the rise in the rate of unemployment, the right hon. Gentleman will have noticed that the rate of growth projected for the second half of next year—2·75 per cent. on the second half of this year—is very close to the long-term trend growth of the British economy. Therefore, the premise on which the right hon. Gentleman's question was based is not correct.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the prospects for a sustained and non-inflationary recovery of the economy at this phase in the cycle are greatly improved by the fact that unit labour costs in manufacturing have been moving downwards and by the fact that our proportion of world trade has been moving upwards? Is it not perfectly clear that that policy and approach to the economy is greatly to be preferred to that of the Labour party, which seems to rely on overspending, over-borrowing and over-taxing, which will keep them over there?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend might have added that the Labour party's policy is also to encourage every inflationary wage claim in the public sector. I have never yet heard Labour Members not support such a claim, and the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) was at it again on television the other day.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right: one of the most welcome developments is that our unit labour costs are falling. It is not just the rate of increase that is falling: our costs have actually been falling. That means that there is a much better outlook both on inflation and for exports, and, as my hon. Friend said, our exports have done extremely well in recent months.

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): Will the Chancellor tell the House what assumptions about unemployment he has given the Government Actuary for the coming year?

Mr. Lamont: Yes: 2·4 million.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Does my right hon. Friend agree that someone listening only to the black propaganda about what we are doing to destroy the national health service would be forgiven for believing that the money spent is going down, whereas the chart shows that, since 1978-79, the money spent has increased from £6·5 billion to £34 billion—a 50 per cent. increase in real terms. That shows a great commitment to the national health service on the part of the Conservatives than the socialists—the only party to have reduced spending—have shown in their lives?

Mr. Lamont: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for emphasising the point. I think that I have already made the point about the increases that we have made, the proportion, of GDP, the proportion of public expenditure and so on. There is no doubt that this Government have provided well, and provided massively, for the health service. The Labour party is interested in spending more money on the health service; it is not remotely interested in ensuring that it is better run and better administered.

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): Given that the autumn statement offers no change in this Government's no-hope economic policies, does the Chancellor still think that unemployment is a price well worth paying—yes or no?

Mr. Lamont: I told the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) that I think that it is necessary to fight inflation, and fighting inflation gives the best prospects for employment. The low inflation countries are those that

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have the best record on unemployment. That is why, even given the current recession, there are now 800,000 jobs more than there were in 1979.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): Is my right hon. Friend aware that this is the twelfth year running that the Government have produced an autumn statement in the autumn and the twelfth year running that they have produced a Budget in the spring, whereas, under the Labour Government, and when the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) was Chancellor, the economy was in such a spiral of decay and disorder that, at one stage, statements were coming before the House monthly?

Is my right hon. Friend further aware that, if he reads his own speech, he will see that he did not mention the IMF—because he did not need to mention it? Does he recall that, when the Labour party was in government, the name of Mr. Witteveen was on everybody's lips because the Labour Government were constantly going cap in hand to the IMF? Is it not clear that the reason why the people of this country trust the Government's economic policies is that we do better for them?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend is right that, like all our autumn statements, the present autumn statement contains no tax measures, whereas the Labour Government were always having to introduce emergency budgets and tax measures in the autumn. My hon. Friend is right: every Labour Government in my lifetime have made the same mistakes and ended up the same way. A future Labour Government would be no exception.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I acknowledge the Chancellor's belated—almost deathbed—conversion to the sanity of Keynesian economics, even if it has been done for the shabbiest of electoral reasons. Will he confirm, however, that, after allowing for inflation, real interest rates are still among the highest this century? When will they come down in real terms?

Mr. Lamont: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's first assertion. The fact of allowing and conceding the automatic effects of a recession does not tally with what he likes to call Keynesian economics. He may have noticed that there was an interesting article on this very theme by Mr. Gavyn Davies—formerly, I think, an adviser to the Labour party, but an admirable commentator none the less. He disagreed with what the hon. Gentleman has just said—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry, but if the hon. Gentleman has read the article, he has misunderstood it. I am afraid that he has also misunderstood the point about interest rates. It is true that in real terms in recent years interest rates have been historically high across the world. Our real interest rates are not out of line with real interest rates in other European countries.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Should not my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury be congratulated on a successful outcome to a public spending round that was carried out in difficult circumstances? Did not Labour, when it was in charge of the Treasury, cut hospital spending by 20 per cent. in one year and also cut nurses' pay in real terms? Should we not compare that with the remarkable announcement made by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer today that health spending has risen by an increadible 54 per cent. over 12 years and that no less than 4 per cent. is forecast as the increase for the forthcoming year?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend's comments about my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury are absolutely right. Various people have implied that the settlement is in some way influenced by the general election. We have of course tried to come up with a settlement that we believe is responsible and prudent. However, without revealing any secrets, let me say that the task of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary was made difficult in recent months as a result of the rise in the political temperature. However, he has done an absolutely exceptional and outstanding job in very difficult circumstances.

On my hon. Friend's second point, we have made considerable increases in health service spending: £2·7 billion is the year-on-year increase, and I believe that the House should welcome that.

Mr. Doug Hoyle (Warrington, North): Why cannot we get away from this ritual of an autumn statement and a Budget the following year? It reminds me of a witch doctor who is called in by a primitive tribe in the hope that there will be rain and sunshine and a bountiful harvest some time in the future. Why is there no comfort in the Chancellor's statement today, or in his Budget, for manufacturing industry? Why is he doing nothing about the chronic underfunding of training when even TECs, set up by the Government, claim that as a result of a lack of funding they cannot guarantee a place for the young and long-term unemployed? What we have today is a fourth-rate statement made by a fourth-rate Chancellor.

Mr. Lamont: In his opening remarks, I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman was attacking the procedures of the autumn statement. It was not the purpose of this autumn statement to review the general way in which we tackle expenditure and separate it from taxation. As he knows, that matter is widely debated. I do not agree with him that there are not things in the statement that will be welcome to manufacturing industry. Industry will welcome the continued and increased expenditure on public transport. That is exactly what employers and the Confederation of British Industry have been asking for. They have also welcomed the considerable increase in roads expenditure which is already present in the base line. Above all, I am sure that manufacturing industry will welcome the fact that next year we are going to get back to growth in line with the G7 average.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the 8·5 per cent. increase in spending on education and the 10 per cent. in real terms on school buildings will be particularly welcome in Cambridgeshire? Since 1979, the number of young people entering higher education has doubled. Do not those facts demonstrate that the Labour party's claim to be the only friend of education is sheer bunkum?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend puts it extremely succinctly. Spending per pupil has increased by 40 per cent. in real terms since 1979, and that adds force to my hon. Friend's observations.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Is it not clear that the freeze in real training budgets which the

Chancellor announced today means that yet again there will be no increase in the abysmal level of youth training allowances? Had those allowances, which were introduced in April 1978, risen in line with the level of average earnings, youngsters on youth training schemes would be on £68 a week—about £40 more than the £29·50 that they actually receive. It is clear that, among today's pre-election, elastoplast political announcements, 16 and 17-year-olds have no vote.

Mr. Lamont: We have honoured all our pledges on youth training. I announced today that there will be additions to plans of £480 million to the Department of Employment's programme. That includes more for employment training and £178 million for employment action. Next year, the Government will be spending 2·5 times more on training in real terms than in 1978-79. Most of my colleagues and most fair and unbiased people would regard the increases that I have announced as very substantial. Only a party that was totally divorced from financial reality could go on asking for more.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): Will my right hon. Friend the Chancellor confirm that the recollections of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) about the outcome of election pledges are quite erroneous? Does my right hon. Friend recall that, in 1987, the Labour party pledged that another £2 billion over and above the current levels would be necessary to sort out the problems of the national health service? Can he confirm that this Government exceeded that figure within months of once again gaining office and that the present levels of expenditure, coupled with today's announcements, are beyond Labour's wildest dreams and certainly beyond what it could ever achieve?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend is right. Expenditure on the health service has been averaging 3·6 per cent. in real terms. We have done more than the Labour party said at one stage that it would do. However much we do, Labour always promises to do more. Labour is not interested in containing public expenditure or taxation.

Ms Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): Is the Chancellor aware that his statement offers nothing in terms of improving housing to the millions of people who listened to his statement who live in substandard, overcrowded and squalid housing? Does he realise that housing is in crisis, not just in inner-city areas such as mine, but throughout the country? What is he offering in his statement to people who need adequate and affordable housing?

Mr. Lamont: If the hon. Lady looks at the expenditure plans and the base line, she will see that there are considerable resources for housing. We made very large increases in the amount available to the Housing Corporation. I hope that she will not be misled by figures for the housing revenue account which are affected by interest rates: the point is the expenditure made available by central Government to the Housing Corporation. In the past two years we have made substantial additions; it is now a substantial programme. I do not accept that the situation for people in difficulties is without hope. We have done a lot.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Does my right hon. Friend agree that our export performance over the past year is particularly encouraging, bearing in mind the fact that our major trading partners—France, Canada, the United States and Spain—have all been in recession? Does he also agree that it would be virtually impossible for us to maintain our international competitive advantage if he ever followed the policies advocated by the Labour party?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend is right. As I have said, we have seen an increase in our share of world trade. I expect that our exports will be even more successful next year. That, of course, is reflected in the current account deficit, which is much smaller this year than last. That is largely due to the strength of exports.

Mr. Terry Patchett (Barnsley, East): Several times this afternoon the Chancellor used the term "targeted increases". Would he use the same terminology to describe the present unemployment figures?

Mr. Lamont: The expenditure increases are targeted, and they are targeted at those areas that we think are most deserving and most in need, but, at the same time, we want to follow responsible and prudent policies to balance the budget over the medium term.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to target extra expenditure on the key public services. However, would it not be that much more difficult to achieve that in order to keep a reasonable PSBR if there were no future revenues from privatisations, which are £8 billion next year and £5·5 billion in the years thereafter? Is not that what the Labour party would recommend delivering—no revenue from privatisations and therefore a much more difficult task of boosting public services?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend makes a very good point, and it is relevant to our £35 billion costing of Labour's programme. Opposition Members will not tell us what they regard as wrong with that £35 billion figure, but, in fairness to them, one of the points that we have not made is that they would not have the benefits of privatisation receipts, and that is why their public expenditure proposals are even greater nonsense than the country already realises.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It may not be possible to call all hon. Members who wish to speak, but I will allow questions to continue for a further five minutes. If hon. Members are brief, most of them may be called.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): The people of Wales have about as much confidence in the Chancellor's policies as they have in the antics of Eddie the Eagle. There is a great gap between the Chancellor's promises to reduce income tax and the spending promises of his spending Ministers. Is not the only way that that gap can be bridged by the Chancellor increasing VAT? If the Government are re-elected, will the Chancellor increase VAT—yes or no?

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Gentleman is totally wrong. One can increase spending and cut taxes at the same time. I do not know where the hon. Gentleman has been—he has not been in this House very long—but we have been doing that ever since 1979.

Mr. Robert Litherland (Manchester, Central): As the Chancellor claimed that business is gaining confidence, what does he think of the words that emanated from the

[Mr. Robert Litherland]

CBI last week when it lambasted the Department of Trade and Industry for the unneccessary recession that has cost British industry billions?

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Gentleman talks about the CBI. I have looked at the CBI's booklet entitled "Competing with the World's Best", its report on manufacturing. I noticed how it very much endorses our view that there has been a remarkable improvement in the performance of British industry. For example—one did not read this very much in the press—it states:

"Most of those responsible for running British industry believe that there has been a marked improvement in performance during the 1980s, which has been more than a temporary phenomenon."

That is the view of the CBI, and it is also our view.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Will the Chancellor of the Exchequer confirm that the increase in social security spending is due to what he terms weaker economic activity, which is a euphemism for the millions in unemployment, for which the Government are responsible? Will he confirm that the cost in increased social security expenditure and lost tax revenue will be about £20 billion? Does he agree that it would be far more sensible to spend much more than 10 per cent. on capital expenditure in education in a city such as Bradford, with its crumbling schools after 12 years of neglect by successive Tory Governments, to create jobs in buildings that are much needed, and to reduce the dole queue rather than spend money on sustaining it?

Mr. Lamont: On the hon. Gentleman's first point about the social security budget, there is an increase of about £4·25 billion, and about £2 billion is for unemployment benefit. There is also the take-up of other benefits, the new benefits for disability and the increase in child benefit, which I thought was welcomed by the hon. Gentleman. His caricature of the social security settlement that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced to the House is not wholly accurate.

On capital spending, £1·25 billion has been added to capital spending plans. That is about a fifth of the increase in the planning total. There is a very considerable increase in capital spending in the health service and also on education. I said that support for voluntary-aided and grant-maintained schools capital will be up by about 10 per cent. in real terms. When we add that to the increases that they had last year, we realise that there is a major programme of capital works in the education services.

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): When the Chancellor tells the people who have lost their homes and the people who are suffering poverty and demoralisation on the dole that it has been worthwhile to get inflation down, is he not concealing the underlying truth—that all that would have been unnecessary if it had not been for the Government's disastrous financial and economic policies?

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Gentleman seems to think that the recession is confined to this country. I do not know what he thinks is happening in the United States, Canada, Australia, some Scandinavian countries, and New Zealand. Over the past year, the world economy has grown more slowly than for many years. Many other countries are in recession. The hon. Gentleman is not living in the real world.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will bear in mind the hon. Members who have not been called today if they wish to participate in tomorrow's debate.

BILLS PRESENTED

Severn Bridges

Mr. Secretary Rifkind, supported by Mr. Secretary Baker, Mr. Secretary Heseltine, Mr. Secretary Wakeham, Mr. John Selwyn Gummer, Mr. Secretary Hunt, Mr. Secretary Lilley, Mr. David Mellor and Mr. Roger Freeman, presented a Bill to provide for the construction of a new bridge over the Severn Estuary between England and Wales and roads leading to the new bridge and associated works; to make provision for the levying of tolls in respect of use of the existing Severn bridge and the new bridge; to make other provision for and in connection with the operation of the bridges; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First, Second and Third time, pursuant to the Standing Order of 18 October, and passed.

Education (Schools)

Mr. Secretary Clarke, supported by Mr. Secretary Hunt, Mr. Secretary Heseltine, Mr. John MacGregor, Mr. Francis Maude, Mr. Michael Forsyth, Mr. Tim Eggar, Mr. Alan Howarth, Mr. Michael Fallon and Mr. Robert Atkins, presented a Bill to make provision with respect to the inspection of schools and with respect to information about schools and their pupils: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 7.]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That (1) Standing Order No. 13 (Arrangement of public business) shall have effect for this Session with the following modifications, namely:

In paragraph (4) the word "eleven" shall be substituted for the word "ten" in line 43; in paragraph (7) the word "eight" shall be substituted for the word "ten" in line 64; and in paragraph (8) the word "two" shall be substituted for the word "four" in line 66;

(2) Private Members' Bills shall have precedence over Government business on 17th, 24th and 31st January, 7th, 14th, and 21st February, 20th and 27th March, 3rd April, 1st May, and 5th June;

(3) Private Members' Notices of Motions shall have precedence over Government business on 29th November, 6th and 13th December, 28th February, 6th and 13th March, 8th May, and 12th June, and ballots for these Notices shall be held after Questions on 13th, 20th and 27th November, 12th, 19th and 26th February, 22nd April, and 20th May;

(4) On Monday 3rd February and Monday 27th April, Private Members' Notices of Motions shall have precedence over Government business until Seven o'clock and ballots for these Notices shall be held after Questions on Thursday 16th January and Thursday 2nd April; and

(5) No Notice of Motion shall be handed in for any of the days on which Private Members' Notices have precedence under this order in anticipation of the ballot for that day. —*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [31 October].

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.—*[Mr. Peter Walker].*

Question again proposed.

Council Tax

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

4.55 pm

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): I beg to move, at the end of the Question, to add:

But humbly regret that the Gracious Speech contains no guaranteed way of ending the Poll Tax by April 1993 and neglects the urgent need to abolish the minimum 20 per cent. Poll Tax contribution levied on the poorest members of society so as to relieve the increased difficulties in collecting the Poll Tax now faced by local government in England, Scotland and Wales; recognise that the proposed council tax combines an unsound valuation process and a banding structure, which takes no account of regional variation, with a personal taxation element or head tax which requires the maintenance of a register of those liable; and deplore the continuing unfairness of a local tax which, by exempting the wealthiest from paying their proper share, forces up the bills for others and fails to provide the stable and fair financial basis that local government needs.

This is a lacklustre Queen's Speech which is remarkable for only one reason. It is the first Queen's Speech in history to be dominated by a Bill that purports to undo the damage done by the same Government earlier in the lifetime of the same Parliament. This Queen's Speech is the work of a Government who want us to believe that they have undergone a deathbed repentance. The pity of it is that the posture is so unconvincing. It is not that the deathbed itself lacks conviction—few can doubt that these are the dying days of the Government. Nor can there be much doubt about the genuineness of the Government's desire—a desire amounting to panic—to be seen to be washing their hands of the poll tax. They have even reached the point of using the dreaded term "poll tax" to describe their great error—almost as though steeling themselves to label it correctly at last is the first and necessary step towards exorcising it.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wonder whether the annunciators are wrong. This matter is of great concern to the Labour party, but there are only 10 Labour Back-Bench Members present. Could you check whether the annunciators are working?

Mr. Speaker: There is nothing wrong with the annunciators.

Mr. Gould: I was saying that the use of the term "poll tax" for the first time by Ministers in their press conference last week was presumably an attempt, by labelling the tax by its correct name, to take the first and necessary step to try to exorcise it. They know all too well that the judgment of the electorate cannot now be long delayed and that a Government with the poll tax on their record cannot hope for much mercy.

There can be no doubt, either, that the Government have a great deal to repent about. The damage done by the poll tax is now too well attested to and too deeply seared into the nation's collective experience to require much by way of elaboration. The evidence of that damage is too damning to be gainsaid by the faint protests of innocence from the Government's dwindling band of supporters.

This is, after all, the tax which has driven millions of ordinary citizens to anger and despair, which produced riots on the streets of hitherto peaceful communities, which forced those without means to break the law and encouraged others to flout it, which broke up families, which induced hundreds of thousands to trade their vote, which cost £14 billion of taxpayers' money—money which should have been spent on health and education—which continues to cost £18 million for every day it survives, which has left local government in chaos and with £1·5 billion of virtually uncollectable arrears, which will require by the end of this year the issuing of 7·5 million summonses, which will clog up our magistrates courts and stretch the police to beyond their breaking point: the biggest debt collection exercise in the history of the world.

It is the tax which has destroyed everything that it has touched, from its original begetter to the very rationale that was advanced to justify it. With comprehensive capping, the poll tax has claimed as its victim the very accountability that was supposed to be its last saving grace, and with that accountability has also gone the Secretary of State's credibility. The right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) condemned comprehensive capping when he was out of office, but he is now compelled by the poll tax to eat his words.

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): In relation to comprehensive capping, will the hon. Gentleman confirm that if there is a Labour Government, he will get rid of all the capping mechanisms that now exist, thus ensuring that all the extreme left-wing Labour authorities, such as Lambeth, Manchester and Liverpool, can penalise and threaten all the people living in their communities? Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that such people will not receive any protection from central Government?

Mr. Gould: I am very glad to confirm that we are opposed to the poll tax in principle because we believe in local democracy. I shall explain a little later why our fair rates bills will necessarily be lower than the bills proposed by the Government.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Michael Heseltine): My hon. Friend the Member for Bury, South (Mr. Sumberg) asked the hon. Gentleman a specific question. Will there be provision for capping in any systems of local government finance that a Labour Government might introduce?

Mr. Gould: Unlike the Secretary of State, I shall be precise. There will be no provision for capping in any legislation that we introduce. I look forward to hearing similar precision from the right hon. Gentleman when he is asked questions about his proposals.

As I have said, there is plenty for the Government to repent. However, it is the genuineness of the Government's repentance that is in doubt. We have had no word of regret

[Mr. Gould]

or apology from them, only the repellent spectacle of a Government who are trying desperately to shift the blame on to the victims of their errors. We have had no attempt to correct the error at the first opportunity—only vague promises that the poll tax would, at some future date, make way for some almost equally objectionable successor. Worst of all, we have a Government who, with the Local Government Finance Bill, are pretending to put an end to the poll tax, but who are keeping the poll tax and its malign principles very much alive. In fact, the Government are about to put a new poll tax on to the statute book.

We know that the Tory flagship was found to be unseaworthy. We know that there was a mutiny against the captain, who was made to walk the plank, but the attempt to scuttle the flagship has been an abject failure. The poll tax remains afloat—waterlogged, it is true, but still drifting and a danger to shipping. As the mutineers deserted the sinking ship—"mutineers" being a rather more parliamentary term than the one that usually springs to mind when people are described as deserting ships—it has become clear that the new vessel is no more seaworthy than the old. The council tax suffers from exactly the same design faults as the old poll tax, and it is captained this time by someone who does not seem to know where he is or what he is doing.

We should, of course, have been warned. After all, this is the Prime Minister who said of the poll tax:

"I don't know what we'll have to do and neither does anyone else."

On that issue at least, the Prime Minister has been as good as his word. This is the Prime Minister who apparently believes that wish is as good as fact, and who told *The House Magazine* that the poll tax had already been abolished. If the Prime Minister really believes his own propaganda, it is no wonder that he is all at sea on the council tax, Europe, the health service—on everything. In my constituency, the latest joke is to ask, "How does the Prime Minister differ from a supermarket trolley?" The answer is that a supermarket trolley has a mind of its own.

This is the Prime Minister who sought to excuse the poll tax fiasco on the grounds that, to use his own words, it had been "bounced" through the Cabinet. Whatever the truth of that excuse, the right hon. Gentleman was one of the guilty men who then bounced the poll tax through the House of Commons, the Tory party, the local government world and through all the worries and fears which, sadly, turned out to be so well founded.

The Prime Minister was one of those who pooh-poohed all the doubts and difficulties about the poll tax and arrogantly insisted that he and his ministerial colleagues knew best. They and he are at it again. If the poll tax was bounced through, the new poll tax is being smashed through. The preparation for the poll tax was positively leisurely by comparison with the sketchy and hasty pretence at consultation that has proceeded the new measure and by comparison with the draconian guillotine with which we are now threatened, which offers us only half the debating time that was given to the poll tax.

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): The hon. Gentleman has laid some emphasis on constancy. Roughly speaking, how many changes of policy on this subject have emanated from the relevant shadow spokesmen since—I shall be reasonable—1987, and does the hon. Gentleman still cling to the four-part valuation system that I believe was part of his latest policy earlier this year?

Mr. Gould: The hon. Gentleman has betrayed his ignorance of such matters by giving that date. Our proposals were published in full well over 15 months ago. We have not departed from them. They have been widely accepted and welcomed and we are intent on proceeding towards implementing them at the first opportunity, because they are the only and best way of getting rid of the poll tax.

Returning to the new Local Government Finance Bill, earlier I recalled the assurances that were used to allay the fears of Conservative Back Benchers as well as hon. Members of other parties and people throughout the country when the poll tax was railroaded through the House. We are sure to hear the Secretary of State and his minions make the same assurances and the same arrogant and airy dismissals of people's doubts and fears as we heard when the poll tax made its progress through the House. This time, surely, Conservative Members can have no excuse if they fall for it yet again. They are on notice that a disaster of poll tax proportions is in the making. Their constituents will not listen this time to pleas of "not guilty". What, after all, are they for if not to protect their constituents against the mistakes of government?

However, it is not only Members of Parliament who are under pressure. Local authorities, which are having to struggle with the dying spasms of the poll tax without any relief from the ludicrous irrationality of the 20 per cent. contribution rule, are at the same time having to prepare for a totally new and untried tax, involving a new valuation register, prepared on new valuation criteria, banded according to new principles, and requiring the preparation and maintenance of a new register, new discounts and new rebates, all to be handled by new software as yet unwritten.

It is no wonder that there is increasing scepticism about whether all that can be done in time to issue the new council tax bills in April 1993, irrespective of when the Bill completes its parliamentary passage. It is not only the Opposition who are saying that ; so are all the independent experts and institutions, the software companies and an increasing number of local authority treasurers. Their concerns are understandable, and centre on the administrative problems that they will face. Those administrative problems are scarcely affected by the timetable for the legislation. The Government's real reason for pushing the legislation through in such a hurry has nothing to do with the administrative timetable, but everything to do with their own short-term electoral considerations and with the need to clear the decks in case they should suddenly acquire the nerve to face the electorate in March.

It now seems virtually certain that, under the Government's proposals, poll tax bills will keep on coming —not just next year—1993—but in 1994 also. It is no wonder that the Secretary of State, true to form, and realising that his Bill is a recipe for keeping the poll tax alive for another two years, is busily trying to shift the responsibility for yet another failure. That is all of a piece with his characteristic refusal to serve on the Committee, and yet more evidence of his unwillingness to face the music.

The Secretary of State's claim that we may somehow be responsible for delaying abolition of the poll tax is a piece of barefaced cheek from a Secretary of State who seems to believe that the more outrageous his claim the less it will be subject to scrutiny. We yield to no one in our anxiety to get rid of the poll tax at the first opportunity. That is why we have repeatedly offered the Government our co-operation in pursuing the one guaranteed way of abolishing the poll tax by 1993—the enactment of our fair rates proposals.

The Government have turned down that offer, and have insisted on their own proposals. We regret that fact. Nevertheless—I wish to make this crystal clear—we have no intention of delaying the Bill or filibustering during its passage through the House. Indeed, we remain ready to discuss with the Government, at any time, a sensible timetable which will allow proper time for debate without jeopardising the Bill's passage.

We will insist, however, on doing our proper job as an Opposition. This is not just a Bill to get rid of the poll tax. It is a Bill to replace the poll tax with a new tax—a new poll tax—and we are determined to ensure that this time the measure receives the scrutiny that it needs. We will not be deterred from proper parliamentary scrutiny by the antics of the Secretary of State. I look to Conservative Members for support in undertaking that important task.

That task is crucial because the new tax is deeply flawed and it inherits many of the most objectionable features of the poll tax. Like the poll tax, it is totally untried and untested. Like the poll tax, it is complicated and difficult to administer. Indeed, by combining a totally new property tax—if one likes, a capital values tax—with the head tax element of the poll tax, it is arguably even more complicated than the poll tax to administer and collect. It will be a tax, in other words, on the roof over one's head and on the heads under one's roof.

We shall pay a heavy price for these complications. The collection costs will be high; the collection levels will be low—certainly lower than in the case of fair rates or the rates of times gone by. Those two factors will inevitably push up the size of council tax bills, just as the poll tax bills were pushed up.

Under the Government's proposals, the bills for average families will also be higher than they need be because of another good old poll tax principle—unfairness. The valuation process and the artificial compression of the valuation bands have many unfortunate consequences, not least for families in the south and the south-east, many of whom will find that they are paying at or near the top level although they live in perfectly ordinary houses.

We shall want to explore those problems with Conservative Members, but when they come to consider banding, they might do well to remember the Prime Minister's statement to the *Financial Times* on 27 November 1990 just before he became Prime Minister, when he said, "Banding does not work." Does he still hold to that view? Do Conservative Members? Does the Secretary of State? Or is this, like so much else, just so much water under the bridge, to be swept away in the panic to do something, anything, as long as it is not the poll tax?

The real unfairness arises because, as with the poll tax, the best-off people are to be allowed to duck out of paying their proper and fair share. Under the Government's proposals, the ratio of property values in the top band and the bottom band is 8:1—in the real world it is, of course, much greater—yet the ratio of the highest bills to the lowest bills is only 3:1. The result of excusing the best-off is that bills for the rest of us are necessarily higher.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): Under the hon. Gentleman's proposals, will he maintain the proportion of public expenditure now covered by VAT? Can we therefore say that there will be no change in VAT rates if his system, as opposed to the council tax, is introduced?

Mr. Gould: If the hon. Gentleman had followed these matters at all closely, he would have known that we said exactly that in the debates on the Budget.

We can test the fairness of the council tax by looking at the bill that the Secretary of State himself will face. The Secretary of State is a millionaire. He lives in an expensive house in the heart of London. His bill will be just £273—£100 less than the bill for the lowest value property in Langbaurgh. How can that be fair? I look forward to hearing the Secretary of State defend that concept of fairness.

For all those reasons—administrative costs will be high, collection levels will be low and average bills will have to compensate for the special help given to the wealthy—the council tax bills will be higher than fair rates bills would have been. On average, they will be £67 higher.

The Government's figures—let us for the moment assume that they have an accuracy which the Government's abysmal record on predicting poll tax bills certainly does not justify—show that average council tax bills this year in Langbaurgh would have been £470 and in Middlesbrough £447—£170 and £153 respectively higher than the equivalent fair rates bills. Those figures—the £170 and the £153—represent the surcharge that Langbaurgh families will have to pay for the continued life of the Tory Government. What is true of Langbaurgh is true of the rest of the country.

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. Michael Portillo): Do I take it from what the hon. Gentleman just said that he now has figures for every local authority under his proposals? I do not believe that we have seen them before. Will the hon. Gentleman please lay them on the table?

Mr. Gould: The hon. Gentleman may remember that the chairman of the Tory party professed to be gobsmacked when we produced precisely those figures. There is perhaps a little mystery in these matters. It is now clear that the chairman was gobsmacked because he saw the figures which we produced. It is clear that the Minister of State has remained ungobsmacked because he has resolutely refused to look at the figures which we produced. I shall gladly send him a copy.

Mr. Portillo: What the hon. Gentleman has produced is a meaningless average figure for Great Britain. He has never produced figures for every local authority. That is what we now wish to see.

Mr. Gould: We are beginning to unravel part of the continuing mystery of why the poll tax went so badly wrong and why the new poll tax will also go so wrong. It is because we are confronted by a bunch of ignoramuses who do not do their homework. They do not keep up to date and do not keep abreast of the facts which are put before them. I shall gladly send to the Minister the figures

[Mr. Gould]

which we produced—I think, from memory, at the beginning of April—and which had such an immediate impact on his senior colleague and an even more gratifying impact on the electorate, who voted in huge numbers up and down the country for Labour candidates.

We are promised in the Queen's Speech a further local government Bill. At first sight, this offers much more promising ground. It contains some proposals that we accept—indeed, some that we think do not go far enough. We are keen, for example, to ensure that local authorities should make a public response to auditors' reports. Our own "Quality Street" proposals recommend that councils should publish information about standards to be met and their performance in meeting those standards. We shall want to avoid some of the pitfalls of what seems to be a muddled approach by the Government to those questions. For example, we shall table an amendment which would require councils to issue customer contracts of the type pioneered by Labour councils. We have no intention of letting local government off the quality hook.

The disappointment of the Bill is the way in which it has ignored, on the issue of local government structure, the possibility of proceeding by consensus. We favour a local government commission. We want to see flexibility and sensitivity to local needs. But we shall hope to convince the Government—indeed, it is essential that we do so—that a piecemeal, long, drawn-out process which is manifestly open to political gerrymandering and is certain to lead to further confusion is not the best way to proceed.

What we need from the Gracious Speech was an apology for the poll tax and a guarantee to put matters right. Instead, we have an apology of a Bill—the typical work of a Secretary of State who is happier making the airy gesture than doing the hard work. The Bill is hastily prepared, it will be rushed through, it takes enormous risks, it will be unfair, it will threaten civil liberties, it will put local councils under intolerable pressure—yet even then, it will not end the poll tax by 1993. When and if it should replace the poll tax, it will simply reproduce the most objectionable features, the unfairness and the confusion of its hated predecessor.

The new poll tax is a fitting epitaph for a Government who do not know how to say sorry, for a Government who are desperate to run for cover, and for a Government who have run out of ideas and out of time. We and the British people will put the Government and their new poll tax out of their misery as soon as they give us the chance.

5.20 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Michael Heseltine): My hon. Friend the Minister made the point that when the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) rose to speak in this debate on the Gracious Speech, on the vital topic of local government, there were only 10 Labour Members to follow him over the top on such a critical issue. Even when the Labour party Whips toured the Corridors of the Palace of Westminster, all they could drag into the Chamber was about 28 people. The single group of people who have a vested interest in keeping the poll tax on the statute book were gathered together to listen to the tragic case that we have heard this afternoon.

The Gracious Speech covers some of the most far-ranging reforms of local government with which we have had to deal in the House for many a long year. It covers a new regime for local government finance and proposals to set up a commission to consider the boundaries of local government. It includes proposals to extend competitive tendering to a wider range of areas. It deals with the scandal of Labour councillors voting for high budgets and then refusing to pay their fair share of them.

The Gracious Speech is set against the background of the Government entering into a wide-ranging partnership with local government through city challenge and competitive housing investment programmes. We are achieving standards in local government that have never been seriously considered by the Labour party, yet all that we have is a weary parade of inaccurate stories about the poll tax from the hon. Member for Dagenham. We are determined to replace the poll tax at the earliest possible moment, but the Labour party will use every device that it knows to keep it on the statute book.

I can tell the House why the Labour party wants the poll tax to remain on the statute book: it sees it as the only argument that it has left with which to try to fight a general election. If anything was revealed to me this afternoon, it was that the Labour party has no policies to deal with local government. It has no credible alternative for financing local government. It wants to use the poll tax to hide the high levels of extravagant expenditure in which Labour councils indulge.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East) *rose*——

Mr. Heseltine: I give way to the arch-exponent of that policy.

Mr. Nellist: Can the Secretary of State explain why schedules 3, 4 and 8 of the council tax Bill provide exactly the same enforcement procedures as apply under the poll tax? Four years ago, the Government abolished imprisonment for debt under the Debtors (Scotland) Act 1987, yet the council tax maintains imprisonment as a penalty in England and Wales. Why the difference? Why keep such medieval barbarity?

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that one third of the 90 people who served a term of imprisonment in England and Wales were caught by the 20 per cent. rule—30 unemployed people and three on invalidity benefit? Will that happen under the council tax?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman knows that people on the 20 per cent. benefit level were compensated for what they were expected to hand over to the local authority. The 20 per cent. arrangement will not apply to the council tax. The issue for the hon. Gentleman is simple. We were elected to the House to pass laws and to keep within the law of the land. The hon. Gentleman consistently undermines the credibility of the democratic process by refusing to pay legally raised bills, which he then foists on his constituents.

If that is the voice of the Labour party, I challenge its leader to say whether that is the message that he wants spread from one end of the country to the other. His supporters are flouting the law. Is that what the leader of the Labour party wants? *[Interruption.]* As the right hon.

Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) will not speak for himself, I give way once more to the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist).

Mr. Nellist: I shall be brief, in deference to my hon. Friends who also wish to speak. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that, since the introduction of the poll tax, every month and on time I have paid a uniform business rate that is five times the level of the personal poll tax in Coventry? Every month, on time, I have paid my national income tax. My refusal to pay the poll tax will be maintained until the Government introduce in England and Wales what they have already introduced in Scotland —the removal of the barbaric practice of putting pensioners, the unemployed and others in prison for the crime of being poor.

Mr. Heseltine: It is a simple matter. Does the leader of the Labour party think that a Back Bencher has the right to defy a law that was passed by a majority in both Houses? Is that a sign of what Labour, if it were in power, would advocate to the country? I happen to believe that the right hon. Gentleman does not support the views of the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East. It is an open secret. I cannot understand why he does not have the guts to stand up in the House and say so.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): The Secretary of State is talking about the Conservative Government bringing in laws and obeying them. What about the previous Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley)? How many times did he break the law? The Secretary of State should get up and tell me that.

Mr. Heseltine: The issue with which the hon. Gentleman must deal is simple. Does he think that he should pay the community charge in his constituency while his hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East does not pay it in his? Is the hon. Gentleman prepared to defend his hon. Friend's position? That is the question and it is one with which the hon. Member for Dagenham did not deal during his speech.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): The Secretary of State referred to breaking the law. Is he aware that many Conservatives are telling people to break the law and trade on Sundays? The Tory party gets money from people who recommend breaking the law on Sunday trading.

Mr. Heseltine: I have no hesitation in saying that the law must stand. I defy the hon. Gentleman to say that those who represent the Conservative party in the House are inciting people to break the law.

The issue is simple: it is whether right hon. and hon. Members have a right to take part in a democratic process and then ignore—indeed, frustrate—the conclusions of that process. That is the road to anarchy and it is indefensible. It is one of the ingredients in the legislation with which we shall be dealing and I will want to know whether the Labour party will resist that, as it intends to resist so much of what we are trying to do. We have made it absolutely clear that the poll tax has to go at the earliest possible opportunity. The interesting point is that, every time we try to take positive action to bring about the end of the poll tax, it is the Labour party that hawks itself round the country saying that it cannot be done. It is trying to undermine the credibility of what we are trying to achieve because it has a vested interest in doing precisely that. The fact is that it will be done. We are going to do it, and we shall do it by April 1993.

Very soon, on Second Reading, we shall have the chance to consider our proposals. They will be exhaustively considered during the usual procedures of the House. The ideas that we have put forward are now clearly understood. There will be a property-based valuation which will broadly reflect the circumstances of the people living in those properties. There will be an eight-band system ranging between a payment of one to three depending on the valuations of the properties.

Mr. Adley: My right hon. Friend will know that, as one who consistently voted against the poll tax, I welcome the Government's commitment to replace the real unfairness of the poll tax and many of the perceived unfairnesses of the previous rates system with the new proposals. However, does he agree that the hundreds of thousands of people who live in mobile homes do not enjoy the sort of property values which equate with the bandings that he has produced? Will he at least say that he is prepared to consider a separate band for people living in mobile homes who really have only the value of the pitch on which they live to represent the value of their properties?

Mr. Heseltine: I know that my hon. Friend has a particular interest in this. All these matters must be fully ventilated in Committee. I do not want that to be taken as saying that we can help in one way or another, but it is important that we should deal with the details in Committee.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Heseltine: No.

The proposals involve issuing a bill on the assumption that a household is occupied by two people. Anybody on full income support will be entitled to a 100 per cent. rebate and there will be a discount for a single person amounting to 25 per cent. of the bill. As the House knows, we shall discount students, student nurses, people on the youth training scheme and apprentices. We shall introduce transitional arrangements in order to help people who face difficulties in moving from one system to another. In those ways, we have carefully designed a system that will be simpler to administer and cheaper to collect. It will undoubtedly be—and already is—widely regarded as fair.

I come now to some of the specific points of the hon. Member for Dagenham. First, I ask him whether he is against banding. Is the concept of banding something with which he can agree? That is an important question, the answer to which I wish to establish in order to discover the differences between our carefully worked-out proposals and the detailed intensive work which is apparently being conducted behind closed doors by the Labour party. Is the hon. Gentleman in favour of or against banding? I think that the House will accept from me that he does not know the answer to that question. There is no answer to whether the Labour party is for banding or not.

I took the trouble to do a little research of my own and I discovered that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) has said that the Labour party had no objection in principle to valuation bands. It is interesting that, if one does one's research and reads with care the

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Municipal Journal, one can find out what the Labour party thinks. But if one asks the official Opposition spokesman, he does not know.

Mr. Gould *rose*——

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside) *rose*——

Mr. Heseltine: I give way to both hon. Members.

Mr. Gould: It is a matter for regret that the Secretary of State seems to suffer from the same weakness as the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities. The answer to that question, and I suspect the answer to almost any question that he may care to put to us, is provided clearly in the fair rates proposals which, as I said in answer to an earlier intervention, we published 15 months ago. It is the Secretary of State's own look-out if he is too lazy to read that document.

However, since we are on the question of banding and who believes in what, would the Secretary of State tell us whether he agrees with the Prime Minister's statement which I quoted, to the effect that banding does not work? Does he agree with that or not?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman knows full well that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister supports the proposals that we have made, so he does agree with them. That is the answer to the question. But let me be frank with the House. I want to find out what the Labour party believes in. That is why I stood at the Dispatch Box a year ago and asked the Opposition to come and talk to us. We gave them a chance to consult, to explain. We might even have gone further. They might have helped us to design the proposals. We could not find the answers in the document "Fair Rates". The document is so vague, almost vacuous, that it contains nothing that would enable anybody to draft any legislation. We asked the Opposition to come and talk, but they would not. Now we ask them about banding and the hon. Gentleman obviously does not know. I accept that his No. 2 does know.

We have established that the only real substance against the banding argument is that the Opposition want to put the bands up higher into the valuation range. That is completely consistent with their policy of going back to the rates. One of the only principles left in Labour's financial proposals for local government is an envy tax. They will not raise any money by that, but they want to cane the rich. Having taken 59p in the pound off them in income tax, they want to milk them in another way by introducing more complicated ways of raising more money, and that is in addition to what they intend to do to small businesses in local government, putting the uniform business rate back under the control of Labour authorities. That is a chilling thought to anyone who happens to be living near a Labour-controlled authority. Sadly, there are too many of them——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Yes, Lancashire.

Mr. Heseltine: —not just in Lancashire. They now see that there will be higher bands to raise more money from the rich and 59p in the pound in income tax, and that British businesses will be milked for more money for Labour extravagance. That is where we are beginning to head in Labour's alternative proposals for local government finance.

Let us move on to the figures. My hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo) has an immense number of virtues and very few weaknesses, one of which is not laziness; it is not a lack of diligence for his task. Nobody knows more about the matter than he does —although, compared with the hon. Member for Dagenham, that is not saying very much. It is known that he knows. The hon. Gentleman says that my hon. Friend has not checked up, but my hon. Friend was right. The hon. Gentleman produced a document which was relevant to the first year of Labour's proposals if we went back to the rates.

Mr. Gould: I was intrigued and amused, as was the whole House, by the Secretary of State's assertion that his ministerial colleague knew and that it was known that he knew. Has the right hon. Gentleman checked that he knows?

Mr. Heseltine: Yes. I spend my life trying to keep up with my hon. Friend, and it is one of the races that I am losing. But he is younger than I am.

Let me continue with the delicate subject of Labour's figures. My hon. Friend has done his homework and he knows, as I know, that the only figures that the Labour party has produced are on the assumption of a return to the rates.

Mr. Gould: No.

Mr. Heseltine: Oh, yes.

I return to the *Municipal Journal* of 25 October and I shall tell the House how the fair rates proposals are going to be valued. This is what it says:

"They have suggested a mixture of capital values, rebuilding costs, repair costs, and rental values."

Before anyone thinks that that is a finite definition of the process by which they have worked out all these figures, and before we get carried away and pinned down into thinking that this is all that accurate, step forward the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), who told the conference:

"We are open to persuasion and to ideas."

That was not 15 months ago or even 15 days ago. It was last week that the hon. Gentleman was saying all that.

Can anyone tell the House how one can pin down the figures that they claim to have published if one has not made up the basis of valuation upon which one is going to do it? Will either the hon. Member for Dagenham or the hon. Member for Brightside, or any Labour Member, intervene at this stage, so that we can understand their logic? *[Interruption.]* Not from a sitting position—if the hon. Gentleman wants to intervene, he should get off his butt and do it.

Mr. Gould: The Secretary of State is making a valiant attempt to get himself ungobsmacked, but in taking this debate back seven months to a point where we comprehensively established our position to the great discomfort of the Government, the right hon. Gentleman will recall that we enjoyed the support of independent experts, not least the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, for the calculations that we made.

Mr. Heseltine: I know that Labour have been consulting CIPFA, so please can we have the benefit of

that consultation? Will Labour Members explain how the system will work? Of course, we all know that there are no answers to those questions. There is no conceivable way in which anybody could work out what proportion of what value was about building costs, capital values, rental costs or anything else, because they do not have those figures. Why? They are terrified that they might actually be questioned about the realities of their proposal.

What has Labour done in its fair rates document? Fair rates? I see that the Leader of the Opposition has gone. Quite rightly, he has abandoned ship, and the reason why he has gone is that he could see where I was coming to in my speech.

The leader of the Labour party was describing rates as the unfairest tax that he had ever come across. What is Labour's policy but to go back to them; not for ever, but just for one putative year, while they try to work out some of the details that they have not begun to approach up until now.

Let us move on to the most interesting and constructive intervention in this debate. Labour's proposals—when it has worked them out, costed them, and designed them—will have one absolutely inviolate principle built into them; that local Labour parties can spend and spend and spend as though there is no tomorrow, and in that way there probably will not be a tomorrow. We have it on the record—no capping and no restraints.

The interesting thing about the departure of the leader of the Labour party is that the shadow Chancellor never came at all and nor, to the best of my knowledge, did the shadow Chief Secretary. I think that the Whips had better go and get them, because we have had another vast extravaganza this afternoon—uncontrolled local authority expenditure, all on the public sector, with no control whatsoever.

Mr. Gould *rose*——

Mr. Blunkett *rose—[Laughter.]*

Mr. Gould: It is rather unfortunate if Conservative Members are to exploit my hon. Friend's obvious difficulties.

As the Secretary of State is talking about unbridled extravagance as a consequence of not having any capping powers, does he remember his very definite espousal of exactly that position in the article which, from memory, he published in *The Times* on 9 April 1990? Does he remember his condemnation of any power of universal capping and the very forceful and persuasive grounds on which he made that condemnation? Why has he departed from that principle, or is it another example of the Government, the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister standing on their respective heads?

Mr. Heseltine: It is very simple. We reduced the community charge by £140 per person, and we are determined that it stays for the benefit of the people and is not gobbled up by extravagant local authorities under Labour control. How much worse it would be if the capping regime were taken off, to make it even more certain.

I have nothing but respect for the hon. Member for Brightside. He actually understands these matters and he can add up. His figures make sense—whereas I do not think that the hon. Member for Dagenham can add up. At least, I did not think that he could add up until I heard him doing a broadcast about his place in the shadow Cabinet, when he was obviously able to add up to determine exactly where he had come. The hon. Gentleman's figuring ability is focused, but not on local government finance.

I have only one final point that I want to draw to the attention of the House.—[HON. MEMBERS: "More."] No, one final point, on the Bill that the House will consider very shortly. It is always complex to design a local government tax and no taxes will ever be popular, so there must be a proper consideration. However, we should all be able to unite in that if the proposals, as the House and another place determine them, pass into law. They will become the law of the land. That is why we were elected to come here. That is why we do not fight it out on the barricades. That is why we do not behave as badly in this country as others with less sophisticated parliamentary systems do. We have learnt.

Mr. Gould: What about a speech?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman asks, "What about a speech?" What about a principle? What I want to know is very simple. When we get to that part of the legislation which takes away from Labour councillors who do not pay their bills the right to vote on matters that affect the budgets of their councils, will Labour vote against us or will it not?

Mr. Gould: Of course we will.

Mr. Heseltine: I heard the answer, even though it was from a sedentary position—"Of course we will vote against."

Mr. Gould: As the Secretary of State is so concerned on all occasions to devote his time to our position, let me make it clear, in case he is yet again unable to comprehend the simplest proposition, that we made it plain on the very day that he made his rather bravura statement to the Tory party conference—not, I might say, to the House—that we would support those measures and that particular part of the Bill. There has never been any mystery about it. I am sorry to deny the Secretary of State his great peroration.

Mr. Heseltine: We had all the poll tax demonstrations and no complaint from the Labour party. We had all the "Won't pay" councillors and no complaint from the Labour party. We had hon. Members saying that they would not pay and no complaint from the Labour party. There was defiance of the law. The Tories stand up and do something about it and then they come in and agree that we were right. Why did they do nothing to discipline their own councillors and Members of Parliament? In the end, it is always the Tories who have to take the difficult decisions. It is always the Tories who have to deliver the quality of service and to keep control over public expenditure. All we get is trivialisation, exploitation and incitement from the Labour party—frightening innocent people with their claims and counter-claims. We will have no part of it. They are an Opposition and bad at that. We will never give them a chance to be a Government and bad at that.

5.49 pm

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Of the Secretary of State's performance—and it was a performance—I can only say that he treated the House as

[Mr. Allen McKay]

an extension of the Conservative party conference. How wise Conservative Members were not to choose him as their leader.

Yesterday we debated rights, freedoms and responsibilities. In fact, that theme runs right through the Queen's Speech and our debates on it. All these matters are important to my constituency: the right to work, the right to education, the right to a free national health service, the right to walk around without fear, the right to an adequate standard of living after retirement and the right to fair remuneration while in work. Those rights complement each other, combining to provide the quality of life to which people are entitled.

If that is to happen, however, the right policies must be implemented, both nationally and locally. That applies to Government policy on employment and education, for instance. My area also needs to continue its industrial development by extending existing workplaces and attracting inward investment. It needs to rebuild its economy, and thus offset the unemployment that has been caused by the policies and beliefs of the present Administration.

I do not wish to be churlish and fail to recognise the help that we are now being given. There is, however, a long way to go before we can replace the thousands of jobs that have been lost, and repair the resulting damage to the local economy. Since 1979, the so-called reconstruction of the coal industry has brought about rapid and continuing colliery closures. My constituency, once the centre of the Yorkshire coalfield, now has no collieries within its boundaries, although mineworkers travel to other coalfield areas. The problem has been compounded by the restructuring of the steel industry.

As a consequence, unemployment in my area is twice as high as the national average: it is now at 14 per cent., and is still rising. Meanwhile, crime is also on the increase, which is not helped by the under-financing of our hard-pressed police force. Our fire service chief recently warned the Government that the underfunding of the service would cause another fall in manpower; he has subsequently told them that the current strength of the service is below the Home Office requirement.

The Rothschild report contains proposals for the reduction of the coal industry to about 18 collieries, in preparation for privatisation. Government thinking appears to confirm that intention. The Coal Industry Bill raises the limit on grants to about £2,500 million—possibly up to £3,000 million. That amount just happens to coincide with a reduction in manpower of 40,000-plus, in line with the Rothschild report.

What measures will the Government take to deal with the devastation that those redundancies will cause to the coalfield communities? One way of helping them would be provided by the RECHAR money which, although it is available in Europe, the Secretary of State is denying to local authorities, for purely ideological reasons. The Government are simply being intransigent. The money was intended to go to the coalfield communities; it was not meant to go where the Government want it to go.

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): I know the hon. Gentleman's integrity, and I am sure that he does not intend to mislead the House. If given the opportunity, however, my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench would tell him that the European Commissioner came here some months ago, agreed with three Secretaries of State on how the RECHAR money could be distributed and was content with the arrangements in Britain. Only after he returned to Brussels did he change his mind. It is not the Government who are delaying the payment of the RECHAR money; it is Bruce Millan in Europe. That is the truth, and the hon. Gentleman should accept it.

Mr. McKay: It is not true. In any case, the Secretary of State has just been lambasting us about compliance with the law. Commissioner Millan has acted in accordance with the law of the EC and the rules of distribution. He is not stopping the payment of the money; the Secretary of State is doing so, purely and simply because the areas identified by Millan and his committee are not acceptable to the right hon. Gentleman. The money is available, but the Secretary of State is helping to prevent the rejuvenation of the coalfied areas. The money would help tremendously—although, of course, further action would still be necessary.

The Government also plan to take steps that no Government should take, irrespective of politics. They plan to revoke the 1908 legislation and to allow any future mine owner to increase the permitted hours of working and to brush aside the years of struggle that it took to regulate the health and safety arrangements and protect miners from unscrupulous mine owners. The legislation should not be revoked without being replaced by adequate protection measures.

The Secretary of State for Energy should make a statement about what the Government intend to do in the event of privatisation of the mining industry. Who, for instance, will supply concessionary coal to pensioners, employees, widows and redundant miners? Will the cost be met by the new owners or by the Government? What will happen to the payment of cash in lieu of fuel allowance? What provision will be made to continue existing pension rights for retired mineworkers, their widows, pneumoconiosis sufferers, future pensioners and those who have been party to redundancy agreements? Will the new owners make those payments or will the Government?

Will those people be sold down the river, as the employees in the sold-off skill centres have been? Astra workers, despite assurances from the Government and the Secretary of State that their civil service retirement and redundancy agreement would be honoured, are now being given a take-it-or-leave-it choice: they can sign away their rights under the new agreement or they can be given the sack. Some of my constituents stand to lose some £27,000.

What is to happen to the £11·5 million that was given to Astra to retain those civil service pensions? Will the Government take it back, or will they allow it to go to the Astra management?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. Let me remind the hon. Gentleman that, unlike the earlier debates on the Queen's Speech, today's debate is on an amendment, to which the hon. Gentleman's remarks should be addressed.

Mr. McKay: I mean no disrespect, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but we are debating the Queen's Speech, are we not?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There is a distinction between the early days, when we debate the whole of the Queen's

Speech, and days such as today, when we are addressing an amendment. Today's debate is more restricted than previous debates.

Mr. McKay: With respect, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have always understood that, as the debates on the Queen's Speech actually constitute a single debate, the contents of the speech are debatable throughout. If I am wrong, I stand corrected.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Let me repeat what I have said. In the early days, when no amendments have been selected, our debates are on the Queen's Speech, and any subject is therefore in order. Today, however, we are debating an amendment, to which the hon. Gentleman should address his remarks. The same will apply tomorrow if amendments are selected.

Mr. McKay: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I accept your ruling; I had forgotten about the amendment.

I hope that central Government will stop their vendetta against local authorities. Local government consists of the people on the ground who are trying to deal with the problems that have been created by central Government, including the increase in crime.

The Secretary of State's failure to deal realistically with my authority's standard spending assessments should urgently be reassessed. I have been a Member of Parliament for nearly 14 years. During the whole of that time, no Secretary of State has refused to meet a delegation led by me. However, when I approached the present Secretary of State for the Environment and asked him to meet a delegation led by me regarding the new council tax, he refused. I accept that he asked the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities to meet us, but it was wrong of the Secretary of State to refuse to meet directors of finance of seven local authorities to discuss the standard spending assessments, how the poll tax affected their authorities and how the new council tax is likely to affect their areas. That should not happen again.

The Secretary of State's failure to deal realistically with the authorities is causing a great deal of trouble. The Secretary of State referred to bad, left-wing local authorities and to capping. Local government has never overspent. I accept that the Government set the targets for overspending. Since 1979, however, the Government have denied local government its proper share of finance. Each year, they have reduced the grant. It was 72 per cent. It is now 33 per cent. Local government therefore had to find the money from somewhere else. The only way to do so was by increasing the rates. That resulted in the Government's introducing capping.

Local authorities are doing exactly what the people in their area want them to do. My authority has been Labour-controlled for 52 years. The authority has 60 Labour councillors and three others, two of whom are Conservatives. Those Labour councillors are elected year after year. How can they not be carrying out the wishes of the people in the area if they are returned to office? The authority is regarded as overspending because it is a low-rated area. The rates have therefore been increased by much more than the Government wanted. The directors of finance wanted to talk to the Secretary of State about that, but he refused to meet them.

Capping has an effect on local government services. If we want to regenerate the economy, we ought not to have capping. The local authority already spends 65 per cent. of its income on education. Our education programme, however, ought to be geared to the regeneration of the area. Capping ought to be stopped so that money can be raised in accordance with local authority requirements. In 1974 the authority decided to introduce nursery education throughout its area. That had to stop when the authority was capped, with the result that only half the area is providing nursery education. That part of the area which is without nursery education wonders when it is going to be provided. All I can tell the people in that part of the area is that, as soon as we get rid of this Government, they will have their nursery education.

In an effort to attract sufficient money to meet its statutory obligations, the authority had to axe all its adult leisure activities—300 courses. That affects the unemployed and the elderly in particular. I wanted the Secretary of State to meet the local authority so that that case could be put to him, but he refused.

The council tax will not work. If the Government's assessment of the money that will be raised by means of the council tax is wrong, where will it be found? Do they intend to ask local government to raise the amount of money locally without capping or by setting capping at a higher rate? Some property in my area has been adapted for use by handicapped people. If a broad assessment of an area is made for council tax purposes, how can those properties be identified? All the houses look alike. All these matters will have to be considered in Committee. If, however, there is insufficient time to consider them in Committee, because of the guillotine, we shall face the same difficulties as we experienced with the poll tax.

Today, the Secretary of State used the same arguments about the new council tax as the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewksbury (Mr. Ridley) used when he introduced the poll tax Bill. The right hon. Gentleman said that it would be fair; it was not. He said that it would be easy to collect; it was not. He said that it would not be expensive to collect; it was. All that the right hon. Gentleman said during the passage of that Bill has been disproved. We are suggesting, as we suggested when the poll tax was introduced, that, rather than rush the council tax Bill through, we should return to the rateable value system so that all the parties can get together and introduce a proper system by means of which local government can raise the money that it needs. We should not rush bullheaded at it and make as much of a mess of the new council tax as we did of the poll tax.

6.7 pm

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): I am delighted to have the opportunity to say goodbye to the community charge, or to the poll tax as it became known. It is well known in the House that I did not support the Bill that introduced the community charge. I felt that it would be disastrous, particularly in my area of Yorkshire and for the majority of the people whom I represent. Some of them did gain, but the majority lost. The poll tax turned out to be a disaster.

My constituents and I welcome the £140 reduction that the Government have introduced this year. It made a tremendous difference to the amount that my constituents had to pay to the local authority. I also welcome the capping powers that will protect people from excessive council spending. I am amazed, however, that the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) said clearly that

[Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock]

Labour would remove all the capping legislation, thereby giving the opportunity to many Labour-controlled authorities to spend even more. I hope that my constituents in Batley and Spen are listening to the debate. Their authority is Kirklees. The one thing that they do not want is the reins to be taken off Kirklees. They cannot afford the bills that they now receive from Kirklees. If capping is removed, my constituents will be unable to afford all the money that Kirklees will want to spend.

I welcome the introduction of the new council tax, which appears to be much more reasonable to the majority of my constituents, as well as to many other people. However, I shall monitor closely the Bill's progress in Committee to ensure that there are no hidden bits that I have missed. I also welcome the extensive rebate scheme of up to 100 per cent. for those on low incomes and the scheme of transitional relief to protect people from any excessive increases during the switch from the community charge to the council tax.

I note that students' halls of residence will be exempt from the tax, as will student nurses on Project 2000. I know that that will be greatly welcomed because many people involved in such areas felt that it was unfair that they should have to make a contribution to local services, even though they may have used them, at that stage in their lives.

I welcome the provisions to bar councillors who have not paid their community charge or council tax bills from voting on the level of spending in their authority. I was brought up with the principle that one cannot have rights without responsibilities. In such circumstances, one has to pay a tax if it is the law of the land; otherwise there should be no right to vote on the level of spending.

If the council tax had been in operation in 1991-92, no council in England that was spending in line with the Government assessment of the standard level of spending would have had to charge more than £267 for a two-person household in the bottom property band. Under the community charge, the authority in Kirklees wanted to charge £750 for a two-person household. The Government's £140 reduction per person has still left those households with a bill of over £500, which is a tremendous amount of money. The new council tax will make a great difference to such people.

Second homes have always presented a problem. It is not always a matter of someone being able to afford to have two homes. Often it may be a vicar who is approaching retirement and who lives in a manse but will need somewhere to live when he retires. Obviously, the Church will want his property back immediately. It may be someone unable to sell a house after an elderly relative has died. The new arrangements say that a property that is not someone's sole or principal residence will be liable for half the bill. That reflects the property element of the tax and I am sure that it will be welcomed.

There must be some charge on empty properties because the owners will still expect some local services. They will expect the roads to be repaired, the fire brigade to come if there is a fire and the police to protect their property if there is a break-in.

Houses in multiple occupation have always been a problem and the community charge has not been easy to collect in such properties. Therefore I welcome the fact that the owner of such a property will be subject to the council tax and that it will be up to the owner to decide how much is passed on in the rent to the people who live in the property. It will make the tax much easier and cheaper to collect, particularly in student areas and cities where there are many flat dwellers. In such areas, a great deal of tax has gone uncollected in the past.

It is difficult to comment at this stage, because I must admit that I have not perused the Bill line by line as perhaps I should have done. However, I can assure my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench that I shall do so shortly. If I find that there are any little bits that I do not like, as in the past, I shall be quick to point them out. However, at this stage, I can give a warm welcome to the new council tax because it will be a great help to people in my constituency and in the north of England where I know properties better than I do in the south.

6.13 pm

Mr. David Bellotti (Eastbourne): We were "entertained" by the Secretary of State, whose comments, sounded more like an after-dinner speech than an intelligent exposition of an extremely important Bill. I noticed that the Secretary of State left the Chamber less than an hour after the start of the debate. Also, the right hon. Gentleman was not present during the debate on the important matter of the capping of local authorities, which was before the House recently. His interest in the subject before us is limited and he revealed today that he does not have a unique grasp of the detail of the Bill. In fact, I wonder whether he has read it. It was fair for the Secretary of State to say that most of the knowledge resides with the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities, but it is a matter of regret that he is not present to hear this important debate.

The majority of people in this country and in the House know that the rates were discredited. The system was unfair because it fell upon people who were unable to pay. Also, the majority of people know that the poll tax was unfair, although many in the House arrived at that conclusion rather late in life. Now, the Government are giving us a combination of those two most unfair local taxes. The poll tax has become discredited and has had to go, in the same way as the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) had to go. The two issues are related.

The poll tax cost the country millions of pounds to introduce. That money would have been better spent not on administration but on services that our local communities desperately need. It has left millions of pounds of local taxes uncollectable and that money will never be seen. Local government will have to raise it in other ways if it is to pay for the important services.

The Government say in the Bill that students and those on income support should not pay local taxation. If that is so, why do we not have before us a Bill that includes the abolition of the 20 per cent. contribution to the poll tax from 1 April 1992? There can be no excuse for the lack of such a provision if the Government are asking us to accept the provisions in this Bill from 1993. Even at this late stage, will the Government consider abolishing the 20 per cent. contribution from 1 April 1992? It costs so much for local authorities to collect that abolition would make good financial sense as well as being fair to those most in need.

There is one system of local taxation that is used in many countries across the world. It is cheap to administer,

easy to collect and, most important, related to the ability to pay. That system is a local income tax. We know that such a system could be in place by April 1993. The information that is needed is contained already in the Inland Revenue computers, and a programme could be introduced within six months. It has been proven in use in other countries and the Government should consider it seriously. They have not done so. Although I regret that, the debate must centre on the Government's proposals.

The proposals for the council tax hinge on valuations. We are to see a repeat of the costs of introducing the poll tax. The Government admit in the Bill that it will cost £250 million to introduce the council tax. About 500 extra staff will be needed in the valuation offices and tribunals. Even with all the extra staff and at such a huge cost—money that could be much better spent on services—the detailed valuations will be hit or miss. Clearly, it is not intended to assess every house and dwelling individually. In many cases it will involve somebody standing at the end of a street deciding that all the houses in that street will fall into a certain band.

The bureaucracy will be the same as that involved in the poll tax. The Secretary of State said some time ago that there will not be a register for the council tax. However, it appears that there will be a list. I should like the Secretary of State to tell the House the difference between a register and a list. Those who wish to apply for a discount will have to fill out a form, and their details will be compiled in some list or register. At the end of the day, the Bill will give the public the right to examine——

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): The hon. Gentleman has made an interesting point about a list or register. Can he give his opinion on how he thinks that the Government will compile such a list, and the time scale involved? Will local authorities produce a list before the service of the first bills or will they compile it after the first bills have been issued and when people come back to the valuation officers with their complaints and to ask for their discounts? How will it fit into the time scale?

Mr. Bellotti: The hon. Gentleman makes a telling point. The Government have not answered many points of detail. The Secretary of State made a fairly long and amusing speech, but it was low on content because he has not thought the issue through. I am sorry that I cannot share my view on the issue with the hon. Gentleman; we shall have to wait and see what the Government have to say on that and other important issues.

Under the Bill, people will be able to take copies of the valuation list and third parties will be forced to reveal information. It would appear that if those who are compiling the list believe that they can obtain information about the value of a property, they can write to, say, National Westminster bank and it will be required to supply that information within 21 days. If that is what the Government intend, they are breaking new ground.

The Bill gives a valuation officer the authority to call on a household in the middle of the night. If he puts a note through a door to say that he will be back in just over 24 hours, the owner of the property or the tenant must allow him in. A call can be paid in the middle of the night with only 24 hours notice being given. One wonders whether that is the Government's intention; I hope that it is not.

Appeals against the valuation band will be held in public. The general public will be able to file in and obtain subsequent information on the outcome of the appeal.

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): The hon. Gentleman seems to be going on about personal privacy. Am I not right in thinking that one of the disadvantages of a local income tax is that everyone's privacy will be invaded, because town halls will have the personal income details of every individual eligible to pay the local income tax?

Mr. Bellotti: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman, because he gives me an opportunity to explain how the income tax would work and to give him the categorical assurance that no town hall would have details of a person's income. The local authority will set the local income tax in exactly the same way as it previously set the rate. That will be communicated to the Inland Revenue, which already has confidential information about national taxation on its computers. If we assume that the local tax rate across the country is 3·3 per cent., that would be added to 25 per cent. and 28·3 per cent. would be deducted under the PAYE system. It is extremely simple.

Mr. Burns *rose*——

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East) *rose*——

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne) *rose*——

Mr. Bellotti: It is extremely simple, and I am grateful to have the opportunity to explain it. May I commend hon. Members who would like more information to visit some of the many countries that operate a local income tax, because they would be enlightened?

Mr. Burns: Am I right in thinking that the Inland Revenue will add an average of 3·3 per cent. to the 25p standard rate of income tax, collect that under PAYE and then pay it to the local authority? If so, surely it would not take a sophisiticated mathematician to work out, if anyone were so inclined, the income of each individual who is paying the local income tax.

Mr. Bellotti: I am extremely grateful again. The total is passed to the local authority. It is not passed with a list of what individuals have contributed—that defeats the whole point of it.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo *rose*——

Mr. Bellotti: I shall not give way again because I want to refer to the local income tax later. Only five Conservative Members were present earlier; I am glad that my speech is encouraging them to come into the Chamber.

I want to deal with the clauses that are vindictive. A councillor who is two months behind with payments of the council tax will be required to declare that and will not be allowed to vote at a council meeting. I can think of nothing more ludicrous than someone who is one month and 29 days behind with his payments being able to vote at a council meeting while someone who is two months and one day behind has to remember to declare that and cannot vote. Have the Government thought through how this will work? The Bill puts the onus on the councillor to remember whether he or she is more than two months behind. It is a crazy and vindictive proposition.

A second area of vindictiveness is the attachment of earnings. The Government will attach the earnings of anyone who has not paid the council tax. When I referred

[Mr. Bellotti]

to the local income tax earlier, I might have expected grumbles about employers having to collect it, but if there is no objection to employers collecting local taxes, what is the objection to the local income tax, which they would collect?

Under the Bill, there is to be a 25 per cent. discount for a single household. The Government always seem to get their maths wrong. If a standard household has two people, and if the Government want to be fair, one as a fraction of two would lead to a 50 per cent. discount.

As with the poll tax bill, the phrase "jointly and severally liable" appears in the Bill. How fair can that be? Surely, under a property tax, the person who owns or rents the property is taxed. Other occupants should not be taxed jointly and severally. The person who rented or owned the property may have moved or split from their partner, yet the remaining partner will be liable for the ex-partner's tax. That is hardly fair.

The whole Bill is unfair. A wealthy single person living in a big country mansion may pay less than a pensioner couple who are spending their retirement in a high-value bungalow on the south coast of England.

Some hon. Members applied to discuss the future financing of local government with the Secretary of State but we were denied an audience. I asked the Secretary of State or the Minister of State to meet the two local authorities in my constituency—Wealden district council and Eastbourne borough council. One is run by the Conservatives and the other by the Liberal Democrats. That request was refused. The hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) had a similar request turned down.

Are the Government not prepared to meet local authorities to discuss the financing of local services? Will this be the standard answer that hon. Members get? Perhaps the Government are trying to cover up what will happen when the council tax takes effect in April 1993.

I must tell the Government that their proposals will win little support in Eastbourne. The rates in Eastbourne were unpopular because of the high value of houses. The poll tax was unpopular. A two-adult household in Eastbourne of one earning and one non-earning adult paid £274 each —a total cost of £548. Under the council tax, the average value of a house in Eastbourne would fall into band C —a total cost of £390. Under the local income tax, a youth worker earning £16,134 would pay £322·45p, with a non-earning partner or spouse paying nothing.

In nearby Lewes, the position is even worse. Under the poll tax, a similar household would have paid £245 each in poll tax, a total of £490. Under the council tax band E the average bill in Lewes, where average house prices are higher, would be £444. Again, however, under a local income tax a youth worker in Lewes earning £16,134 would pay just £255·74, with the non-earning spouse paying nothing.

In local authority after local authority, the council tax will be unpopular. In some places, it will not be an improvement on the poll tax and in others the improvement will be only marginal. The Government have clearly not done their sums—they have not worked out what its effect will be.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: The hon. Gentleman uses as an illustration someone working in Eastbourne and someone working in Lewes. The House is anxious to know whether the collection of tax by employers is relevant to where people work or to where they live. The young man working in Lewes may live 50 miles away, for all we know, so will the hon. Gentleman deal with the problem of how on earth the local authority will know who works where? Local authorities do not have that information at the moment. If the tax is not based on where people live, how will the money eventually end up with the local authority in which they live? How will a local authority know how many working people live within its area?

The hon. Gentleman's party has not thought about any of those issues. He says that such a system works in other countries. His party's spokesman in another place refers to local taxation in Canada and in the United States. California is the size of this country and some of the Canadian provinces are 10 times that size. Can the hon. Gentleman relate that to a local income tax in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Bellotti: I am again extremely grateful for that intervention. I shall not take any more interventions, as I am coming to the end of my speech and many hon. Members wish to speak.

Mr. Andrew MacKay: I enjoyed it.

Mr. Bellotti: I enjoyed it, too.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) for his intervention. A local income tax would work according to where a person lives. The Inland Revenue has the necessary information on its computers, because it has everyone's postal code. Only this summer, I went to the Inland Revenue offices to check, and the postal codes are on the computer. Every local authority knows exactly which dwellings are in its area so, by matching the postal code to the authority, all the money would go to the right local authority. I am grateful for the opportunity to enlighten the hon. Gentleman, and I thank him for his question.

There has been an overestimation of property prices in the Government's thinking. Since the Government first thought of the council tax, property prices have fallen, so the income generated will be less. The effect will be that the eventual figure for the poll tax—now the council tax—will be greater. There will be millions of losers who live in high-price property who enjoyed the poll tax but will now pay much more under the council tax. Many of them are in the south of England, in seats held by Conservative Members of Parliament.

I should like a response from the Minister about the proposal to privatise the revenue collection service in local government. Colleagues in local government have been saying for some time that the Government have said that, at some point, the revenue collection services in local authorities would be privatised and would go out to tender. I seek an assurance that that will not be for at least three or four years after the introduction of the council tax. If it were introduced before that, it would cause absolute mayhem in town halls.

The Bill refers to the collection costs, which the Government have estimated at 40 per cent. of the cost of administering the poll tax. However, the Audit Commission has challenged that figure, and has said that it would be nearer 50 per cent. The Bill refers to £200 million a year being saved on the cost of collection, but it does not mention whether that £200 million is a saving on

the cost of collecting the poll tax or on the cost of collecting the original rates. The Government introduced the discredited poll tax, which cost an enormous amount to collect, so there is not much joy or credit if the new system still costs more than the original system.

Instead of the council tax and the unclear proposals, it would be far better to introduce a system that will work. Let the local authorities control, for example, the business rates; let us remove all the capping powers and increase the quality and accountability of locals services by making people locally responsible to those who elected them. With less Government interference, more local competence will emerge.

In Committee, we shall consider every detail of the Bill and we promise to consider carefully every clause. We want to ensure that people are not landed with a second taxation system which is as unfair and unjust as the poll tax.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): I call Mr. Allen McKay.

6.35 pm

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): We have already heard Allen, and he cannot speak twice.

I do not wish to appear uncharacteristically churlish, but I wonder whether I alone raised an eyebrow when the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) questioned whether the Secretary of State should have left the debate after an hour when the hon. Gentleman has been the only member of his party to be here throughout the debate—until the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) scuttled in towards the end of his speech. Wisely, he missed the first half, but sadly, the second half was not a great improvement.

I commend the hon. Member for Eastbourne on one half of his speech. He quickly glossed over Liberal Democrat proposals on local income tax and rightly stuck to debating the official Opposition's amendment. It was clear from the telling interventions of my hon. Friends the Members for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) and for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) that there are many unanswered questions.

The only question that the hon. Gentleman answered clearly—I am grateful to him for that—was to the effect that there would be no capping under Liberal Democrat proposals. So, if we had local income tax, however it might be collected and whoever it might be collected from—wherever people happen to live—there will be no limit on the tax, which means that a profligate local authority could levy huge sums. That was fascinating to learn. But that is enough about the Liberal Democrats' local income tax.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): The hon. Gentleman must understand that in a city such as Liverpool this has been a serious issue. If the poll tax or rate cappers had been the people themselves, that city might not have run into the problems that it experienced. Militant might not have been given the opportunity to blame the Government if there had been far more local accountability. That is why my hon. Friend's point was well made.

Mr. MacKay: There were problems in Liverpool before rate-capping was introduced, but I shall not be diverted from the amendment because we wish to consider carefully what the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) said when he moved it.

Perhaps the Labour party has been out of office for too long; it has forgotten what government is about. It has forgotten that it is about making hard decisions and that there are complex problems associated with the raising of income for local authorities. I presume that that is why in the past four years the Labour party has come up with 70 different policies.

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): Is my hon. Friend sure?

Mr. MacKay: It was very difficult to decide what the hon. Member for Dagenham had in mind, even when he was being prompted by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett).

All of us who have studied the problems over the years can point out the shortcomings of alternative policies. As I said in the previous debate on the subject last year, what was required was to combine the best of the old ratings system with the best of the poll tax, or community charge, and local accountability. That has been achieved in the council tax and I strongly support it.

You may recall, Madam Deputy Speaker, because you were in the Chair during that debate, some of my reservations about the poll tax, which have now been addressed satisfactorily by the Government. I said that it was nonsense to collect 20 per cent. poll tax from students. It is unfair to the students concerned, and the cost of collection outweighs the money that comes in. I am delighted that, when the council tax is introduced, there will be no charge for full-time students.

I also expressed concern about some of the poorest in our community who found it difficult to pay even 20 per cent. of the poll tax. I know full well that, in effect, they are not paying that, because they have gained increases in social security which offset the 20 per cent. that they pay. But that is not good accountability. The real problem is that those people often spend the money in advance and then find it difficult to raise the sum when required. I am, therefore, delighted that the rebate will go up to 100 per cent. for the least well-off in the community.

The third group that worried me when I spoke before were the families in my constituency in which the breadwinner or breadwinners were on a low income which was not sufficiently low to be eligible for community charge benefit. Almost inevitably, most of those people live in properties of relatively low value. Under the council tax, they will pay less than they were paying under the community charge, and that is right. There should be some element of ability to pay. I am satisfied that the banding system is sufficiently wide so that those who live in houses of a higher value will pay somewhat more for services which they can clearly afford.

The reason why I was so opposed to the old rating system and why I campaigned for so long to have it changed was the blatant unfairnesses, especially for single people, whether they were young people starting out in life or pensioners, widows or widowers, living on their own. They had to pay the same as their neighbour who lived in an identical house. We have all heard that argument before and it is correct. It was wrong that such people should pay the same, so I am delighted that there will be a full 25 per cent. discount on the council tax for single people.

[Mr. MacKay]

The first most serious flaw in Labour's proposals is that there is no discount for single people, so that widows and old single people will pay the same under Labour's so-called fair rating system as will their neighbours in identical houses. That cannot be right, and I hope that all those single people are well aware of Labour's proposals.

Labour's proposals share their second great flaw with the proposals of the Liberal Democrats. I was pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, South (Mr. Sumberg), aided and abetted by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, flushed out from the hon. Member for Dagenham the admission that there would be no capping. If there were a Labour Government, or a Labour Government aided and abetted by the Liberal Democrats as we had between 1974 and 1979, there would be no capping. That meant that for every irresponsible council such as Liverpool council, against which the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) fought so courageously, the sky was the limit.

I am amazed that the hon. Member for Mossley Hill can go along with that idea because he has considerable practical experience in Liverpool of what life is like for his constituents if there is no capping. That is now Liberal Democrat policy and it is Labour policy.

We should not have needed to debate the issue tonight if, on day one of the community charge, there had been the 2·5 per cent. increase in value added tax which had led to £140 reduction per head in poll tax. Like colleagues in other parts of the country, I have found that in my constituency it was not the principle of the community charge—except for the anomalies that I have just mentioned—that concerned people and lost public opinion, but the size of the poll tax bills.

From knocking on doors in my constituency, I have found that, although the poll tax was a great issue until 18 months ago, when in the Bracknell end people were paying £396 and in the Windsor end they were paying £450, following the reduction of £140 and with prudent spending by the local councils—the poll tax is now £230 in Bracknell and £287 in Windsor—it is no longer a major issue. That is deeply significant and it is a great pity that, when the poll tax was introduced, the increase in VAT did not take place. If it had taken place, we could have amended the anomalies such as discounts for students, and we should have had no problems.

It is only because the poll tax is holed below the water-line in public credibility that we need to move to the council tax. The council tax offers the best compromise between the two previous systems of rates and of poll tax. We have the best of both worlds without the worst of either.

Mr. Pike: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that in my constituency, as in many constituencies in which there are low rateable values, many pensioners living alone find it strange and inconsistent with the Government's claimed policy of getting rid of the rates, and going on to the poll tax and now the council tax, that, as a result of the concession on low rateable values, a single pensioner living alone often pays more poll tax as an individual than do two, three or four individuals living next door? People living together tend to get more relief in lower rateable value properties. How does the hon. Gentleman justify that, when one of the Government's original claims was that the poll tax would help single pensioners living alone?

Mr. MacKay: As the hon. Gentleman knows, single people on the whole have been helped immensely by the community charge and they will be helped by the council tax as well. Much depends on the amount of relief that is given. As I have already pointed out, up to 100 per cent. relief will be given to those on the very lowest incomes to whom the hon. Gentleman referred. That has been satisfactorily addressed under the council tax and the hon. Gentleman should appreciate it fully.

I shall explain how satisfactorily the council tax will work in Bracknell and Windsor. The average house in Bracknell comes under band D. Band D will be charged £367 compared with the £230 a head which we pay at present under the poll tax. The figure was £396 before the reduction due to the VAT increase in this year's Budget. In Windsor, where the largest single band is band E—25 per cent. of people are in that band—people will pay £495 council tax for a house compared with £287 a head poll tax. The figure was £450 before the Budget.

The council tax is a good deal for my constituents and they will also deem it a fair deal. They will be pleased that their student children do not now have to pay poll tax and they will be delighted that the least well-off in the community will get up to 100 per cent. discounts and full relief. I commend the council tax to the House. I am delighted that Ministers have listened to what I and others said in previous debates and in private.

If democracy means anything in our society and if our constituents making representations to us means anything, saying, "Yes, we are wrong and we need to amend the proposals" should be applauded and not laughed at by hon. Members such as the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar). I can remember sitting on the Opposition Benches on many occasions and seeing mistakes made by the previous Labour Government. They never retracted those mistakes.

The fact that many of us who supported, and still support, the principle of the community charge, and who voted for it, believing that it was right, but nevertheless saw mistakes in it, made representations to the Government and speeches in the House, and now have the perfect compromise in the council tax, should be commended. That is what good parliamentary democracy is all about. The average voter, the average member of the public out there, would like to see politicians change their minds more often and amend policies taking public opinion and practical experience into account. If they did so, politics and politicians in this country would have a much better name than they do now.

6.50 pm

Mr. Bill Michie (Sheffield, Heeley): The hon. Member for Berkshire, East (Mr. MacKay) said that the Government at least had the courage to admit when they had made a mistake. I have no doubt that they are making another mistake now. The argument seems to be that there was nothing wrong with the principle or the administration of poll tax, it simply cost people too much. What sort of argument is that? That is precisely what the problem was, not just to ordinary ratepayers but to the nation as a whole.

If the Government claim to be honestly admitting that they have made mistakes, why do they not have the honesty to say that the poll tax was a complete and utter disaster? They were told both in Committee and on the Floor of the House how bad the poll tax would be, and what effect it would have. Unfortunately those predictions came true. We cannot be glad that the poll tax died in that way, because it did so only by causing suffering to many of our constituents.

The poll tax was a disaster.

Mr. Illsley: It still is.

Mr. Michie: Indeed, the poll tax is a disaster, and will continue to be. The council tax is "son of disaster". Elements in it are the same as those in the poll tax legislation; it will cause the same problems to the ratepayers; it will meet the same fate. Again, it will be rushed through. We shall not be able to examine every comma, phrase and sentence. That was not allowed in the poll tax debate, and it will not be allowed in the council tax debate.

I understand why the Government want to rush the council tax through. Nevertheless, mistakes will be made again, because we shall not have enough time to scrutinise all the details. I am pleased that the Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen do not wish to delay the legislation for the sake of delay. They do not want to be blamed for keeping the poll tax in its present form. But the Opposition cannot play footsie with the Government when the Government say, "Come and help us with our Bill and share the blame as well as the glory." Unfortunately, there will be no glory, and so far as I am concerned the Government can take the blame.

I am angry about what has happened to local authorities over the past few year, because local authorities are one of my first loves—the work they do and the services that they provide, or at least, used to provide. With the council tax, bills will go through the roof, yet it will not help local government in its function of helping the people who elected it.

Local government has suffered for at least 10 years. Even the rate support grant was fiddled, messed about and changed so much that local authorities found it more and more difficult to cope with their yearly rate assessments and bills. Our amendment at least stresses that we would get rid of poll tax immediately and replace it with a fair rating system.

The only way to cure the immediate problems of local government is to scrap poll tax entirely. That would help to stave off further suffering for local taxpayers, who have already suffered for many years, not only in financial terms but from the stress caused by trying to find out whether those such as young people, single people or unemployed people were eligible for help. The poll tax caused division within households as well as within cities.

The Secretary of State said that he believed in democracy and that the Opposition did not. I dispute that. For me, democracy does not consist in letting the Government run amok with the nation's expenditure without question, nor in saying that the Government alone can make decisions and know what they are talking about. Democracy involves the whole structure of society, including local government. Without local government we should not have a democracy for long; there would be a dictatorship from Westminster. I do not want to hear any more about our people not believing in democracy because we defend local rates and local authorities. We do that because we are democrats and believe that local government is a good democratic institution which helps people and the nation as a whole.

If there were not so much fiddling with the standard spending assessments, and all the extra burdens of responsibility imposed on local authorities without the wherewithal to implement the legislation, local government would be in a better position. Local authorities have no room for manoeuvre to help people in need in their areas. Local economies are in a sorry state because of Government policies, and nowadays local government has neither the power nor the wherewithal to help local people in difficulties, or even local industry—that is a factor in my constituency.

This is the fag end of the Government. As several of my hon. Friends have said, there is not much in the Queen's Speech. The biggest part of it concerns the council tax. I have learnt from other Members who have spoken that we are not allowed to stray from the subject of the day's debate—local taxation—and deal with the main issues in the Queen's Speech. But there is no doubt that the way in which local authorities are funded has an effect on the economy of cities, constituencies and regions.

Over the years, because of the restrictions placed on local authorities, democratically elected councillors have become less and less able to help people in distress or need. It is said that the Government have been trying for years to slim the nation down—to get it fit and ready to fight, to compete with other countries. They call that lean and hungry. That is not what I call it. The Government have emaciated and starved the nation. The investment which should have been made at national and local level is no longer there; our industry is dying around us. Our nation is emaciated because training programmes are few and far between and are of nothing like the quality which should be expected in a modern society. It is emaciated, too, because of the siphoning off of our national assets and the squandering of North sea oil. The profits from those assets, and the benefits of North sea oil, have not flowed, or even trickled, down to local government.

The nation is not lean either; it is starved. It has been starved of caring because of the idea, encouraged and perpetuated by the Government, especially the former Prime Minister, that there is no such thing as society, and that everyone is on his own. That is the sort of society that has been created; it is not the sort of society that we want.

Local authorities are still trying their best to keep communities together and help in any way that they can, but they cannot do that without proper powers and legislation—certainly not without proper financing. Community spirit in our constituencies is now at rock bottom. There is a shortage of cash, an atmosphere of hopelessness. And what about caring communities? Even under the council tax legislation, if it gets through, if local authorities such as mine decided to help the community in any way, they would be liable to capping or other forms of restriction, as in the past.

It is not local authorities' irresponsible actions or overspending that are to blame: the local authorities have been starved of cash. It is no good the Government saying, "That is your allocation: like it or lump it," if, when something goes wrong, and when the fabric of society in an area falls down, they ask, "What was local government doing about it?" If there is a child abuse case, the

[Mr. Michie]

Government immediately ask, "What was the social worker doing about it?", but we all know that the social worker in question was probably dealing with a caseload twice as heavy as that with which he or she should have been dealing and was receiving no extra resources to help.

The Children Act 1989 is welcome; of course it is. But where is the wherewithal to implement it? The Government have made what would appear to be a generous offer, but an examination of the small print reveals that the money needed to implement the Act has been taken away from other areas on the assumption that the Act will take care of them. That is not the case. More and more responsibilities are being placed on local government while less and less cash is being provided to it.

Let us consider how much cash has been wasted on the poll tax. What is it now? Almost £6 billion has been wasted in one year. That is £19 billion in total, or £173 million per week. The mind boggles. What could we not have done with that in terms of home helps, social services, children's nurses, the rising fives and so on? You name it. That money is all gone—wasted on some daft scheme arising from the Government's bitter hatred of local government and its representation of its people. What has happened? The money has been wasted, services have been slashed and local authorities are no longer in a position to identify and deal with areas of weakness and vulnerability in society. If they do, they are penalised for overspending; if they do not, they are criticised by the local electorate.

I know from my experience of local government that, before the bad old days of Toryism, local authorities used to be able to take all sorts of initiatives. We did not just automatically help young people who wanted special training and special courses. Labour-controlled authorities went to the trouble of forming employment departments that adhered to the strict philosophy of trying to help not just local community groups but local businesses. Working hand in hand with the banks, they sought to help private businesses and small businesses—for example, by trying to help companies with cash flow problems. They bought land to enable people to set up businesses and so create jobs and wealth.

That was all down to the local authorities. If we spent that sort of time and money now, the Government would condemn us as overspenders, because such activities do not fall within the criteria that they have set. Local government has been wrongly accused—indeed, I feel, abused—by central Government, when most of the responsibility lies precisely with that central Government.

While on the subject, I have something to say about a subject connected with local authorities. The demise of the nation's manufacturing base has certainly affected my area of Sheffield, where we have lost 30,000 or 40,000 jobs. Little can be done quickly in terms of the provision of Government money, although we have quangos growing up all over the place trying to tell local government to get over a problem that it did not create in the first place. There is no way in which local authorities can get organised to help to cushion the blow of massive redundancies in such a short time. On the one hand, the Government are destroying the nation's manufacturing base while on the other the local councils in areas that are drastically affected by that destruction are totally restricted both financially and by legislation. That leaves thousands of our people without hope.

Mr. Wilshire: Is the hon. Gentleman really saying that the only way in which a local council or local councillors can achieve anything is by spending money?

Mr. Michie: Of course, strictly speaking, that is not the case. But if the hon. Gentleman wants local authorities to give advice, he must acknowledge that they will incur costs. Or does he want people just to go to the corner shop and ask for advice? Is not it more sensible for them to go to the town hall? If one wants expert advice, one sees an expert, and that expert will be employed by the local authority. If one wants good planning, one employs a good architect, and one pays that architect.

Do the Government want children to have proper accommodation? Do they want people to be protected from abuse of all kinds? If so, they cannot send Joe Bloggs, or anyone who happens to be handy that day, to see people; they must send the relevent expert—social workers or architects. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that all those services can be provided free of charge, in which case that perhaps explains why local government is no longer provided by central Government with the resources that used to be at its disposal.

Local authority initiatives are no longer possible and there is little hope unless we scrap the poll tax completely and bring back some form of fair rates system. That is what the Labour party proposes, and that is what it will do on its return to government next year. In that way, we shall be able to start rebuilding the nation's prosperity. That cannot be done starting from the crackpot ideas of a Tory Government. It must be achieved starting from good initiatives from a Labour Government and, certainly, from local democracy.

7.6 pm

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): There is nothing quite like a local government debate to clear the Benches on both sides of the House. You, Madam Deputy Speaker, may feel that you are looking at the same old faces, but I sincerely hope that you are not hearing the same old speeches even if some of what all of us say on these occasions is quite familiar.

When I contacted Mr. Speaker earlier to ask him whether I might speak, I explained to him that, although I fully understood that the topic for today was the council tax and the Opposition amendment connected to it, I wanted to speak particularly about the other local government Bill which is to come before the House, which is much more relevant than you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and other hon. Members may suppose. *[Laughter.]* You see, Madam Deputy Speaker, they laugh before they hear anything, which shows that they do not want to listen. If Opposition Members read history books—no matter the country in question and no matter the political philosophy of its Government—they will discover that, in the long term, structure is much more important to the health of local government than finance.

My second reason for wishing to speak about the Local Government Bill is that I do not believe that the House can expect to get the finance of local government right without

knowing exactly what it is that we are seeking to finance. I hope that that second point will keep me in order during the rest of my speech, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The snag about the Local Government Bill is that it covers three topics—the extension of powers to the Audit Commission, the extension of competitive tendering, and restructuring. All three matters could be the subject of long speeches but, because of the constraints of time, I shall confine myself to just one of them—restructuring. Let me first explain why I think that the subject of restructuring needs to be thought about at this stage. Someone needs to urge our colleagues, both in this House and in the other place, to avoid the mistakes that have been made in the debates that have taken place so far outside the House and in the lead-up to the legislation that we are now considering.

For my sins, I have listened carefully to a huge number of people in the course of this year. I have studied submissions from 282 of the 335 affected councils, and they do not make happy reading. The process has been profoundly depressing. Throughout my listening and my reading I have found errors resulting from a failure to understand what we are all about. All the time, one finds the same muddle and confusion arising from the failure to think through what it is we are trying to restructure and refinance.

Let me give the House one or two examples. The first error is that the size of a local government area's population matters; it does not. It does not seem to matter in the Scilly Isles, where a couple of thousand people get all their services, nor does it matter in cities with more than 1 million people. Both communities seem to get on quite well. Therefore, population does not matter.

Another error is that the resource base matters. No, it does not if the House gets the Local Government Finance Bill right because that Bill and the contribution from the centre will deal with that. Another error that crops up time and again is that council and service boundaries must be coterminous. That belief led to the foul-up and disaster when we last restructured local government. On that occasion, we drew up the boundaries for service delivery convenience.

An example of the muddle and confusion is that far too many people claim that meeting needs equals providing services. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Mr. Michie) exhibited that confusion. Meeting needs means ensuring that services are provided, and that is very different from providing them oneself.

More confusion and muddle is revealed by the statement, "I'm in favour of unitary authorities because I believe in all-purpose authorities." No one, not even someone on the far out-of-sight, left-wing of the Labour party, would suggest that local government should have all-purpose authorities to run every supermarket, and do-it-yourself shop and every solicitor's and doctor's practice. We must be grateful about that confusion.

Another mistake is to believe that accountability means local democracy. It does not. The deliverer of every service, from a corner shop to a hospital, is accountable to every client or customer. Accountability does not necessarily need the intervention of a councillor or any other politician.

How should we avoid those traps? We should home in on and think seriously about one small part of the Local Government Bill. Clause 13(5) provides that the review that is to take place must have

"regard to the need—
(a) to reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and (b) to secure effective and convenient local government."

That provision raises four big issues which should be at the heart of the debate that will take place in this House during the winter: what are the identities of local communities? What are their interests? What is local government? How are we to make local government, when we have defined it, effective and convenient?

The first issue—to identify local communities—sounds simple, but mistakes have been made about it on so many occasions that I have almost lost count of them. Only that issue should be allowed to determine local government boundaries. There is only one way to identify local communities, and that is to ask and trust local people and therefore resist temptations to impose solutions from the centre.

However, we must be clear about what we mean by local communities if we are to get things right. That requires us to have regard to the fact that human society, wherever we find it, is highly territorial. In the real world, human society has many levels of community. The implication is that we all belong to several communities so that there is no such thing as one natural community which, if we could find it, would make everything well. We must be clear about what the local government community should be doing. It should respond to service needs and define the area in which people move around for their services. That is the fundamental issue, but we are still talking about local communities.

Mr. Bill Michie: Who is going to pay?

Mr. Wilshire: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will stop and think about it. Obviously local people and central Government would pay—or does he want all local government to be paid for locally, irrespective of how we define it? That would be grossly unfair. Alternatively, if it was all paid for by central Government, the element of local democracy would disappear. I am not suggesting anything vastly expensive. I am simply suggesting that we should listen to local people. If they say that they want something small, let them have something small. If they want something big, let them have it.

Irrespective of issues such as finance, rate capping and charge capping, boundaries must not be drawn for service convenience or for financial consideration. They must be drawn according to what local people want for themselves. There is no ideal or minimum size and there is no standard solution. The Cornish may want to remain Cornish and simply retain Cornwall. However, I am certain that Bristolians do not have the slightest desire to remain in Avon or to be put in Somerset or Gloucestershire.

Mr. Illsley: The hon. Gentleman appears to be saying that, no matter what size the local community wishes to be, it can be classed as a local authority perhaps alongside a large area in which, speaking purely in geographical terms, the people want to be a large authority. Surely there would be losses through economies of scale if that was the case. Surely there must be a minimum size.

Mr. Wilshire: The hon. Gentleman reveals one of the muddles—that meeting needs and delivering services are the same thing. There are different ways of achieving economies of scale in a small community as opposed to a big one. If the natural community boundaries with regard

[Mr. Wilshire]

to the Local Government Finance Bill are defined for service convenience, we will fall into the trap that people fell into years ago.

We must also consider the interests of local communities. It is important to be clear what those interests are not. They are not simply confined to local government services. A local community is as interested in its hospital as it is in its dustbins——

Mr. Bellotti: It is not allowed to be.

Mr. Wilshire: Yes, it is. That is the point. That confuses being interested and allowing councillors to be involved.

The interests of local authorities do not involve who employs the people who empty the dustbins or who employs swimming pool attendants. It is all about the quality of those services. The interests of the local community are not about who owns the electricity company, but about the quality of service provided. They are not about how hospitals—which are topical at the moment—are managed, but about the quality of the service provided.

If that is so, what does it mean for the interests of local government? It means that we should be talking not about economies of scale or about size, but about whether the values of local communities are upheld; whether the needs of local communities are met—whoever meets them; whether local priorities are being set and followed and whether they are being set by local people instead of being foisted on them. Local people are interested in service quality being of the highest possible level and service costs being at the lowest possible level. That is the true role of local government and of councillors.

The next consideration in the Local Government Bill is effective and convenient local government. However, we must first be clear what we mean by local government. There are two concepts floating around on both sides of the House—this is not a party political point—about what local government means. The first is that local government is owned by central Government, and the other is that local government is owned by local people.

This Government, the previous Labour Government and virtually every other Government that I have ever come across have tended to focus on ownership of local government from the centre. But the truth is that central Government simply devise the local framework, and then central Government allocate services, but central Government and this House do not own local government. Local government is owned by local people. The implications of that——

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): The hon. Gentleman is against capping.

Mr. Wilshire: I shall put the hon. Gentleman out of his misery. I am not against capping, and he will see why in a moment.

The implications of what I have said are profound. The hon. Gentleman is quite right to intimate that I have said something significant, but it is not what he thinks I have said. The implications are profound for the Local Government Finance Bill, but not for the reasons that the hon. Gentleman gives, and they are even more profound for the future of local government itself. If we cannot get back to the concept of local government being owned by local people, the future of local government looks pretty bleak.

Mr. Graham: It is bleak just now.

Mr. Wilshire: It is bleak because too many people, particularly in the hon. Gentleman's party, are locked into spending money on interfering in things that local people do not want them to interfere in, or they are wasting money. All those things make the future of local government pretty bleak at the moment.

Having decided what local government means, we can then consider how to make it effective and convenient. If we want to make it effective, we need to look at what the dictionary has to say about the word "effective" and then what it has to say about "convenient". Effectiveness is one of the three Es of the Audit Commission—effectiveness, efficiency and economy. It is interesting that only one of them is mentioned in the Bill. That is absolutely right, because effectiveness is about meeting needs and it is highly political, which is why the Audit Commission and others have always found it difficult to have anything helpful to say about effectiveness.

Efficiency and economy are left out of the Bill for one simple reason—that is, efficiency and economy are about delivering services, not meeting needs. Thus, if we think about effectiveness, we focus our debate upon the needs of local people, and that is absolutely fundamental. Effective local government is about working with local people in areas with which local people identify, irrespective of how the services are provided, and in ways that best meet the needs of local people and not the convenience of service deliverers.

If we want to achieve convenient local government, the dictionary becomes very unhelpful indeed. I wish I could be more positive about that, but I cannot. My dictionary says that convenience means freedom from difficulty or trouble. I wish that it were possible to have freedom from difficulty or trouble in local government, but it is not. Tension is inevitable, for three good reasons.

First, local government is subservient to central Government in any nation state, and that is bound to bring conflict and tension—it is inevitable. Secondly, in the United Kingdom, there is no formal regional organisation. It is perfectly possible to do without it, but it does not half make for additional tension if the absence of a regional organisation is not handled carefully. The third reason why tension is inevitable is that change in society is rapid and great and totally outside the control of politicians. I suspect that, in respect of trying to achieve convenient local government, the best the House could hope for is to achieve the least inconvenient, because that is the reality of the situation.

Thus far I have quite deliberately said little about services, because that is what the Bill wants us to do. It is about local people, local communities and their needs, not about services or the convenience of their managers, and it is not directly about the economy and efficiency of service provison. However, outside the House, the debate about the Bill has been dominated by such issues. It has been dominated by considerations of who controls which service. It has been dominated by debates about making sure that there are areas big enough for efficient provision. But both are issues totally separate from the issues that we should consider when we restructure local government.

The correct way forward for services is that each and every service must be designed separately and independently of natural community boundaries. Surely nobody suggests that the service boundaries of the gas supplier or the Post Office, for example, should automatically coincide with local government boundaries. Of course we do not say that. Why, therefore, should we automatically assume that education, social services or refuse collection boundaries should automatically coincide with a natural community boundary?

The other point about making progress in that direction is that each and every service needs to be allocated separately to the person——

Mr. Bellotti: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that every local authority service could have a different boundary? If so, it is rather incredible, and I should like the hon. Gentleman further to explain.

Mr. Wilshire: The hon. Gentleman makes my point for me. He said "every local authority service". We should not be considering simply local government services. If local government is to be truly effective on behalf of local people, it will have just as much interest in the Post Office, British Rail, the local supermarket and so on. If, however, the hon. Gentleman and his party wish to focus upon those services that are provided by local government, we will fail all over again, because the debate will focus on who controls what. We will be talking about efficiency of service delivery, we will draw up boundaries and have councils which reflect service delivery, and people will simply not identify with them. However, if we go down my track, we will welcome the Bill and make the Bill serve the purpose of local government.

I hope that what I have had to say has alerted the House to the errors that have been made elsewhere and to the muddle and confusion. I very much hope that the forthcoming consideration will seek to define natural communities, not service territories. I hope that it will focus on the needs of people rather than on the services that are delivered to meet them. It must detach the designing of services from drawing council boundaries.

If we do that, we will secure once and for all the future of local government, improve service delivery at the same time, and enhance local democracy. If we do not do that, we will live to rue the day. The wish for a good future for local government unites all parties and all people inside and outside the Chamber. If that is so, the needs of people and respecting them must come first, and then we will get it right.

7.27 pm

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): I quote:

"The community charge is here to stay. I don't think that by the time the next election comes the idea that we should overhaul once again the whole system of local government finance will be regarded by the electorate as a terribly cheering idea. Maybe one day we'll have people breaking the law and painting on the sides of buildings 'Up with the community charge'".

Those are the very profound words of the right hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Patten) in an article in *The Spectator* only a little more than a year ago. As usual, he got it wrong. As usual, the arrogance of the Conservative party could be seen in the words of its chairman. The Tories got it wrong with the poll tax, but they were not prepared to admit it. The Government misled the electorate, but they were not prepared to admit it. They blindly carried on saying how popular the poll tax was, when, from day one, everyone knew that it was a disaster and that eventually it would have to go.

Today we are discussing a new tax to replace the poll tax—the poll tax that has hardly been with us any length of time and yet has been a disaster. Statements by the chairman of the Conservative party and by many other leading Tories have shown them to be totally inept in not being able to glean just what a disaster it was. The Government have disgracefully squandered billions of pounds on the poll tax. Billions of pounds of taxpayers' money have been wasted on a tax which everyone except the Conservatives knew would fail.

Even at the end of 1990, when everyone knew that the poll tax was becoming a liability and a disgrace, the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo) said at the Conservative party conference:

"The community charge is a courageous, fair and sensible solution. Far from being a vote loser, with your help it will be a vote winner and launch us on our fourth term. Let's go out from this hall together and proclaim its advantages. The community charge makes local government accountable; the community charge revives local democracy; the community charge puts power into the hands of local people. That, ladies and gentlemen, is an achievement to be proud of."

If it is such an achievement, why are we discussing the new council tax today, a tax that is intended to get rid of the dreaded poll tax? The reason is that the Conservative party is an arrogant party that will not listen or take advice.

When the poll tax was originally introduced in the House, my right hon. and hon. Friends pleaded with the Government not to introduce it, saying that it was a bad and unfair tax. But the Government did not listen and we can all be sure that they will not listen today either. Just like the poll tax, the council tax is deeply flawed. It is not a fair or a practical tax and it certainly will not stand the test of time.

The administrative complexity of the system is likely to be worse than that required by the poll tax. The whole thing will be a shambles and as unpopular as the poll tax. The new council tax will be based on an inadequately banded valuation of property, with a fixed upper limit that is designed to protect the very rich at the expense of everyone else. Is not that exactly the same as the poll tax? As we said when the poll tax was introduced, the council tax is just another tax that has been designed to protect the very rich. There is no doubt that it is a flawed and a doomed tax.

The appeal system is vague. The banding and discount schemes will mean that bills will not be related to people's ability to pay. The discount scheme will cause tremendous problems and will be a bone of contention causing disruption, just like the poll tax. Every property in Britain will be banded. Why is the difference in property values between band A and band H in the ratio of 1:8 while the difference in bills for households between those in the bottom band and those in the top band will be only in the ratio of 1:3? The council tax proposals are and will remain contentious. The number of bands and the fact that they are national and do not allow for regional variations will cause great resentment throughout the country.

The use of estate agents to carry out the valuations will cause tremendous problems. Different estate agents will have different views. The assessment process will be seen to be totally unfair. Valuations will be carried out not on individual properties, but on packages of about 20,000

[Mr. Gerry Steinberg]

properties. Individual properties will not be given an actual value. The operation of such a simple and crude system is bound to cause tremendous problems and to trigger masses of appeals from people who do not accept that their property has been valued correctly.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Before leaving his point about valuations and his criticism of the fact that there is only a national scheme, will the hon. Gentleman agree that the old rating system often led to properties in low-rated areas having a high rate in the pound, while in high-rated areas, some properties had low rates in the pound? I do not see what the difference is. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman can explain it, because it is his party that wants to return to the old rating system.

Mr. Steinberg: The difference is that someone whose property is too highly valued and placed in the wrong band will pay more than he or she should. If the hon. Gentleman cannot recognise that, it is easy to see why his party is in its present difficulties.

The biggest complaint that I hear about the poll tax is that people whose house may be exactly the same as that of their neighbours and who may earn exactly the same wage are paying a different amount. That causes tremendous resentment—and rightly so. Another complaint is that a single pensioner may have to pay more than the working couple who live next door. Again, that causes tremendous resentment. We must get away from such a state of affairs. However, under the council tax, the bills received by identical households with the same income may differ simply because of the identity and status of the person who is nominated as the "liable" person, thus causing exactly the same resentment.

It is now almost certain that, despite what the legislation may say, local authorities will have to compile a register or list if they are to administer the tax efficiently. Although we were told by the Secretary of State that there would be no need for a register, a register or list of adults will be required to administer the system of the 25 per cent. single person and status discounts.

The importance attached to the head count element of the new tax is obviously the result of pressure from the right wing of the Tory party and is most clearly revealed in the proposals for the complex system of discounts. Despite what the Government have said, the system of discounts and household liability will make administering the tax almost impossible without a register listing every adult, similar to that which was needed for the poll tax. For most households, councils will need to know the number of people living in a house and the relationship between them.

If ever there was an infringement of people's liberty, this must be the ultimate example of it and, frankly, it is even worse than with the poll tax. Help with bills will be lost if additional individuals move into households. In many cases, the income of every adult in the household will need to be known by the local authority before the bill can be calculated. Is not that crazy? Is not that exactly the same system that the poll tax produced and was it not that system that caused so much hatred towards the poll tax?

The Government got the amount of the poll tax bills wrong. When they introduced the poll tax, they said that the average bill would be about £178. They soon revised that and said that the bills would average £278, but when the bills were sent out for the first time, the average amount turned out to be £357. The signs are that, yet again, the Government have got their sums wrong. They have already made the mistake of overestimating property prices when establishing the bands.

Recent figures from the building societies show that house prices will be well below those used by the Government for their council tax calculations. Although the council tax retains a head tax element, it has been devised as a property tax. Each household will receive a tax bill that is based on the value of the property, but that value will not necessarily be the property's actual value. Is that not an incredible U-turn from the Government? Is that not an amazing volte-face?

I am sure that hon. Members will recall that only recently the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate said:

"Any system based on property will repeat the injustice of the domestic rates . . . taxes on people's homes are unfair. Property values bear little relation to people's ability to pay."

How can anybody ever again take seriously anything that the hon. Gentleman says—that is, if he was ever taken seriously in the first place?

The Government aim to have the new tax up and running by April 1993. That means that the Local Government Finance Bill will have to complete its parliamentary passage quickly. Therefore, as was the case with the poll tax, much of the detail does not appear in the Bill but will be introduced later through regulations. Again, as with the poll tax, it will be a total catastrophe and a total nonsense.

When the poll tax was introduced, we repeatedly warned the Government not to go ahead, but they are yet again introducing a tax without any thought, research or real idea of what will happen. Again, Opposition Members are warning them that they are moving towards disaster.

Last year, the Prime Minister said:

"One of the difficulties we got into with the community charge was being bounced into decisions before they were fully thought through and before we knew precisely how they would affect people".

That attitude is typical of everything that the Government have done. But the Prime Minister is now set to do the same thing all over again with the council tax by trying to rush it through even more quickly than the poll tax. The new tax will prove as disastrous for the British people as was the poll tax.

Will the council tax be fair? As we all know, unfairness was the reason why the poll tax failed, but many people to whom I have talked already believe that the council tax will be unfair because, once again, it will not be related to people's ability to pay, which should be a characteristic of any good tax.

Early indications are that the Government's predictions are all wrong and that, as happened with the poll tax, when the first bills go out they will be twice as much as the Government have estimated. I welcome the Government's decision to get rid of the poll tax and to reintroduce a property tax, because that is basically what the Labour party would do. But this Conservative council tax is the wrong option. It is ill thought out and badly prepared, just like the poll tax, and the Tories are making it up as they go along.

First they were going to have 14 valuation bands, then seven, then nine, then seven again, and now we have eight. Despite the Government's promises and the chaos of the poll tax, the poll tax is still with us and poll tax bills will

be going out in March and April 1992. If only the Government had been prepared to accept Labour's help to solve the problem, we could have got rid of the poll tax.

The delay in abolishing the poll tax is due entirely to the Government's unwillingness to co-operate with the Labour party. If they had co-operated, we could have got rid of the poll tax and returned to the rating system straight away. Because the poll tax is still with us, it is becoming increasingly difficult to collect. The debt throughout the country is more than £1·5 billion and continually rising.

Mr. Wilshire: Surely the hon. Gentleman knows why the poll tax is becoming increasingly difficult to collect. It is because Labour Members set such a dreadful example by breaking the law and refusing to pay.

Mr. Steinberg: Do not talk so much drivel. That is absolute drivel and you know that—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Member will correct what he said.

Mr. Steinberg: I certainly will, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have never known you to speak drivel in your life.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is because I hardly ever speak.

Mr. Steinberg: The only drivel that ever comes out of the House comes from Conservatives, and we have just heard it again from the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire), who spoke for about half an hour.

If only the Government had listened to us—but they continued to refuse to co-operate with the Labour party. They continue to keep the discredited 20 per cent. contribution rule, which is inflicting dreadful and unnecessary hardship on the poor and is undermining the ability of councils to collect the tax. Would the Government do anything about it? Would they listen? No, they never do, because they are so arrogant. As a result, I am pleased to say, they will lose the next general election.

The British people are sick to death of the unfair poll tax. It does not matter where one goes or who one talks to —all one hears is how unfair it is. It will be with us until 1993 at the earliest if the Conservatives win the election. Fortunately, they will not. The British people want a tax that is based on the principle of fairness. They want it based on the ability to pay and the council tax, like the poll tax, will fail those tests.

In 1990, the chairman of the Conservative party said:

"You must know that any fundamental change from the existing system will in fact create many millions of losers. The only way of avoiding this is by pumping in billions of pounds of taxpayers' money from the Exchequer."

That is exactly what the Government did last year. They pumped in £4 billion of taxpayers' money to cushion the poll tax. The poll tax had to be subsidised to such an extent that it is costing the Exchequer billions of pounds in an attempt to take away the pressure that it has caused on the Tory party.

Recently, the former leader of the Tory party apologised for the dreadful mistake that she had made in the broadcasting franchise fiasco. More appropriately, she and the Tories should be apologising to the British people for the catastrophe of lumbering them with the dreadful poll tax and the misery that it has caused so many people.

Many leading Tories made speeches viciously condemning a property tax. The right hon. Members for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke), for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt), for Witney (Mr. Hurd), for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) and for Bath (Mr. Patten), the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo) and the right hon. and learned Members for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind) and for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) all viciously attacked the suggestion of a property tax. Yet now they promote this council tax, which will be just as bad and just as painful as the poll tax.

Were those right hon. and hon. Members converted by argument or perhaps by sorrow for what they have done, or by pity for the poll tax payer? No, they were converted simply because they realised that they would lose their seats and lose office at the next general election if they did not do something.

Adopting the council tax is jumping out of the frying pan into the fire. The council tax will be no better than the poll tax. It will be just as unfair as the poll tax and will lose the Tories the general election, just as the poll tax would have done.

7.44 pm

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): I was delighted that the Gracious Speech contained provisions for both the major Bills dealing with local authority functions, management and finance. I hope that I will catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, on Second Reading of at least one of those Bills. I am delighted that we can refer broadly in this debate to those Bills.

All too frequently, Conservative Members are wrongly accused of being anti-local authorities. Those accusations are always made by the same people who have all but destroyed public support for the local authority concept because of their blindness to the requirements of good financial management within local authorities. When it goes wrong, they always seek to blame central Government. It is never their fault at local level.

It is very much to the credit of my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for the Environment that they have returned to basics and have not looked at finance in isolation. They are looking at structure and functions at the same time.

We will certainly not again make the mistake that was made in the 1970s and 1980s. It is true that the Conservative party got it wrong 20 years ago when the belief in the two-tier system for local authorities was fashionable and won the day. True, it was working in some areas at that time. No doubt, following the local government commission which will be set up under the new Bill, that system will continue, where appropriate—but only where clearly appropriate. I am pleased that we recognised our earlier error. In the 1983 to 1987 Parliament, we removed the metropolitan upper tier. I am delighted that we will continue that process under my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State in the new Parliament which will be formed some time late next spring or in the summer.

It goes without saying that a great urban conurbation such as Nottingham cannot and must not have its affairs meddled in by councillors from Mansfield, Worksop and Retford who, although loyal Nottinghamshire people,

[Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo]

have no community of interest in our great city and who, not surprisingly, want their towns to have as much of the county cake as they can get.

Legislation that will take further the right of the public to know just how their council matches up with others must be right. It must also be right to have proper mechanisms in place to ensure that they get value for money. Only the committed socialists on the Opposition Benches can oppose such a move, in the belief that only local authority organisations should provide services. As my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) pointed out, it does not follow that an identified public need must be met by a public sector bureaucracy. If services of the right standard giving better value for public money can be provided, the resources saved will be available to meet other public needs. That surely must make sense.

The main Bill scraps the poll tax and provides local finance through the establishment of a new council tax. Like many of my colleagues, I plead guilty to the fact that I willingly supported the principle behind the original poll tax Bill. However, I did argue that certain key protections against abuse were not in that Bill. Too many local authorities used the changeover to milk people of money that they did not have through bills that they could not have anticipated and therefore provided for. That naivety will not be repeated in the new Bill.

Given that, at least in the first year of the new council tax, there will still be two-tier authorities in the shires, I hope that the Bill will be as tight as a drum to ensure that the tiered authorities that are not up for election do not use that freedom from the ballot box—as happened in Nottinghamshire with the poll tax—to wreck the council tax in the way that they wrecked the poll tax in its first year. Even if it can be shown that many authorities will have elections at that time, we must not be naive again. We must screw the lid on spending as tightly as possible, so that a true and proper comparison can be made between the old rates system, uprated to match current spending, the poll tax charge, and the new council tax.

Unless anyone should mistake my purpose, I say clearly that, provided that local authorities, at the point of change in April 1993, have the power to spend that which they are spending this year, plus inflation, not one meal on wheels, not one old people's home, not one teacher—in fact not one public provision—need be cut. If that were to happen, let it be clear that that would be typical of the cynical manipulation by Labour councils of the most vulnerable in our society, and nothing to do with the new council tax.

If Labour Members do not think that their party is the most cynical shower alive, I can give them a classic example from my county. There has been a great deal of national publicity about the plans of the Labour-controlled Nottinghamshire authority to close 12 old peoples' homes. One, Rivergreen, in my constituency, is a happy, well-run, well-managed, well-staffed home. It is an integral part of the community of Clifton, which is the second largest estate in England. Our county council always has enough money for the obscure and the daft, but when it comes to providing for its old people's homes, it does not have money. Its answer to the problem is either that it is entitled to more money from central Government, regardless of how much its rate support grant for the social services sector has risen, or that it needs the unfettered right to raise further taxes locally.

That brings me back to the earlier part of our debate, from which we now know that the Labour and the Liberal Democrat parties want absolutely no constraints on the ability of a local authority to raise whatever level of tax it decides. I assure the House that money is not the problem for the old people's homes in my constituency. It is the will of the controlling Labour group and its inability to manage financial affairs. Any county council that cannot find elbow room within a £600 million-plus budget to look after its old people's homes should stand aside and let some of my colleagues take over.

Mr. Bellotti: The example cited by the hon. Gentleman from his constituency is well known to hon. Members because it is repeated in other constituencies. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that in East Sussex, where the Conservatives control the county council, there is exactly the same problem because the Conservatives want to close seven old people's homes? I am sure that he would agree that the real problem is that local authorities across the country cannot spend the necessary money on our elderly people because of the capping regime imposed by central Government.

Hon. Members: Absolute rubbish.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: As my hon. Friends have said, that is absolute rubbish. What I have said about Nottingham I would also have said about East Sussex had I had the same information. I do not have the slightest doubt that in Nottingham the money is available to do whatever is necessary to keep open those old people's homes, and so remove once and for all the worry of hundreds of residents in those homes.

Mr. Illsley: Where would Nottinghamshire county council find the elbow room to which the hon. Gentleman referred? Is he saying that it has balances that are not accounted for by other services? If so, the Government should be taking another look at the amount of grant that that council receives. If that is not the case, from which services would the hon. Gentleman want to take money to spend on the old people's homes?

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Labour Members always imagine that some service or other would have to be cut to do what is right. I can tell him that Nottinghamshire county council's balances are more than adequate to deal with those old people's homes, without touching any other departmental budget. The hon. Gentleman should ask anybody in and around Nottingham whether they approve of the famous leaf stem statue, which costs £38,000, the coloured blobs under one of the car parks, which cost £28,000, or the provision of a day centre for the winos who are driving everybody mad, which cost £160,000. The list is endless. The council will always find money for whatever suits it, but when it comes to the elderly—the most vulnerable in our society—they always play ducks and drakes. They want maximum party-political benefit.

Mr. Wilshire: My hon. Friend said that the county council's not looking after the elderly properly was a reflection of the will of Labour councillors. Does he agree

that it is all about the priorities of Labour councillors? It appears that in Nottingham they put sculpture above the interests of the elderly.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: My hon. Friend has it in one—*[Interruption.]* If a simple answer will do, there is no need to take a paragraph. My hon. Friend had it in a nutshell.

I have not yet had time to study the minutiae of the Bill which, as we now know, runs to 163 pages, but I want to touch briefly on certain parts of it. The great problem with the poll tax was the collection procedures. I am not slow to sing the praises of the city of Nottingham, and there are good grounds for doing so. However, in devising its method of collecting poll tax, in the words of that famous song, "If there was a wrong way to do it, the right way to screw it," nobody did it like Nottingham. My constituents have had to pay an additional £44·75 per adult because of that incompetence, and that is a disgrace. It is made all the more aggravating when people living inside the city know how little it costs the authorities outside the city to do precisely the same job. I hope that the legislation that will come before us next week will ensure that that will not happen again.

Equally, who is liable and what is meant by "occupier" must be beyond doubt in the new Bill. Where, as in many inner-city areas, there is a high turnover of occupancy, I hope that there will be powers to levy the owner in order to ensure that the financial base of local authorities is not undermined.

In order that our desired aim to assist one-person households is not blurred by lack of definition, the phrase in the present legislation "sole or main residence" must be defined beyond doubt.

I also plead self-interest—if that is the right term—in supporting the view taken on students. With some 22,000 students moving around within our city, even if one felt that a nominal sum should be paid—here I am looking after the interests of the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) whose lovely daughter is now a constituent of mine; I trust that she will be sensible and know where to put her cross—it is clearly administratively impossible to handle and, given the changes in student support, that small relief will be welcome.

I, hope, too, that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will address the technical problems of billing, particularly carry-over yearly billing, to avoid current confusion with many charge payers, because I regret that separate billing has not increased accountability. If it is already in the Bill, I apologise, but I hope that we will finally resolve the injustice of the tax on empty properties.

Finally, since all too many non-payers were simply "won't payers", sponging on the rest, I hope that we will provide all the powers necessary to ensure that never again are my constituents expected to pay for the law breakers.

8.1 pm

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Conservative Members' speeches today show that they have not learnt the lesson of their hatred of local government. They continue to work against the democratic interests of the nation whose people do support the concept of local government.

The Secretary of State made one of the worst speeches that I have ever heard from a Minister in the House. I was appalled to hear his jovial, jocular style. Bob Hope must have written his script. However, many people are living in abject poverty because of the poll tax. There are many who cannot pay.

Watching the Secretary of State today was like watching Jesse James leading a bunch of desperadoes governing the country like a bunch of robbers. The Secretary of State for Scotland, who is now on the Government Front Bench, reminds me of the Sundance Kid and his brigade.

I am appalled that the Government have not learnt the lesson from Scotland. Scottish Members raised in the House the problems faced by Scotland and clearly indentified the terrible damage that the poll tax was doing to the people of Scotland, but the Government continued to blunder on in their merry way. Only after a 10 per cent. drop in their fortunes in the opinion polls did they decide that, with the general election coming up, and the prospect of their being routed, they should do something. They came up with the council tax.

The Secretary of State's comments today were so shabby and his speech was so shallow that he did not make me laugh. We have heard some speeches tonight about the poll tax, but I want to read the editorial in the Glasgow *Evening Times*, so aptly published on 5 November, Guy Fawkes night. It is no wonder that ordinary men and women throughout the country wish that Guy Fawkes had been successful when they consider the punishment that this House has levelled at ordinary men and women in a state of poverty. The hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) shakes his head, but he should come to my constituency and I will introduce him to people who cannot pay the poll tax because they simply do not have the money.

This is not an editorial from a Labour weekly; it is a reputable Scottish newspaper, as I am sure the Under-Secretary of State will agree. I want to read all of it to make sure that it appears in *Hansard*. It is entitled "Myth of the tax rebels" and it says:

"Over the last decade the Government has done a better job of blowing local authorities to smithereens than Guy Fawkes.

That is the real reason Strathclyde finds itself in the midst of the gravest financial crisis in its history—not the 'can pay, won't pay' Poll Tax rebels.

The truth is the bulk of the £250M shortfall in Poll Tax, a debt mountain that has steadily grown over three years, is owed not by rebels, but by people who haven't a penny to their name.

The middle class revolt has turned to a whimper. Nearly all the collectable money is now in; only a small number of diehards continue to withhold cash.

That will not stop non-payers being used as convenient scapegoats. In Tory demonology they will always carry the can."

We have seen that tonight.

The article goes on:

"The reality is the Poll Tax represents just 14 per cent. of Strathclyde's budget. The remaining 86 per cent. comes in Government grants.

Under the Conservatives those grants have fallen hugely. Over ten years, Scotland's councils have lost £600 million in grant aid—or £170 for every Poll Tax payer in the land.

Costs

Strathclyde, hit proportionately harder, has been like a man living on starvation rations throughout the eighties. Forced to become more efficient and cost-conscious, it had to devise imaginative measures to keep services going.

And when privatisation of services was introduced many staff lost job security, worked for lower pay and saw their pension rights eroded.

[Mr. Thomas Graham]

But any fat the Region may once have had is long gone. The Poll Tax was the last straw.

The Government's refusal to accept needy folk can't pay has left the Region chasing its own tail—trying, at vast cost, to collect money that by and large simply isn't there.

That is why 750 jobs are being shed and a whopping 32 per cent. rise in the Poll Tax is likely next year.

Poll Tax rebels are only bit-players in this crisis. The responsibility lies four-square with the Government and its chronic underfunding of councils."

Alongside that editorial, there is a small paragraph which says:

"Government grants for Scottish local authorities have slumped from 67 per cent. to 55 per cent. over the past ten years."

That is one of the most devastating of editorials.

All Members of Parliament hold surgeries, and many have received complaints about the poll tax from constituents who are viciously angry with the Government. Some decided that they would not pay the poll tax, but the people about whom I worry are those such as the elderly lady suffering from a form of senile dementia who came to me because she was being harassed about the poll tax. The Government wanted 20 per cent. of the amount from that woman. For months, we in Scotland begged the Government to give 100 per cent. rebates to people such as that lady.

I received a call from another constituent who was frightened because she had been slapped with not one warrant sale but two, yet she had paid her poll tax. I remember telling the Secretary of State that the poll tax was cumbersome, burdening and complicated; that it would give a great deal of trouble to local council finance departments; and that it was inevitable that thousands upon thousands of mistakes would be made. That has proved to be the case.

I remember looking at a graph showing the complications of the financing of the community charge. It looked as though someone had spilled a can of spaghetti and had to make some sense of it. The elderly and the unemployed are being hounded by the Government, and there is no end in sight. The tax is continuing into 1993. The Government are still after their pound of flesh. They do not have the sense, decency, or caring to give people a 100 per cent. rebate now, yet they cannot get blood out of a stone.

Ministers are a bunch of desperadoes, and they are carrying on like a bunch of stoneheads. The only way that we will get rid of them is by a general election. The poll tax is an albatross round the Government's neck and the council tax will be another, because the Government will not allow proper debate on it in the House. Instead, they want to steamroller it through with a guillotine, and will not entertain common-sense discussion. Is that what democracy has come to in this country, with the democratically elected Government refusing to listen to the democratically elected Opposition—who will be unable to reveal the flaws in the council tax as we did in the case of the poll tax, and which were soon clear for all to see?

The Secretary of State for Scotland smiles. He knows that the poll tax was a shambles, but he was a diehard and continued to go to the wall with it. That is not true of many Tory Members of Parliament in Scotland, who are desperate to get rid of the poll tax.

I would welcome anything that would improve the legislation. I hope that a general election will be declared soon, that it will be fair, and that it will serve to bring back a decent system. A Labour Government will offer such a system. It will offer a fair rates policy that gives 100 per cent. rates relief to people whom the present Government have abandoned. They have shown by their tasteless and tactless menace tonight that they are still not prepared to take on board the problems of people who cannot pay their poll tax because they do not have sufficient funds.

The Secretary of State could take the necessary steps to give people a 100 per cent. rebate now and even make it retroactive. *[Interruption.]* Do not the members of the Government Front Bench think that my remarks are important? Does not the Secretary of State realise that thousands and thousands of people who still cannot pay the poll tax are facing court action and warrant sales? Does the Secretary of State think that that is right? Does he believe that one can get blood out of a stone? It has never been done.

It is time that the Government realised that, took steps to protect people who are suffering as a consequence of their lamentable and disastrous poll tax, and ensured that the council tax reflects more sympathy and caring. I hope that a general election will be held quickly, so that we can show the Government the door.

8.15 pm

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): I welcome this opportunity to congratulate the Government on the Gracious Speech and on their proposal to abolish the community charge and to replace it with the council tax. I take the point made by the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham), that many people are unable to pay the community charge. I have met many of them at my advice surgery, and I will weep no tears over the demise of a tax that had no progressive element and which sometimes militated against people on low incomes. So the community charge will go.

Mr. Graham: That is a change of heart.

Mr. Hind: Yes, some of us changed our minds, because we could see the effects of the poll tax.

Many right hon. and hon. Members should remember that we started with a tax of only £175 a head. We did not reckon on greedy Labour authorities utilising the change to conceal vast increases in public expenditure that they forced on to thousands of unsuspecting electors in our communities, to try to persuade them to change their allegiance from the Conservative party to Labour. That is what happened, and we now realise that we must take away from such authorities that most unjust tool with which they managed to acquire electoral support that they did not deserve and have unscrupulously used.

I welcome the change to a single bill for each household. A great difficulty with the community charge, which was a point of grievance among many of my constituents, is that people can move on and avoid paying it, with the inevitable result that the rest of the community is called upon to meet the shortfall.

Fortunately, we have altered the system. Due to the change in the taxation balance, national Government will pay 85 per cent. of local government expenditure, with the remaining 15 per cent. left to be levied through the council tax. In future, that will mean that the old high rates will no

longer be levied on the unsuspecting population, and we will see a continuation of support by central Government of local government.

Fortunately, too, Labour has agreed to continue with that policy should it come to power—so let us hear no more complaints about depriving local government of central Government funds because of cuts in rate support grant, revenue support grant, or whatever it is called today. In future, large amounts of taxpayers' money will go to support local government.

The banding system is a move towards progressive taxation, which I welcome. Logically, people live in a particular type of house because it is one that they can afford to purchase or rent and to maintain, so there is a rough and ready relationship between the value of their home and their income. That will be one of the mainstays and pillars of the council tax.

The council tax will avoid the problems of the past. The Bill's tough capping measures will ensure that Labour councils will be unable to pursue the profligate spending that they managed in the past, and that they will be controlled.

I was disappointed to hear the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) say that Labour would abandon capping. I hope that the public realise the implications of that. If Labour returns to power, we shall have a return to the bad old days: Labour councils will be able to spend, spend, spend. They will be able to milk local taxpayers as they did with the rates, irrespective of the consequences. Their line will be, "Don't worry: we are the money milch cows who will provide the cash for the future."

That is diabolical. I hope that the public understand that, in the event of a Labour Government, they can look forward to being milked by Labour councils that will levy high rates of their new tax—as well as being milked by a national Government through increased rates of income tax.

The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti), who is not in the Chamber now, complained about the amount that people had to pay. The Bill, however, will not only abolish the current registration arrangements, but introduce an extensive rebate scheme, allowing rebates of up to 100 per cent. to protect those on low incomes. Many of us will welcome the end of the 20 per cent. charge, principally because it hit the worst-off but also because it probably cost more to collect than was gained in revenue.

Students will benefit: those living in digs or halls of residence will no longer have to pay anything. Student nurses, those on youth training schemes and others will also be helped.

The electorate must realise that, if Labour is successful at the next general election—which is highly unlikely—we shall immediately return to the old rating system. The Leader of the Opposition has complained that that was an unfair tax, but has now managed to stand on his head and support the current proposal. Labour Members quote figures in relation to their proposed fair rating scheme, but they give only averages; there are no details, sums or projections. Their whole scheme is flawed, because it is based on the assumption that a Labour Government will have to raise £6·3 billion. We all know that this year the Government had to raise £6·8 billion—£500 million more than that. Obviously, if the calculation is made on the basis of averages, Labour's proposed tax will appear to be less than the community charge this year, or the projections for the council tax.

Labour's system is far too complex. It would be impossible to operate. The public will see immediately that Labour has no idea what it is going to do—but perhaps that is Labour's chosen method: perhaps the idea is to introduce a tax that is completely incomprehensible.

It is preposterous for the Opposition to claim that they can introduce such a tax and then complain about the Government's introducing a new tax in 1993. Opposition Members have said that the council tax is too complex and difficult to be rushed through in time for 1 April 1993. They say that there will be too many difficulties with the software, and that local government officials will not be able to work it out properly. Yet, if an election took place next week, in the unlikely event of a Labour victory, Labour would try to introduce its system on 1 April 1992.

That is a joke. Labour cannot, on the one hand, criticise us for giving our system careful consideration and waiting until 1 April 1993 and, on the other hand, announce that they will bring in a scheme in 1992 with no system to back it up.

Our system is clear, fair and progressive. The system that we are being offered as an alternative is unclear; it is nonsense; and it will not work. I have no doubt that, when the time comes and we push our tax through, it will be seen to be fairer than the Labour alternative. It will provide massive rebates for those who are worse off; and it will be welcomed by the majority of the public, who will realise that it is far fairer than the community charge, that it is progressive and that it will work.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Everyone who lives in Lancashire will be very glad that the council tax will retain capping, which Labour's alternative would not. That will provide a fallback for the unfortunate citizens of Lancashire, who have a very extravagant Labour council.

Mr. Hind: My hon. Friend has made an important point. The first community charge bill that dropped through my letter box, and those of thousands of my constituents, was for £376, £346 of which was to be spent by the Labour-controlled county council: that was stated on the bill. Residents had to wait four years to elect their council after receiving that bill. That, if anything, reveals the main reasons for the failure of the community charge system. It was deliberately smashed by people who used it cynically for their own electoral purposes.

I wish that system well. Goodbye; good night; we shall see nothing like it again. We must ensure that the new system will not be used as a political tool. The hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) may smile; he is probably one of those who encouraged the cynical use of the community charge and never had a good word to say for it. I have not often heard him condemn his hon. Friends who did not pay it.

Ours will be a good tax—and, more important, it will work.

8.26 pm

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): I know that the hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) will recognise —being, like me, a Lancashire Member—that only one local authority in Lancashire has been consistently Labour-controlled since the local government reorganisation. I refer to Burnley, whose council I led before I came to the House. Both last year and this, Burnley's poll tax was the lowest in the country.

Mr. Hind: Look at the subsidies.

Mr. Pike: The point is that, with good continuous Labour control, we have been able to provide good services and good local administration.

The current Parliament was elected in 1987, and it will soon have run its term. The Government have already scrapped legislation introduced by previous Conservative Governments, but it is extremely unusual, if not unique, for them to provide, in the Queen's Speech, for the abolition of what was claimed to be the flagship of their opening programme.

One or two Conservative Members have admitted today that they now recognise that they got it wrong in 1987-88. I served on the Committee that dealt with the poll tax legislation. We spent some 200 hours, in Committee and on the Floor of the House, spelling out the fact that the tax was unfair, unworkable and extremely expensive to administer. Every failing that we pointed out has since proved to exist: those failings have emerged every year since its implementation.

The Government have spent billions of pounds on trying to make their tax work—and, of course, it was introduced in Scotland the year before the general election. If a local authority misused the billions of pounds that the Government have misused for that purpose, it would be taken to the district auditors. Many of its councillors would be surcharged, disqualified and probably made bankrupt.

We could have built many schools, sheltered housing schemes and sports centres with those millions of pounds. The meals-on-wheels service and many other services would not have had to be cut. However, that money was squandered. It is outrageous.

The Government claimed in 1987-88 that they had a mandate for their legislation. It is strange, therefore, that in this Queen's Speech the Government say that they intend to introduce a new Local Government Finance Bill to abolish what they did in 1987-88. They claim that they have a mandate for doing that, too, but they cannot have it both ways. My hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) said that the legislation is only a shell and that regulations will be needed to implement it. He is right. When this legislation is pushed through, we shall face exactly the same as happened with the poll tax. The Chamber was packed when there were seven orders before the House, with an hour and a half in which to debate them. There were about 46 pages dealing with deductions from wages and benefits and with prison sentences.

This Session is time-limited because of the general election, so the Bill will have to be guillotined, thus curtailing debate and proper consideration of the proposals. Four years ago, the Government said that the poll tax would solve the local government finance problem. They were wrong, so why should we believe that they have got it right on this occasion? Eighty per cent. of my constituents lost out. They live in what was formerly a low rateable value area. People who paid rates amounting to only £200 on a house now have to pay £1,200 in poll tax. The same applies in Pendle, Rossendale and Darwen and Hyndburn.

The Conservatives will lose those seats at the next election. Labour Members of Parliament will be elected to represent those constituencies. Ministers told those people in 1987-88 that the Government had got it right, but now, four years later, they say, "Sorry, we got it wrong. You had an awfully raw deal out of it, but now we have got it right." Why should people believe them now? They are just as wrong on this occasion as they were on the previous one.

The Local Government Bill provides for compulsory competitive tendering and creeping privatisation. Ministers are not prepared to allow local authorities to lay down conditions of employment, sick pay, holiday pay and other pay levels. It is appalling that in 1991 the only way in which the Government want to save money is by cutting people's pay and working conditions. It is tragic that they should be doing that to local authority employees. There is no employee on the buses who enjoys as good conditions of service as applied before the passing of the Transport Act 1985 in the areas affected by that Act.

I do not believe that local authorities should be capped. I accept that the Government have the right to determine the amount of money that they are prepared to give to local government. There will always be arguments about whether that amount is sufficient, but the amount provided by this Government has always been insufficient. Local authorities have the right to provide the services that they were elected to provide. It is wrong for any local authority not to take into account people's ability to pay. The poll tax failed completely when it came to people's ability to pay.

The Government have never accepted that there are some people who cannot afford to pay for local government services. That applies in every constituency. It is time that the Government accepted that fact and dealt with it. If they did so—and they could do it easily—we should be willing to co-operate with them. The matter could be dealt with speedily, by regulations under the existing legislation. Rebates could be increased. The 100 per cent. rebate to be included in the new Bill could be applied now. The Government could also authorise local authorities to remit payments when they know that people cannot afford to pay.

One case in my constituency highlights the type of thing that happens. Two of my constituents, Mr. and Mrs. Bellis, were sent to prison because they did not pay the poll tax. They had a young child, but the court did not take account of who would look after the child while they were in prison. If magistrates no longer apply the natural principles of justice, it is a bad day for our law. I wrote to the Lord Chancellor about the case. He said that it was nothing to do with him; it was a matter for the Department of the Environment. When I wrote to the Department of the Environment, the reply was that this was the Lord Chancellor's responsibility. This is the Government's responsibility. They need to do something about it. The poll tax must go, and the quicker the better.

8.36 pm

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): I welcome the general tenor of the Queen's Speech. It confounds the rumours that have been put about that the Government are running out of steam. It is an imaginative Queen's Speech. It contains a programme that will take us well beyond this Session, after our fourth election victory in March, April or May of 1992.

I intend to concentrate on two issues in the Queen's Speech—the commitment to continue to prepare for the privatisation of the British Railways Board and the

commitment to introduce a new council tax and to establish a review of local government structure in England. My constituents are concerned about British Rail's performance. More than 10,000 people commute from Chelmsford to Liverpool Street each day.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the fact that we are debating an amendment to the motion on the Queen's Speech. The debate must be confined to the amendment, which relates to the local council tax.

Mr. Burns: I sought guidance earlier, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and was advised that one could speak on anything in the Queen's Speech, but if that is incorrect I shall confine my remarks to the council tax. I was assured that one could discuss any aspect of the Queen's Speech.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not the advice that has been given to me. I am advised that the amendment means that the debate today is confined to the terms of the amendment, which relates to the local council tax.

Mr. Burns: Then I shall curtail my comments on British Rail and deal only with local government finance.

It is a truism to say that nobody likes paying anything for any service. If we could get out of paying for local government, many people would be far happier. They would prefer not to have to make a financial contribution, regardless of their ability to pay. However, it is a fact of life that local government has to be financed by individuals within the local community and by businesses and central Government. What has proved to be a thorny problem, not just during the past four years but for many years before, is the basis for financing all the services provided by local authorities and the level of services that should be provided.

Earlier in the debate, the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) told us of the Liberal Democrats' proposals for a local income tax. I would be the first to admit that I was amazed, enlightened and then staggered by some of the intricacies of the local income tax à la the Liberal Democrats. I had not realised that it was even more complicated than I had been led to believe originally.

The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) told us in the briefest and skimpiest of ways—that is to be expected from the new model Labour party—of the Labour party's pledge to return to a policy of fair rates. I was staggered to learn that the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats gave categorical assurances to the House that rate capping or capping of any sort would not be part of their programmes.

If there were to be a Labour Government or the unlikely event of a Liberal Democrat Government, it would be open house for local authorities to spend and spend, just like Viv Nicholson. There would be an orgy of spending with no restraint, regardless of the damage that it might do to ratepayers, community charge payers or whatever they may be called. I suspect that, when people up and down the country realise the sheer horror of what is being proposed, they will recoil from such an open-ended commitment for massive local government spending.

The level of service provided by local authorities is crucial. It is imperative that the services provided are cost efficient and of the highest quality. If one looks around the country, one becomes seriously concerned about the definition of a high level of service in certain local authorities.

It is interesting that the Labour party proposes to return to what it calls a fair rates policy. As far as anyone can understand or discover what that cliché means, it seems to be a return to the old, discredited rating system. Like the old saying that success has many fathers, but failure has none, nobody is prepared to claim parenthood of the old rating system. Even the Leader of the Opposition is on record as saying that the rating system is the unfairest of taxes, yet we are led to believe that that is what the Labour party proposes.

We have before us a proposal for a council tax to finance local government. I do not want to disappoint the hon. Member for Eastbourne, but the chances of a local income tax are nil, because his party does not have a cat in hell's chance of ever being returned to government.

One of the most worrying aspects is the danger posed by irresponsible and loony left local authorities. Opposition Members may wave their hands, but for those living under the regime of a loony left council, the follies of its ways cannot be highlighted enough. Day after day they have to live with those policies and spending commitments.

Very few people, especially Conservative Members, would dispute the fact that until the change in party control in Brent it probably had the accolade for one of the looniest of loony councils. It was said of Brent under the Labour council:

> "If you have a council that is as monumentally incompetent as Brent's has been in the last few years, it rightly gets a major vote of censure from the public."

That forthright common sense does not come from the *Conservative Newsline*; nor is it a quote from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State or my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo). That common-sense approach to Brent came from the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) who, for those who may not remember, was the former leader of the Greater London council.

If that is not enough, a former Member of Parliament and a former councillor in Hackney, Ms. Maureen Colquhoun, said that the only reason for Labour losing seats in Hackney in 1990 was

> "the total failure of the Labour Group to deliver services. The record is shameful."

If you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, read what that council has got up to over the past four years, you will appreciate fully, just as people in Hackney do, just how shameful the record is.

Equally shameful was an article in *The Guardian* of 28 February 1991 in which a Councillor Steve French in Lambeth called for victory for Iraq and urged the bombing of Israel. Up and down the country, there are stories of grotesque mismanagement and waste of money by Labour councils.

Nearer to my home in Chelmsford in Essex—that wonderful county which produces Essex man and Essex woman—the Labour-controlled council in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) has spent millions of pounds on a huge new civic centre. Unfortunately, it forgot to plan for the needed new council chamber within that civic centre.

Senior council officials in Birmingham, some earning up to £65,000 a year—that is more than we poor Members

[Mr. Burns]

of Parliament get—are living in council properties and paying rents as low as one fifth of market levels. Bradford voted to spend £10,000 to celebrate some obscure strike that took place in the city 100 years before. Charge-capped Islington considered sending 25 children and five teachers to Senegal to study French. Islington could have saved its council and charge payers a great deal of money if it had just asked the advice of a local geography teacher and been told that it is better to go to France to learn French.

I understand that in Dudley, Thomas the Tank Engine has crossed swords with the ideologues of the loony Labour left. Thomas the Tank Engine has been banned from schools and libraries because it is sexist. When reading stories about Thomas the Tank Engine to my daughter, I never thought it sexist. Obviously, there is a new interpretation of the word.

Last year in Harlow, the national anthem was forbidden by the local authority at council entertainments. That is all utter rubbish. Local authorities should not be interfering and wasting charge payers' money in those ridiculous, trite and stupid ways.

I have always believed—I make no apology for it—that any system of financing local government must contain a way of making the local authorities more accountable to those who live within the local area. The Government have decided to introduce the council tax. They listened to the representations that were made and, in their wisdom, decided to make this change as quickly as possible. I wish the Bill well not only on Second Reading but in Committee. Hon. Members will have an opportunity to debate the Bill, but, whatever happens, it is far better to have a system that is more accountable to local people and that will, we hope, put an end to some of the ridiculous mismanagement, inefficiency and wasting of money that has gone on for far too long.

8.50 pm

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): We listen time and again to scare stories about loony left Labour councils, many of which are figments of Conservative Members' imaginations. I respond with one simple example of wasting money. NHS trust hospitals in my health authority area are sending people to Toronto, Paris and all over the world to learn how to do catering and cleaning. The Government should address themselves to such wasting of money and not to fictitious ideas about Thomas the Tank Engine.

Earlier this year, the Government announced the abolition of the poll tax and the introduction of the council tax. That should have been welcome. Hon. Members, including some Conservative Members, have said how divisive and unfair the poll tax was, how difficult it was to collect, with the result that 7 million court summonses are outstanding, and how expensive it was to administer. Hundreds of thousands of pounds were spent on computers and software, only for them to be replaced by new software for the council tax.

The poll tax bore no relation to the ability to pay, offered no accountability because of capping and limits set by the Secretary of State, and imposed a 20 per cent. universal contribution, despite the fact that many people simply could not afford to pay. The hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) rightly said that it costs more to collect that contribution than it yields.

The problems of local authorities were exacerbated by the Prime Minister saying that the poll tax was being abolished because it was uncollectable. That was welcomed by the organisations that had campaigned for non-payment. Their problems were further exacerbated by the fact that many people took the Government at their word and simply stopped paying. Many local authorities are issuing court summonses and spending much time and money trying to persuade them that the poll tax has not been abolished and that it will be with us next year and possibly the year after.

It is no wonder that local government finance officers regard the poll tax as a financial nightmare. When we explain each local government Bill to them, they frown and put their heads in their hands. The poll tax is uncollectable and expensive. Much of that expense is caused by the enforcement procedures. My local authority spends a lot of money simply issuing court summonses and trying to pursue people for non-payment.

The abolition of the poll tax is widely welcomed until we consider what will replace it—simply more of the same. Page 2 of the consultation paper refers to the guidelines that the Government considered for the new council tax. They considered the same principles on which they based the poll tax. The consultation paper refers to accountability. How can capping lead to accountability? A local authority is accountable either to the local electorate for the poll tax that it sets or to the Secretary of State because he decides how much it can spend.

How can any tax that has a universal contribution, regardless of income, be fair? How can we consider the fairness of the council tax when the eight bands equate house values with the wealth of an individual and his ability to pay? It is simply nonsense.

The document refers to ease of collection. One bill will be issued for the council tax, and supposedly there will be no register. How will a local authority allocate rebates? How will it, without a list or register, determine whether a household is a single or a two-person household? How can the council tax be easy to collect if the people who are responsible for collecting it simply do not know how much they must collect from each household? Of course there will have to be a register: otherwise, the system will be thrown into chaos.

The document mentions equitable distribution. Once again, the Government considered making everybody pay the council tax but relented and will abolish the 20 per cent. contribution—not before time. As that is so expensive to collect, why not abolish it now?

Conservative Members should realise that capping is based on the standard spending assessment. The cap applies not to what an authority spends but to what the Government believe an authority is entitled to spend. Many times, Labour Members have pointed out the iniquities of the standard spending assessment, which is based on irrelevant data more than 10 years old. The standard spending assessments, which will remain, will lead to further capping and difficulties for many authorities.

The council tax is doomed from the start. It contains not only a personal element but a property element. The personal element of the poll tax led to huge decreases in

census registration and registration for elections. I understand that about 1 billion people did not register in the recent census.

Council tax bills will be based on a two-person houshold. Imagine the confusion that there will be among single people who receive a bill based on a two-person household. Pensioners will believe that they have to pay the full amount unless they query it with their local authority or unless the authority has a list. Council offices will be inundated with people querying their bills.

An interesting change has been made, because under the poll tax each adult had to pay, which penalised larger families. As the council tax is based on a two-person household, a household of four or five students or people on income support will pay less.

Many people will not realise that they are entitled to a discount, because, there is no information on how the discount scheme will work. Where will the list be of people who are entitled to a discount? How will a local authority find out who is entitled to a discount? If a person goes to the town hall and says that he qualifies for a discount, the authority will need proof. It will have to compile a list or a register, so the idea that the council tax will not need a register is a complete fiction. It is also wide open to fraud, because many people who are not entitled to a discount may try to claim one from their local authority.

The discount for a single-person household will be set at 25 per cent. Once again, many people will not realise that there is a property element built into that and they will wonder why they do not receive a 50 per cent. discount on the two-person household bill. Many people will not realise that there is a property element built in and that they qualify only for the 25 per cent. discount.

The dual element will be a cause of great confusion, which will be compounded by the proposals for other discounts and rebates for people on low incomes. How can those rebates and discounts be administered without some form of register or list? How is a local authority to react to thousands of claims for rebate? Will it wait to deal with them when the bills drop on the doormats and then try to compile a list of people entitled to a rebate after the council tax has been introduced? Will local authorities be required to compile a register of people entitled to rebates before the council tax is implemented? What is the time scale for implementation?

In a brief to me and my colleagues, my local authority wrote:

"In addition, because of its very nature as a combined personal/property tax, movements of individuals within a household will inevitably give rise to changes in liability. Consequently, some details of individuals within properties will need to be kept."

Local authorities themselves are saying that a register will be needed.

We have heard that the amount to be paid by each household will depend on the valuation of the property and that properties will be allocated to one of eight bands. The problems are obvious. There will be different housing valuations across the country for similar types of property.

Whole areas of property will be lumped into bands with no attempt at individual valuations. People in the south-east will be allocated to bands E, F, G and H and will pay the top rates. They will be extremely unhappy that people in the north and the midlands with similar properties will be allocated to lower bands. We shall also find that people in one band will attempt to switch to another in order to pay a lower rate of council tax. The unfairness associated with the poll tax remains with us, and the anomalies will remain until a fairer system is introduced with a more distinct and accurate valuation.

The problems of valuation and banding will also be compounded by the Government's proposed method of valuation, which is to give the job to people such as estate agents who have a vested interest in ensuring that the valuations are as high as possible. The Inland Revenue will merely oversee the process under which thousands of properties will be given over to estate agents to lump into the banding system. Many estate agents have no expertise in property surveying and many cannot even sell houses, yet they will carry out the banding which will place properties into distinct bands.

The consultation paper states:

"Valuation is not an exact science. Two different valuers may well come up with two different detailed valuations of the same property—providing fertile ground for appeals and disputes."

That is only too true. The same paragraph applies to valuation for banding, especially as properties will be banded in groups of 20,000 or more. There will be appeals and disputes in relation to the council tax ever after. It is interesting that appeals are still in progress for the old rating system from years ago.

As I have said, the abolition of the poll tax is to be welcomed, but even more welcome would be the abolition of the system of grants—the standard spending assessment which is responsible for most of the problems relating to capping and high poll tax bills. Colleagues from neighbouring authorities have drawn attention to the various anomalies in the standard spending assessments and I shall not repeat them. However, one local authority should not receive double the amount of grant received by another only a few miles away for the provision of exactly the same level of service, which is the case at the moment. My authority receives half as much in grant as an authority such as Manchester to provide exactly the same level of teaching service.

The council tax will fail. It needs a register. It has a personal element, discounts and rebates, all of which will have to be listed by the local authorities. It is obvious that some form of register will be needed. The tax is unfair. The basic banding system is unfair, and will lead to appeals and anomalies. All in all, we shall have the same problems as we would have had if the poll tax had remained.

9.4 pm

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I will support the amendment tabled by the Leader of the Opposition. However, it will come as no surprise to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) when I say that my party has its own alternative to the council tax, which is referred to in the amendment tabled by myself and my hon. Friends.

The House well knows that the Scottish National party has been vitriolically opposed to the poll tax. Our view has always been that any taxation system must be based on the ability to pay. If a tax is to be fair, if it is to have the support of the people and if it is to be collectable, it must be based on the fundamental principle of ability to pay.

The Government introduced the community charge legislation as a result of total panic about what was happening in Scotland when revaluation came before us again. There were screams and cries from Scottish

[Mrs. Margaret Ewing]

Conservative Members, who said that, unless the Government did something, they would lose their seats. The Government did something. They introduced the poll tax and, as a result, lost 11 Scottish Conservative Members in 1987. The introduction of the community charge was a desperate attempt to save the skin of the Conservative party in Scotland, and it failed miserably because of the sense of social justice in the Scottish philosophy. The Scottish people saw the community charge as the most hated tax that had been implemented within their memory.

Other hon. Members have given specific examples of their constituents. I could list many individual examples of how the tax has treated the poorest and most vulnerable in society. I could give examples of how people have been pursued beyond the grave to pull back a few miserly pounds of poll tax payment. Only this weekend, I had a telephone call from a distressed daughter who pointed out that her mother, who was widowed 18 months ago, had just received a threatening letter saying that, if she did not pay £11 for the 16 days between 1 April and 17 April 1989, during which her husband had been alive, poinding action would be taken against her. Such a philosophy is wholly unacceptable and shows how stupid the tax was.

Unfortunately, we again have a Government who are panicking about how to fund local government. They have not thought carefully through how we should deal with the important issue of funding and local authorities. The Government are deeply concerned that they may lose seats south of the border as a result of the community charge. It brought about the demise of the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) and many people panicked. As a result, we have another ill-thought-out form of taxation to pay for local authorities.

It is clear that the Government are determined that the Bill will be on the statute book before the general election. I understand that a timetable motion is to be introduced on Second Reading—a procedure which I have not experienced. All that is intended to clear the decks because the Government think that the council tax may be the remedy to their problems.

The Bill perpetuates all the anomalies, unfairness, regional variations and bureaucracy that made the poll tax unpopular. I suspect that those of us who continue our work as Members of Parliament after the next general election will find our surgeries just as busy with people complaining about the council tax and its anomalies as we have during the past year as a result of the poll tax.

The Government should prove that they are a listening Government and should reconsider the legislation because the Bill will have profound effects on local government and on people's sense of justice and fairness.

My party has consistently argued that the real alternative for funding local authorities is a local income tax. Such a tax operates equitably and effectively elsewhere —in Scandanavia, for example. In Sweden local income tax raises 99·7 per cent., of total government tax revenues, in Finland 98·9 per cent., in Denmark 91·6 per cent., in Norway 89·5 per cent., in Switzerland 86·5 per cent., and so on. Many other European countries operate effectively a local income tax based on the ability to pay. People there feel that their local authorities are accountable and make decisions in the interests of the community and that the taxation system is based on the ability to pay. I believe that we in Scotland would like to have a similar facility.

The Government's argument is always based on how much it would cost to implement a local income tax system. The Secretary of State for Scotland will recall that, when my colleagues and I met him and the Secretary of State for the Environment during the consultation period on local government funding, we argued our case on local income tax and pursued the issue of costing. After letters to and from Ministers, and having asked parliamentary questions, we estimate that, if Scotland yields 8·3 per cent. of United Kingdom income tax, the full-year effect of a 1p increase in Scottish income tax levels for 1991-92 would be £161·86 million. If we place that figure against what is being raised through the community charge, we see that income tax would have to rise by 3·5p. Most people would be willing to pay such a price to remove the anomalies involving the ability to pay.

I disagree with the idea that someone on my salary should be asked to contribute the same as the person next door, who is probably earning only half as much. I should pay according to my income and my neighbours according to theirs. I want that sense of fairness and justice to be written into the local government finance legislation.

I have heard the Secretary of State for Scotland and some of his ministerial team say that local income tax would not benefit certain groups of people—teachers and hospital porters, for example. We estimate that a teacher earning just over £16,000 a year, with a non-earning spouse, would pay £389 in local income tax, a saving of £175 on the poll tax or £31 on the council tax. A hospital porter earning just over £8,500 a year, with a non-earning spouse, would pay £124 in local income tax, a saving of £440 on the poll tax or £296 on the council tax.

I could give many other examples which would kill once and for all the idea so often propounded by the opponents of local income tax that such a tax would not benefit people on the lowest incomes. Our research, and the examples provided by other countries, show clearly that local income tax would be based on justice and fairness.

In all seriousness, I ask the Government not to deride the strong arguments for a local income tax just because they happen to be advanced by what they call minority parties. The Liberal Democrats and ourselves represent a substantial proportion of public opinion throughout the United Kingdom. The Government have a responsibility to look more carefully at the positive arguments advanced. Those arguments are supported by a broad spectrum of opinion, including people working within the taxation system and people involved in local government administration and finance. They believe that it could work. The Government are making a major error by dismissing local income tax out of hand. To replace one bad tax with another solves no problems whatever.

9.14 pm

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): I am perhaps out of line with some of my hon. Friends in that I quite enjoyed the speech made by the Secretary of State for the Environment, who opened the debate for the Government. Personally, I have no objection to a little bit of Punch and Judy politics and to some knockabout stuff: it is all good fun. I have to say, however that, in the end —and this applies particularly to the right hon.

Gentleman's peroration—I thought that he was rather ridiculous. His argument seemed to be based fearlessly on the refusal to recognise what is already public knowledge about our plans. I confess that I literally gasped with disbelief when I heard him calmly announce his determination to get rid of the poll tax at the first possible opportunity. He told *The Scotsman* the other day,

"the only thing that can stop us is the Labour party."

That certainly qualifies him for a prize for brass neck.

The other prize for the evening's debate undoubtedly went to the hon. Member for Berkshire, East (Mr. MacKay) although that, I think, was a prize for innocence and naivety. The hon. Gentleman proudly proclaimed that the new council tax was a perfect compromise, although it was not clear what it was a compromise between. In my experience, perfect compromises are unusual animals, and I fear that the hon. Gentleman is in for a disillusioning experience if the tax is ever brought into practice. Apart from that, I do not think that I learned a great deal from Conservative Members' contributions to the debate—except, perhaps, that the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), who is not noted for his breadth of vision, does not like Labour councillors, which did not seem to me to advance the argument very much.

I want to examine some of the competing attitudes to, and some of the recent experience in, local government finance. I ought to say straight away that I have some sympathy with some of the Scottish Conservatives. I can make what is perhaps not a usual boast in Scotland: I can claim that some of my best friends are Conservatives. Their agony in recent months and years has been terrible to behold. They have genuinely found it difficult to come to terms with the rout that has taken place—the complete volte-face.

I should explain to the Secretary of State that what has been involved is not so much a loss of dignity as a destruction of credibility. The right hon. Gentleman knows—there can be no doubt about it—that, until recently, as the foundations of the poll tax crashed around his ears, he was still proclaiming it to be a remarkable success and something which was here to stay. Now, I am afraid—if rumour is correct—he is reduced to confiding to any journalist who will listen that he was a dissident from day one, bound unwillingly into the whole scheme by a love of collective responsibility. I am afraid that he is getting very near to the Nuremburg defence of saying that he was only obeying orders. I would find it all a little more convincing had the right hon. Gentleman not peddled the Government's line so enthusiastically, with militant zeal—I hope that he will not resent the term—for so many months.

All my hon. Friends will remember the reception that was given to Labour's alternative to the poll tax. Abuse and scorn were heaped upon it with an intensity of attack that I cannot remember experiencing previously in my political career. That was perfectly understandable, because what we were proposing was so essentially and uniquely horrible. The House will remember that we had the effrontery to propose that we should have a property-based system founded largely on capital valuation and with legal liability falling on the householder alone. Clearly, that was unacceptable and intolerable. We were told in terms that it was a veritable tyranny—Scotland was colonised by vultures and no roof beam in Scotland was free from this plague.

What was unacceptable and intolerable suddenly—just like that—became acceptable and tolerable, as the Conservative party line turned, with a discipline which I found quite remarkable and which was reminiscent of societies that Conservative Members often dismiss contemptuously. A study of the assault made on our plans at the time reveals a number of points that were put forward as incontrovertible arguments against what we were proposing. It is perhaps worth taking a minute or two to invite the Secretary of State to answer those arguments in his reply and to explain how they have been overcome in the new council tax system. That will be particularly interesting to Labour Members, and I look forward to it.

I have here a copy of "Roof tax v poll tax", published by the Scottish Conservative party. Let us start with one or two fundamentals. The document states:

"Their new local government tax will be based on the value of your home . . . The truth is Labour's proposed 'Roof Tax' will be, as the rates were, a tax on your right to live in a house. The family home. It'll be the family millstone."

How does the new council tax overcome that essential fault?

The document contains a second charge. It states:

"council tenants won't laugh when they hear they'll be liable to pay the new tax in addition to their rent."

I must have missed something in the council tax. Some subtlety must have eluded me. I was under the impression that people who rented council houses would have to pay the new council tax in addition to their rents. Clearly I have misunderstood and I am sure that the Secretary of State for Scotland will correct me shortly.

The document also explains

"why the youngster with a full time job living at home will once again pay nothing towards local Government services. While the youngster who leaves home and rents a flat will be clobbered."

It seems that another subtlety has escaped me. What I have just related will look rather familiar to those who examine the Bill that we will debate next week.

I am sure that the Secretary of State will be able to explain the next point to me, because it is so simple. What is even more chilling for the people who have bought their council houses at a discounted price is that they will now be taxed at today's full value. That point was elaborated upon by the then Secretary of State for Scotland, the right hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind) who now runs—or rather does not run—our railway system. In a press release dated April 1990, he said:

"A council house in Bearsden is likely to have a much higher market value than a council house in Castlemilk. But the income of the council house tenant might be exactly the same. How does Mr. Dewar justify the one having to pay a much higher roof tax than the other?"

He continued:

"The council tenant who buys his house need also beware of Labour's roof tax. Their liability will not be based on what they have actually paid for their house but what it is deemed to be worth without discount. They may have bought it for £9,000 with full discount, if it is actually worth £30,000 it will be the latter figure that will be used to work out their roof tax . . . Labour will punish them with a vengeance."

That was a fundamental objection to our plans. How has the Secretary of State met that point in the council tax? *[Interruption.]* We never accepted that that was an objection. I have quoted from the Conservative Cabinet Minister in charge of local government finance. I want the Secretary of State to explain why he has abandoned the attack. Did he do that on the basis of arrant hypocrisy or because he is a man of no principle who is now putting his principles in his pocket?

[Mr. Donald Dewar]

The Government have capitulated on the flat rate principle, the property base and on accountability. All we can hear is the sound of Conservative politicians eating their own words. However, that has not encouraged humility, as the Secretary of State for the Environment proved when he opened this debate. The Government have capitulated on principle, but they have made a terrible mess of translating the principle into practice.

In the weeks ahead, we will examine the details of the new council tax. I am sure that the Secretary of State for Scotland will appreciate that I have corresponded with him about the fact that the Local Government Finance Bill is a United Kingdom Bill. I did that on the basis that it is very difficult to scrutinise the Bill's Scottish aspects, complicated and far-reaching as they are, as they impact on a very distinct and separate local government tradition and system within the framework of United Kingdom legislation. I hope that he will use his influence in the usual channels to ensure that there is a decent Scottish input to our debates.

I received a letter from the Secretary of State for Scotland on 30 October in which he confines himself to saying:

"I believe that the Scottish interests will be dealt with appropriately."

If we are reduced to a handful of Scottish Back Benchers and perhaps only a couple of Opposition Scottish Back Benchers on the Standing Committee, that will be deeply resented. It will be seen by many people who do not have a partisan political approach to the problems as a blow at the proper parliamentary scrutiny of Scottish legislation. The right hon. Gentleman must bear that point very much in mind.

I now refer to our objections. Understandably, I must state that, in broad terms—as the House will recognise, we have a Second Reading debate and a Committee stage to come—the first objection is very important. The proposed banding system was dealt with at some length by the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine). It is pinched and restricted. It is artificially constrained in a way that ensures that the burden is not fairly distributed and those at the top end of the property range, and very likely to be at the top end of the income range, are being given shelter which is not justified.

The right hon. Member for Henley made a powerful point when he said that all we were doing was trying to introduce an envy tax. He made a strange point, because he said, as though he justified that attack, that, after all, further bands would not raise any more cash. However, as he is always telling us, he does not want local government to raise more cash. It is not just a matter of how much is raised: there is another essential principle, and that is how the burden is distributed. That is the point at issue. I am surprised that someone as acute and as experienced as the right hon. Gentleman does not appreciate that arguments for fairness and justice also enter into the matter.

Mr. Heseltine: If one does not raise more money from the top bands, one does not actually help the people in the lower bands.

Mr. Dewar: Yes, one does, if one broadens the range. At the moment it is 3:1. The richest in the land can pay only three times as much as the person in the most lowly valued, difficult-to-let council house. If one broadens that range and spreads it more evenly, one gets away from the present situation in which those at the bottom end of the range are paying more than they need to pay because of the way the system has been constructed.

Again I refer to the "Roof tax v poll tax" document. On this particular the Government have got it right, and I am proud that they got it right. The Tories got it absolutely on the nail. That document states:

"Labour's message clearly is 'Those on high incomes in high valued properties will make a larger contribution to local services'."

I plead guilty to that. That is a principle which the vast majority of people in this country would endorse. It was the principal objection of many people on very wide and varied incomes to the way in which the poll tax operated.

The arrival of the eighth band, which suggests that the right hon. Gentleman's conscience was at least pricking him, is not enough, and more should be done. Perhaps we will refer later to the blatant dishonesty—I am sorry, I must watch my language; let us say something bordering on the dishonest—of the suggestion that we can have a banding system which avoids for ever the problem of revaluation. I read in the ministerial journals—the Secretary of State for the Environment will certainly know about it—that the Minister of State said that, once a person is in a band, his property would be in it probably for perpetuity. That is the level of the argument. If we go to any local government official and talk to him about local government finance and how the council tax might work, he will say that it is nonsense and a case of trying to muddle through and paper over the cracks simply to make the package a little more presentable for electoral purposes.

The next main point is about the complexity of the system. We are, in the practicalities, preserving many of the characteristics of the poll tax that have plagued and complicated our lives over the past two or three years. We have had a plethora of reduction schemes and concessional allowances—five or six of them—and they will go on. We have the 25 per cent. discount. I recognise why it is attractive. All of us are aware of the problems of someone who was living alone and struggling to maintain a large house, but I am genuinely surprised at Conservative Members' enthusiasm for a benefit that is clearly not targeted.

In Scotland, there are 580,000 homes consisting of a single adult over 16. I do not know how they are made up. Many of them will presumably get the 100 per cent. rebate anyway without having to call upon the discount system. Although there is an assumption that most of those people are little old ladies who live in the circumstances that I described earlier, I suspect that we do not really know who the beneficiaries will be, but if the Government do not know, they should tell us. I have said it before and will say again that I am one such beneficiary, and probably not the sort of beneficiary that was intended when it was decided that a discount would be required. If fairness is to be the test, the discount is neither an efficient nor effective way of targeting help where it is most needed.

In Committee we shall draw attention to the many anomalies that are already beginning to pile up. Let us take one random example. Perhaps the Secretary of State for Scotland will address the logic of the following. Let us imagine two neighbouring houses. The householder in the first earns £30,000. Only one other person lives in the house, his son who is on income support. As a result of his

son's status, that householder automatically gets the 25 per cent. discount. The neighbouring householder, however, earns only £15,000—he lives in exactly the same sort of house, but has only half the income of his neighbour—and, again, only one other person lives in the house, his non-working wife who brings in nothing. That householder would not receive any discount; he would pay the full charge. That is just one of many anomalies in what will be a long list in Committee. The discount system has the potential to run us into a substantial amount of trouble and I believe that very few people will be prepared to defend it in a year or two.

Many people have said, "How wonderful, there will be no register." The hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) cheerfully told the nation on radio the other day, "Of course, there will not be a register, but there will have to be a list." The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has asked me how the discount system, as distinct from the rebate system, will work. It has said, "We do not have the power to have a statutory canvass, but without a statutory canvass, we do not know the real position. Are we supposed to send out bills for 100 per cent. of the liability to everyone and leave householders to claim the discount if they are entitled to 25 per cent. off the full cost because they are single householders? If the bill is to be calculated on a daily rate and someone's auntie comes to stay for a couple of months in the middle of the year, what about all the complications in adjusting for that and how do we account for the period for which someone has lost the discount? If we calculate bills on that basis, the bills of all the affected people will have to be reissued." I am not making pedantic points when I refer to all those complexities and difficulties which are now beginning to bite in a way that I find worrying.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): I have read Labour's document, which is entitled "Fair Rates", in which the Labour party did not tackle the question of how it would deal with houses in multiple occupation or refer to salary levels. How would the hon. Gentleman's party cope with that?

Mr. Dewar: Our view is simple. We should not have a discount and rebate system. We should have simply a rebate system in which a flexible, generous and realistically tapered rebate takes account of the incomes of the people in any house. All the available funds should be targeted in that way to ensure that we achieve the best social return on the available resources—*[Interruption.]* If Conservative Members think that I am making a partisan point, I invite the Secretary of State for the Environment to move beyond the *Municipal Journal*. Why not do something daring and take the *Local Government Chronicle*? If the right hon. Gentleman had read the *Chronicle* this month, he would have seen the leader headed,

"To introduce the poll tax is a mistake, to bring in the council tax is a disaster".

I will favour the right hon. Gentleman by quoting one thought that was expressed in that article:

"If the single person discount remains a feature of the tax they will have to create a register—a point Michael Heseltine will eventually have to acknowledge. The discount—the Achilles heel of the system—would be better abandoned now rather than later."

Conservative Members would be well advised to heed those words because all the contact that I have had with local government—I am not talking about Labour councillors, but about impartial experts—has shown that those experts believe that the council tax will eventually run into such trouble that it will become unworkable.

I wish to make a simple plea about the 20 per cent. rule. We listened to the hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind)—we often must do so—and he defended the council tax with all the conviction with which he defended the poll tax just a few months ago. To be fair, he echoed his party's line when he said that of course the 20 per cent. rule has turned out to be a social disaster and an indefensible imposition. As the Audit Commission said, it will cost considerably more to collect than the net yield to the Treasury. We cannot in justice defend it and it does not make any financial sense—to use a good accountant's term, it is imprudent.

Why does not that rule go in 1992 instead of limping on until April 1993? I find that people cannot comprehend why it will not go in the forthcoming legislation. They do not understand the basis of the argument and they ask me to explain the Government's position. I am not, perhaps, the best person to do that. Perhaps I sometimes do that job inadequately, in the view of any Conservative commentator. But on this case, I cannot give it a try—that is the point. Having been told that the Government have conceded that the whole thing is nonsense, I cannot begin to understand why we are not getting rid of it now, taking the strain off last year's poll tax, which is becoming intolerable. I hope that the Secretary of State can help me on that point.

It is necessary to cut through the confusion and to attack the mess of local government finance which is the legacy of the past few years of Conservative rule. We must find a way of distributing the burden more fairly. In Scotland, we have a valuation base which is comparatively up to date—perhaps that is an advantage which we have over the rest of the country—but we should build upon that base. We should kill the poll tax as quickly as we can. We must then continue with a rolling programme of reform that takes us away from the narrow concept of notional rents. We must build in the kind of rebate system that the hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) tempted me to describe—a rebate system which concentrates on people's ability to pay and which is not concerned with an artificial concept of status.

If we took the Labour way, it would be fairer, and I can quickly give some reasons. The broader property base which we would introduce would mean a fairer distribution of the burden. As I understand it—of course, I am open to correction—the discount system which Conservative Members have praised to the sky will be entirely financed within the system, so others who are not getting the 25 per cent. discount will pay more than they would otherwise do. The savings resulting from the administrative efficiency of the new system will largely be dissipated by the effects of the problems to which I referred.

My experience is that a change would bring a sense of relief. The people in my part of the world, and I believe in the United Kingdom as a whole, are weary of the bitterness and frustration that the poll tax has brought. They fear that they are now looking at a successor tax which is designed simply to allow the Government to muddle through to the next election. They want a fair system which is practicable and workable—an acceptable base for genuine local democracy and the delivery of

[Mr. Dewar]

services that are the mark of a civilised society. That is what the Labour party intends to bring in after the next election.

9.38 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Ian Lang): Charm was never the strong suit of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar)—indeed, I think that he is wearing his only suit. What a dismal, doleful, baleful lament of a speech we had from him. Labour knows, and the long faces around the hon. Gentleman confirm, that the council tax is a winner and that we have found in three months the solution that has eluded Labour for three years. We have worked our way directly to a fair, simple and durable solution while Labour has wandered around the highways and byways throwing up and discarding enough nutty ideas to revive the Monty Python show.

We are indebted to the Opposition for tabling the amendment to the Loyal Address which has enabled this subject to be debated and which enables us to prove that we have the best solution for local government funding. It is not often that the Opposition play to the Government's strengths, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock) said, the council tax is a simple and fair tax, and she was right to welcome its rebate scheme and its transitional relief.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) identified the efficiency of administration that the council tax will bring. My hon. Friend the Member for Berkshire, East (Mr. MacKay) welcomed the discounts for students and others. My hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) welcomed the banding and the single bills for households. My hon. Friends the Members for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) and for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo), among others, welcomed the capping provisions to protect residents of profligate councils.

The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) raised, in a passing aside, the question of local income tax. I was most impressed by the effective way in which my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford destroyed the hon. Gentleman's case during a short intervention. The hon. Gentleman was wrong to say that we had failed to consult on our proposals for the council tax. We invited hon. Members from all Opposition parties to consult and debate with us the best form of taxation to replace the community charge. Indeed, Liberal Democrat Members took part in those discussions, as did SNP Members. Only the Opposition, who proclaim in their paper "Fair Rates" their willingness to discuss their proposals, failed to take part when the invitation to consult was issued.

The hon. Member for Garscadden complained that the provisions for Scotland and for England were included in the same Bill. Just a few years ago he complained about the exact opposite—that the provisions for the community charge in Scotland were in a separate Bill from those for England and Wales. I note his comments about the representation of Scottish Labour Members on the Standing Committee, but that is a matter not for me, but for the Committee of Selection, which I am sure will hear his words.

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Mr. Lang: I give way to the hon. Gentleman, who is an endangered species on the Opposition Benches as he is one of the few who still speak their mind.

Mr. Nellist: As the provisions for Scotland and for England and Wales are contained in the same Bill, can the right hon. Gentleman explain why the schedules relating to imprisonment as an enforcement penalty still apply to England and Wales, whereas the Debtors (Scotland) Act 1987 abolished that penalty for Scotland? In England and Wales, people may still be imprisoned if they do not pay their council tax.

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman has identified differences between Scotland and England which will persist in the new Bill. That underlines the fact that the one Bill will have the capacity to cater for both Scotland and England. One of the advantages of the Scottish arrangement is that it does not create martyrs, and the hon. Gentleman should know all about that.

The hon. Member for Garscadden raised the issue of discounts and exemptions. It is at the core of our proposals that single-person households should pay less than households comprising two or more adults. It was the failure of domestic rates to take any account of the number of people living in a property which, above all, led to the system being rejected by the public as an acceptable means of raising local government revenue.

In our consultation paper, and now in the Bill, we have recognised further that there will be certain circumstances in which it would be inappropriate for members of a household to add to that household's bill. Those are the cases which, for convenience, we have termed "status discounts". The Bill therefore provides that students, student nurses, apprentices, youth trainees and other categories, who are currently only partially exempt from the community charge, will not, if they are resident in a dwelling, add to the council tax liability of that dwelling.

Mr. Graham: Will the Secretary of State say now why he will not give a 100 per cent. rebate to those people who genuinely cannot pay the poll tax? Why not rescue them from the hell hole created for them by the Government?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman knows that those on income support were given increased income support to enable them to pay their 20 per cent. liability for the community charge. Labour Members, locally and nationally, have led those people astray, so that they are now facing financial difficulties and are unable to pay.

Mr. Dewar: Would it be a convenient moment for the right hon. Gentleman to answer one of the questions that I asked? Will he explain why, given that the theory has been abandoned, and given that the poll tax is ultimately to go, the 20 per cent. rule cannot be abolished in the council tax Bill with effect from April 1992?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman can get rid of the 20 per cent. rule quickly by helping us to abolish the community charge and then the package will disappear altogether.

The Opposition call their proposal "Fair Rates", a contradiction in terms if ever there was one. One might as well speak of even-handed socialism. But just as they have done throughout the past three years, we find the Opposition spokesmen contradicting each other. The hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) now says that there is no question but that Labour will replace the

council tax with fair rates. But the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) says that Labour will amend the council tax. The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), the man responsible, as on so many other details, is really not very sure. Even by Labour standards the pantomime season has come early this year.

But unfair rates is what is on the table, along with the tattered remnants of more than 60 other proposals that went before. What a retrograde disaster it represents. After all these years, has the Labour party not learnt that people pay their taxes in sorrow, but they paid their rates in anger? How does the Labour party's policy stand up to examination by comparison with the council tax? Fundamental to the stability of a system of taxation is the level at which people are asked to pay, and the switch from local to central taxation achieved by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor in his Budget was widely welcomed because it recognised that the tax burden had become too high for any system to sustain, and that is why he took steps to reduce it.

That has been welcomed everywhere except on the Opposition Benches. Not for Opposition Members the 14 per cent. contribution from local residents that we have achieved—the figure in Scotland is even lower—but, on the contrary, a commitment to raise it to 20 per cent. The general secretary of the Scottish Trades Union Congress even proposed an increase of up to 50 per cent.

But what does that mean for the local residents? Surely not cuts in income tax by a Labour Government. One has only to mouth that thought to recognise its absurdity. What it means is higher bills for local taxpayers. That is what the Labour party means when it says it wants councils to raise more of the money that they spend.

In the past 12 years, despite the protestations of the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham), the funding of Scottish local authorities by Government has risen in real terms by 10 per cent. but spending has risen by no less than 26 per cent. That is the reality of Labour in action in local government. Labour's policy means giving spendthrift councils the green light to send tax bills soaring even further with devastating results for millions of people.

The Labour party claims that its new fair rates policy is easy to administer. "Fair Rates" says that Labour wants to cut unnecessary bureaucracy from local government finance, an admirable objective, but it seems that the Labour party cannot help itself. It could not even make up its mind. Faced with four alternative approaches to valuation—whether it should be based on capital values, rental values, maintenance costs or rebuilding costs—its choice was not to go for one of them, or even a mixture of two of them, but to go for all four of them.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): On the subject of making up his mind or the minds of parties in Scotland, can the Secretary of State say whether the Conservative candidate in Kincardine and Deeside supports that aspect of Conservative party policy?

Mr. Lang: My friend the candidate, soon to be my hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside, supports me and my hon. Friends on that policy as on so many other policies.

But what the Opposition call a modernised valuation system has more components than a car manufactured in the constituency of the hon. Member for Dagenham, and on top of that we are promised a revaluation every year. That policy is to simplicity what the Leader of the Opposition is to brevity. It would not have the confidence of the people, so it would never work.

When we come to banding we find that the Labour party is incapable of making up its mind. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State asked today whether it supported banding but received no answer. We referred to its "Fair Rates" document where it argues for it but carefully puts in the word "perhaps". The hon. Member for Garscadden says that banding protects the rich and the hon. Member for Dagenham says that the Government are clobbering the rich, and still we do not know.

The Labour party claims that its policies would be fairer, but the council tax brings fairness to single people with discounts. They are not the rich bachelors or the yuppies that the Labour party fears; two thirds of single people entitled to discounts will be over 60, single pensioners, widows and widowers, and many more are single parents. Where is the justice for them in a rates policy?

If businesses think that they would escape, protected by a fair and stable business rate, they had better think again. Labour says that it will reverse every step that the Government have taken to protect businesses, and would leave them to the mercy of Labour's own local councils. Once again, city centre premises would be boarded up, as business after business moved out of centres, driven away by runaway rates bills.

Mr. Bellotti: The Secretary of State said that those people who were to receive discounts would be separately marked on the lists. Will he explain to the House the difference between a register and a list?

Mr. Lang: There is all the difference in the world between a register and a list. A register is a statutory designated body that is a basis for designating liability, and a list is a source of administrative efficiency for the use of the local authority. If the hon. Gentleman serves on the Committee that is to consider the Bill, he will be able to reassure himself as to the way that works.

Another refinement and contrast between the council tax and Labour's rates policy is the control, or lack of it, that Labour would exercise over excessive spending levels. According to Labour's policy document, it would abolish capping. Today, the hon. Member for Dagenham confirmed that, and the hon. Member for Eastbourne joined in on behalf of the Liberal Democrats. They were too modest, because it was a Labour Government who invented capping—back in the 1970s, when Labour said that the party was over. In effect, the party had not even started. It was Labour Ministers who told local authorities that there was to be

"severe restraint in expenditure in the national interest."

We all know that without capping there would be an explosion in local authority spending and spiralling local tax bills.

What do we find in Labour's new "Fair Rates" policy? Where is the smack of firm government? Labour would throw away all controls, and, according to the hon. Member for Dagenham, would do all it could to encourage councils "to behave sensibly." The only people who would be encouraged by that would be councillors in areas such as Lambeth, Liverpool, and Lothian. For them,

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the party would be on again. It would be spend, spend, spend. For the rest of us, that can clearly be seen as a policy of catastrophe.

My hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne suggested that regional variations in house prices should be taken into account in regional banding. That overlooks the protection that is built in to the dampened banding system. I suggest to those who talk of regional banding that they look at the protection that the banding system will offer to people living in London and the south-east. Do we really want a [illegible] in which a couple——

Mr. Dewar: Will the Secretary of State explain exactly what is a "dampened banding system"?

Mr. Lang: Precisely the system that the hon. Gentleman, if I recall his words, said was restricting and constraining. It narrows the differential, so that those in the top band are not forced to pay more than three times those in the bottom band. I regard that form of protection as highly desirable and an important part of our proposals.

Limiting the range of bills will give all the protection that London and the south-east needs. Bills there will be reasonable if local authorities spend sensibly. That is critical. It is not the Government who play havoc with people's local tax bills but the Lambeths, Liverpools, and Lothians of this world. We have not and, I repeat, we will not allow local authorities to spend irresponsibly and profligately—and we mean what we say.

No local authority will be allowed to undermine the principles of sound and prudent public sector management to which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and all the other members of the Government are committed. I repeat that we will maintain firm vigilance over local authority spending. Where necessary, we will cap, and cap vigorously.

It is nonsense to suppose that local authorities should be let off the financial hook for flagrant mismanagement of their responsibilities. They can and will be called to account. It is in the interests of the ordinary citizen that that should be so. Why should the people of Lambeth be subjected to savage bills because their local authority fails to collect rents, the community charge, and even outstanding rates arrears going back over many years? Why should the people of Liverpool have to pay for the self-inflicted deficits of their local council, and why should the people of Lothian suffer the same dismal experience?

Let us examine the collection rates for 1990-91. The five worst councils are Hackney, with 55 per cent.—Labour; Lambeth, with 67 per cent.—Labour; Liverpool, with 68 per cent.—Labour; Islington, with 69 per cent.—Labour; and Newham, with 71 per cent.—Labour. In Scotland, the worst two regions are Strathclyde, with 71 per cent.—Labour; and Lothian, with 75 per cent.—Labour.

Government is about responsibility, and local government is about local responsibility. We in government have a duty to ensure that local responsibility is not abused, and we intend to carry out that duty.

One of the more unedifying spectacles that emerged from the community charge was the flaunting display of the "can pay, won't pay" brigade. "Can pay, won't pay" is shorthand: written out in full, their credo was, "We have the money to make our proper contribution to the cost of essential local services, but, because we wish to indulge in political point-scoring, we will withhold that contribution —knowing full well that by doing so we will force local authorities either to increase charges for the great majority of law-abiding citizens, or to cut services." Put in such terms, that is a cheap and tawdry act, and the whole campaign is rightly reviled by most people. Even the Scottish National party has been forced to acknowledge that it hitched its colours to a vote loser.

Such action becomes particularly distasteful when it is carried out by elected representatives. In our view, it is entirely unacceptable for them to be allowed to continue to exercise any influence over the amount of local taxation that they require their electorate to pay. Such a degree of hypocrisy cannot be tolerated; it is morally indefensible, and in defiance of the rule of law. We are saying to those councillors, "Won't pay, can't say"; in other words, "If you are not prepared to obey the law and pay your rightful contribution to the cost of the local services which, as locally elected representatives, you have a say in providing, it is unjustifiable for you to have any influence, through your votes, on the amount of local tax that is levied in your area."

Today—diffidently, quietly and from sedentary positions—Opposition Members agreed with that. Yes, whispered the hon. Member for Dagenham, they would support us. We welcome that deathbed repentance, if it lasts through the Committee stage. But what a pity that, when the heat was on—when the law of the land was being challenged by Labour councillors up and down the country, and by Members of Parliament—the Opposition Front Bench was found wanting, and failed to stand up to the rule of law.

When the Opposition try to throw back at us arguments about increasing accountability, I say this to them. Yes, we believe in local accountability: we have tried to strengthen it, first through funding mechanisms and now through contemplating single-tier authorities. But where is the accountability in a policy that abrogates responsibility, or in a Government who do the same? Where is the accountability in a Government who take all controls off local authorities, and let spending rip; who switch a larger burden of tax-raising to profligate authorities and abandon the interests of oppressed residents? Where is the accountability in a policy that fails to take account of the number of people living in a house, and leaves businesses without a vote and at the mercy of local authorities?

When asked to hold themselves accountable to their residents, local authorities chose instead to clobber them with a 30 per cent. increase in this year's burden and inadequate efforts to collect until it was far too late. There is no sense of accountability in a council such as Edinburgh, which sought last year to tax residents at £584 per head.

The fact is that Labour wants to keep the poll tax so that it can attack us with it. Labour wants to hide behind it, to disguise the incompetence and extravagance of Labour authorities and their lack of an alternative. If I am wrong, Labour can prove it by helping the Local Government Finance Bill on to the statute book. That is the acid test. How can the nation judge Labour's sincerity if Labour is determined to resist? The truth is that Labour knows that it has no creditable system with which to replace our proposals.

Our council tax forms part of a major undertaking on which we have embarked to reform the structure, funding and function of local government throughout Britain. It is

fair; it spreads the burden evenly, providing proper discounts and proper control of local authorities. I urge the House to throw out the amendment.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 198, Noes 326.

Division No. 1] [10 pm

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clay, Bob
Cohen, Harry
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cunningham, Dr John
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Neillist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert N. Wareing and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus

Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Sir Robert
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Moss, Malcolm
Mudd, David
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trimble, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

Question accordingly negatived.
It being after Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.
Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

Mr. Andrew Docherty

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sackville.]*

10.19 pm

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the case of the late Mr. Andrew Docherty. I have two purposes in raising his case. The first is to draw attention to what I and others believe to be clear injustices in the way in which he was treated before his death and the second is to expose the fact that the injustices faced by Mr. Docherty affect many others in similar circumstances, and are a direct consequence of Government policy.

I do not intend to point an accusing finger at individual officials in either the Department of Employment or the Department of Social Security at local level whose actions may have a bearing on Mr. Docherty's case. I am satisfied that in their dealings with Mr. Docherty, which I will describe, they were following to the letter the procedures required of them by present Government policy. As the Minister knows, my criticism and concern are directed at Government policies which had a major bearing on the difficult circumstances faced by this man in the period immediately before his death.

I first met Mr. Docherty, a 32-year-old man who originates from the Hemsworth area, while canvassing in a local government by-election in my constituency during March this year. He raised with me certain personal problems that he was facing and I asked him to come to my regular constituency surgery to discuss matters in more detail.

Mr. Docherty came to see me in April, desperately concerned because he was homeless and had insufficient money with which to feed himself. He told me that he had recently been sacked from his job as a long-distance lorry driver for refusing to drive a defective and dangerous vehicle. He told the police that the vehicle concerned had a virtually bald front nearside tyre and a gash in one of the rear tyres, and that its tachograph was not working. Two days later, he was dismissed and as a consequence of his dismissal, his unemployment benefit was stopped and he received reduced rate income support of, I understand, £23.79 a week.

As he previously spent most of his time living in his cab or in bed-and-breakfast accommodation while he was working, his dismissal meant that he had nowhere to live. His mother and stepfather, who was in poor health, had a two-bedroom house and another relative also resided there. I subsequently established from Mr. Docherty's mother that the other factor preventing him from living at home was the fact that his presence would have had an impact on the family's eligibility for housing benefit and would have resulted in additional poll tax liability which the family simply could not meet. To my knowledge, such considerations have had a major influence on the circumstances of many other homeless people in West Yorkshire and elsewhere.

Mr. Docherty told me that he was sleeping rough either in his car or in a small tent. He expressed concern that he was not getting sufficient sleep to carry out work as a driver, to which he hoped to return shortly.

Following his interview, I wrote an urgent letter about his circumstances to the local housing department, although I recognised that it could be some time before he received any offers of accommodation. My office is inundated with referrals concerning housing needs and the official figure for homelessness shows an almost 40 per cent. increase over the past two years within Wakefield district. The latest annual report from the Wakefield metropolitan district council housing department states that in terms of homelessness,

"the major problem we face is that 30 per cent. of all referrals are from single people and there is simply not enough suitable housing for this client group".

The local authority in Wakefield has a good record on housing. Its voids are less than 1 per cent. and the average property turnround time is within the lowest Audit Commission quartile. Our housing problems stem directly from the fact that the Government have actively prevented replacement of the 9,500 council houses lost through the right to buy. With the exception of the war years, last year was the first since the Labour Government of the 1920s in which no new starts were made on council dwellings in Wakefield.

The consequences of that are only too apparent in cases such as that of Andrew Docherty. After seeing Mr. Docherty I wrote to the manager of the local unemployment benefit office for her comments on the circumstances leading to the suspension of his benefit. She replied promptly on 26 April stating:

"When Mr. Docherty claimed benefit he wrote, 'got sack' on his claim form. Our instructions state that we must suspend benefit pending further inquiries to his last employer. We did this. On receipt of the reply from the employer it was stated that Mr. Docherty had been dismissed for misconduct. In these cases we are instructed to refer to the Adjudication Officer for a decision on whether the claim to benefit should be allowed or disallowed.

The claim is currently being considered by the Adjudication Officer who is awaiting a reply from the employer regarding Mr. Docherty's response to their claim that he was dismissed for misconduct. If no reply is received from the employer by 1 May then the Adjudication Officer will make a decision. If Mr. Docherty's claim for benefit is allowed he will receive the benefit to which he is entitled. If it is disallowed then he will, presumably, continue to receive reduced Income Support for the period of disallowance."

My office was subsequently informed by telephone on 10 May and by a letter dated 13 May from the deputy manager of the unemployment benefit office that Mr. Docherty's case had been allowed by the adjudication officer, and that he was therefore entitled to arrears of benefit. I wrote back to advise them that, unfortunately, Mr. Docherty had committed suicide by inhaling exhaust fumes in his car on the Monkton industrial estate in Wakefield, in my constituency on Saturday 4 May.

I gave the office details of Mr. Docherty's next of kin —his mother in Hemsworth—and said that presumably any outstanding benefit should be paid to her. Given the circumstances of the case, I was surprised and angered to receive a further letter dated 29 May from the deputy benefits manager stating:

"Unfortunately it is not the policy of the Department to inform next of kin of any outstanding benefits, the onus is on the individuals concerned to instigate the action."

The Minister is aware that when I received that letter I immediately tabled a question on the matter, and had subsequent correspondence with her fellow Under-Secretary of State, who has been most helpful and concerned. I know that he had hoped to take part in this debate but had to be elsewhere; I pay tribute to the fact that he has shown a personal interest in the case. That is appreciated by me and also, I am sure, by Mr. Docherty's family.

[Mr. David Hinchliffe]

The Minister may wish to refer to our correspondence when she replies to the debate. As she knows, I was far more concerned about the circumstances leading to the suspension of benefit and the effect that that had on Mr. Docherty immediately before his death.

I could substantiate the information that Mr. Docherty gave me through contact with the West Yorkshire metropolitan police. The divisional commander for the Wakefield area informed me in a letter dated 6 September that he could confirm that Mr. Docherty sought the advice of a PC Lingard during March 1991. The letter continued:

"According to the officer, Mr. Docherty had been directed to use unroadworthy vehicles belonging to his employers, RT Transport. He was advised that if he did use the vehicle he and his employers may be liable to prosecution. The officer also reports that Mr. Docherty appeared to be aware that if he was dismissed from his employment due to refusing to drive the vehicle, he may have problems regarding his DSS benefits. The officer agreed to confirm the conversation with the Department of Social Security if he was contacted."

The letter continues:

"A short time later Mr. Docherty advised PC Lingard that he had been dismissed from his employment and that his claim for benefit had been refused. The officer was also contacted—although two weeks later, by the Department of Social Security and he confirmed details of the conversation."

Bearing in mind the fact that the Departments of Health and of Social Security were advised of Mr. Docherty's complaint to the police before his dismissal, at the time of his initial claim to benefit, it is surely a matter of great concern that his benefit was suspended in the first place, leaving him facing the most difficult financial circumstances on top of his homelessness. The Minister may also wish to elaborate on why it took so long for her Department's officials to contact the police regarding Mr. Docherty's case.

There are additional factors of which I was not aware when I was dealing with Mr. Docherty's case. Apparently, during April and early May, Mr. Docherty had contact with the Wakefield centre for the unemployed, which is based in the same building as my constituency office. The centre, which is mainly funded by the local authority, gives a tremendous amount of support to local people who are facing the trauma of unemployment. The centre's welfare benefits adviser, Mr. Nick Hodgkinson, has advised me that, when Mr. Docherty initially made contact, he had been refused a crisis social fund loan to supplement his weekly income of £23·79. He was actively seeking work as a driver and, in addition to having insufficient money to feed himself, or come anywhere near funding any accommodation, he was having the greatest difficulty in meeting the petrol costs of his car—an essential item in his search for work, in addition to being his home at that stage.

Following advice from the centre for the unemployed, Mr. Docherty successfully obtained a crisis loan of £13·60 from the Department of Social Security. I was astonished to be told by Mr. Hodgkinson that Mr. Docherty was required to repay the loan at the rate of £5·95 per week, leaving him a mere £17·84 on which to live. The centre made a formal written request on his behalf that the repayment should be reduced to £1·98 per week because at that stage its staff were becoming concerned about Mr. Docherty's physical and mental state. After they arranged for him to see a GP, he was prescribed medication and given a sick note which was sent to the Department of Social Security on 20 April, in the hope that his money would be increased to the full rate of sickness benefit. Nine days later, when Mr. Docherty called again at the centre, his sickness benefit had still not materialised.

During that period, Mr. Docherty depended on cans of food provided by the centre, which he was warming on a small camping stove. On 29 April, the DSS confirmed that a giro for 11 days' sickness benefit would be ready for collection on 2 May, but that a social fund deduction of £5·95 was being made. No decision had been made regarding the request for a reduced repayment rate.

I understand from Mr. Hodgkinson that Mr. Docherty called in again on 1 May, and the centre contacted the DSS adjudication officers in Doncaster regarding the voluntary unemployment investigation. They were informed that there would be the normal delay while the DSS waited for employers to respond to letters, and that it could be up to three or four weeks before a decision was made on his case.

Mr. Docherty's suicide note, which I have with me, was written three days later. It included the words,

"I am sorry to everyone concerned.

PS. I asked for help but I got none."

Andrew Docherty was better known to Mr. Hodgkinson than to me, and I feel that it would be appropriate to quote Mr. Hodgkinson's comments in his letter to me on 2 October, because they provide a most appropriate summary of the situation:

"It seems that this was a man who worked hard during his adult life, and who was honest enough to lose his job rather than break the law and endanger the lives of other road users, who paid tax and national insurance during his many years' employment, but was unlucky enough to come up against the rules regarding homelessness, which deemed him not vulnerable enough to be given priority status; against the lack of single person's accommodation in Wakefield, which left him sleeping in his car or tent; against the voluntary unemployment investigation procedures which, in effect, hold you guilty until you prove yourself innocent; and against a Social Fund system which insists that people who are accepted as being in crisis are forced to live below the poverty line as they repay the crisis loan."

Mr. Hodgkinson went on to say:

"He is not the first and, sadly, will probably not be the last person for whom the trauma of unemployment, homelessness and poverty—none of which could in any way be said to have been caused by any wrong doing on his part—was simply too much."

I have met Mr. Docherty's mother and I pay tribute to the courage that she has shown over the past few months following this bereavement. I hope that lessons can be learnt from Mr. Docherty's case and I look to the Minister to provide his family and many others with some hope arising from what has happened.

A whole range of injustices may have been factors in Mr. Docherty's decision to commit suicide. Clearly, I cannot prove that, but knowing some of the factors, I am sure that they had a bearing on his decision to take his own life.

I urge the Minister to look specifically at three particular issues to arise from Mr. Docherty's case. The first is the plight of the homeless and, in particular, the single homeless. I appreciate that that is not the Minister's direct responsibility, but in her Department she has contact with vast numbers of homeless people and single homeless people through the benefit system. As a result of this debate, I hope that she will make representations to the appropriate Department about the problems facing single homeless people in Wakefield and elsewhere.

Secondly, with regard to Mr. Docherty's case, I draw the Minister's attention to the operation of the crisis loan system which may have added to his problems. It is clear that the burden imposed on Mr. Docherty was unreasonable and the same thing is happening to many other people who face similar problems.

Finally, the main issue that I hope the Minister will address is the automatic assumption in the Government's benefit system that when an employee is dismissed from a job, he or she is assumed to be the guilty party. Mr. Docherty clearly was not the guilty party. I am grateful for the presence tonight of my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) who is making his debut on the Opposition Front Bench. My colleagues and I wish him well in his future as a Front-Bench spokesman. I hope that he and the Minister will remember Mr. Docherty's case and will press the Government to do something about such cases.

10.37 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Miss Ann Widdecombe): I congratulate the honourable Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) on obtaining this Adjournment debate. The issue that he raised is the tragic case of a man without a home who took his own life after having lost his job. I extend the condolences both of myself and of my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, the hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), to the family at this difficult time. I was grateful to the hon. Gentleman for stating that he did not feel that the staff at our local offices were in any way to blame for this tragic sequence of events. He has rightly pointed out that they were obeying the rules as they stand and it is to those rules that I wish to address the bulk of my remarks.

I was also grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his kind comments about my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, who has taken a deep personal interest in this case, and he sends his apologies to both the hon. Member for Wakefield and to the House for his unavoidable absence this evening. He is abroad on ministerial business.

The hon. Gentleman has two criticisms of my Department. First, he criticises what may be described as a presumption of guilt in determining unemployment benefit where there is a question of voluntary unemployment. Secondly, he criticises failure to inform relatives where a deceased person is entitled to arrears of benefit. He has also raised the subject of social fund loans and their recovery.

I shall deal with the events in the local offices of the Employment Service and the Benefits Agency between 11 March 1991, when Mr. Docherty made his first claim to unemployment benefit, and 3 May 1991, when the adjudication officer decided that Mr. Docherty was not disqualified for receiving unemployment benefit.

Perhaps at this point I should say, in response to the hon. Gentleman's description of the circumstances which surrounded Mr. Docherty becoming unemployed in March, that it is indeed, regrettable that that man appears to have been offered a decision between safety and employment, although the facts of the matter I have not established. However, if the hon. Gentleman's description of the circumstances is accurate, perhaps the employer in question would also wish to reflect on the lessons of this case.

The decision by the independent statutory authority that Mr. Docherty was not disqualified for receiving unemployment benefit was made after Mr. Docherty had claimed sickness benefit on 25 April. It was also made on the day preceding that on which he so tragically took his own life.

When Mr. Docherty, a divorced man of 33, made his claim to unemployment benefit he gave his occupation as a heavy goods vehicle driver. In a statement on why his job had ended on 9 March, he said that he had been sacked. That answer clearly raised the question whether Mr. Docherty had lost his employment through his misconduct. The local office wrote to his last employer, R T Transport of Wombwell, Barnsley, seeking information on the circumstances of the dismissal. The employer's reply was received on 19 March.

The question was then referred, quite properly and in accordance with normal procedures, by the local office of the Employment Service to the adjudication officer for a decision. The Social Security Act 1975 requires any such question arising in connection with a claim for benefit to be submitted forthwith to an adjudication officer. In this case, the reference was made on 21 March, two days after the reply had been received at the local office. I hope, therefore, that it will be accepted that local officials acted with all necessary dispatch.

Again in accordance with normal practice, the adjudication officer invited Mr. Docherty to comment on the statement from his late employers. Having no fixed address, he did not make his response to the statement until he next attended the local office on 11 April. His comments conflicted with the information given by the employers and the adjudication officer directed that R. T. Transport should be given the opportunity to see Mr. Docherty's further statement. The adjudication officer did not receive an early reply from the employers and decided that he would make a decision if he still did not receive their reply by 1 May.

On 3 May, the adjudication officer gave his decision to the effect that Mr. Docherty was not disqualified on the grounds referred. When that decision was received by the Employment Service, it was passed immediately to the connected local office of the Benefits Agency where the calculation was made of the arrears of income support due. Those amounted to £44·13 and arrangements were made to ensure that the payment was ready for Mr. Docherty when he next attended the local office.

Mr. Docherty received income support payments covering his entitlement from the date of his initial claim to unemployment benefit until he claimed sickness benefit on 25 April. He received £28·29 on 21 March and £44 on 4 April. He then received £62·80 in respect of the period of 3 April to 21 April and a further £6·80 on 23 April. On 29 April, he received £45·47. Because he had no fixed address, he collected his benefit personally. That continued until he claimed sickness benefit. The Employment Service office was unaware that Mr. Docherty had committed suicide until the hon. Gentleman's letter of 23 May was received by the manager.

I now refer to the presumption of guilt.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Has the Minister seen a copy of a letter that was sent to me on 7 October by the deputy manager

[Mr. Hinchliffe]

of the Employment Service office in Wakefield, stating the income support payments made to Mr. Docherty? The figures that I have been given conflict with those that the hon. Lady has given.

Miss Widdecombe: There is a further conflict in respect of the social fund. I have indeed seen a copy of the letter. My information is documented information from the local office. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to pursue that point after the debate, I suggest that we correspond or meet on the issue. I shall be very happy to resolve any differences.

The hon. Gentleman will be aware that it is a principle underlying the payment of benefits to the unemployed that the lack of employment should not be attributable in any way to the actions or choices of the claimant. Disqualification under the national insurance scheme is intended as a recognition of the basic principle that a person can be insured only against events for which he or she is not personally responsible. Any disqualification for the receipt of unemployment benefit is met with a corresponding reduction in the rate of income support. The principle of paying a reduced benefit rate until a decision on disqualification has been reached by the independent statutory authorities has been followed by both Labour and Conservative Governments.

Mr. Docherty stated that he had been sacked. If claimants making such declarations were paid their full income support entitlement pending the adjudication officer's decision, we would probably be faced with substantial unrecoverable debts. The hon. Member will, I am sure, be aware of the many difficulties that face us in recovering overpayments in the normal course of events. To enable us to cover these debts, with safeguards built in, would require a major change in primary legislation. I am not convinced that there is a sufficient case for us to depart from the principle that has been adhered to by successive Governments.

Although I am not able to offer the hon. Gentleman any prospect of change in terms of voluntary unemployment deductions, it is perhaps worth pointing out that the 40 per cent. of the personal rate of benefit which is removed while inquiries proceed is modified to 20 per cent. if any member of the family is pregnant or seriously ill and if the family has less than £200 capital. No reduction is applied to benefit payable in respect of dependants. There is, therefore, a policy of trying to protect the most vulnerable.

However, the hon. Gentleman's second point has brought action from my Department. My hon. Friend the Member for Fylde wrote to the hon. Gentleman on 10 June thanking him for bringing to his attention the omission in the procedural instructions issued to local officers. It is more regrettable—and is profoundly regretted—that when notified of Mr. Docherty's death, the local office staff did not have instructions before them which ensured a sympathetic approach to the question of the payment of arrears to those who had just suffered the loss of a relative. My hon. Friend expressed his sympathies to Mr. Docherty's family and passed on assurances from the Employment Service that an invitation to claim arrears of benefit will be issued to a legal personal representative or next of kin where either, or a third party, notifies the Employment Service that the claimant has died.

I am pleased to tell the House that the Employment Service has now issued new instructions to that effect to everyone in its offices and has made managers responsible for inviting claims for any outstanding benefit. The new instruction emphasises that, when inviting such a claim, discretion must be used to ensure that no further distress is caused to relatives. The instructions arise directly as a result of this tragic case and I hope that they will act as some reassurance to the hon. Gentleman that the treatment which Mr. Docherty's relatives received will not recur. I join my hon. Friend the Member for Fylde in expressing sincere regret for the additional distress which must have been caused by the original absence of such directions.

I turn to the applications made by Mr. Docherty to the social fund. He applied for a crisis loan on 27 March as his fortnightly payment of income support was not due until 4 April. He was paid £28·09 and agreed to repay the loan at the weekly rate of £5·51. I should say at this point that it was open to Mr. Docherty, as it is to any applicant for a crisis loan, to negotiate a lower rate of repayment, particularly if it is likely to cause difficulties at the rate set. In this case, recovery did not commence until 29 April —a month later—by which time Mr. Docherty had left the unemployment register and was receiving income support at the full rate while sick.

Further crisis loans were made on 11 April and 24 April, when the social fund officer decided that Mr. Docherty's personal circumstances were such that these were appropriate. The weekly recovery rate of £5·95 was deferred until the earlier loan had been paid off. Clearly then, Mr. Docherty benefited from the fact that the social fund is a flexible scheme and he was able to use it to mitigate the effects of his reduced benefits.

As the hon. Gentleman said, a letter was received from the Wakefield centre for the unemployed, requesting a change in the rate of recovery. Had Mr. Docherty lived, this would have been discussed with him and a revised rate of recovery would have been considered in the light of his circumstances.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman has drawn attention to the fact that Mr. Docherty was homeless and searching for accommodation at the time of his death. I know that the hon. Gentleman was assisting him with an application for local authority housing. Homelessness is a complex problem about which the Government as a whole are seriously concerned and the hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Department of the Environment has been taking a number of initiatives. I shall, of course, draw to that Department's attention the situation that the hon. Gentleman has described and shall ensure that it fully understands his comments and concerns on this matter.

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at eleven minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 7 November 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

Special Constables

1. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what impact recent changes to the conditions of special constables have had on recruiting; and what plans he has further to increase numbers of specials.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Peter Lloyd): We are taking a series of measures to increase the strength of the special constabulary with the aim of recruiting an additional 10,000 special constables. We launched a national recruiting campaign at the beginning of this year and are shortly introducing a pilot scheme to pay a bounty to specials, as a further boost to recruitment. The latest information, from a sample of forces, suggests that strength increased by up to 6 per cent. in the first half of this year.

Mr. Pawsey: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that exceedingly full and comprehensive reply—the type of reply that we have come to expect from this Minister. Does he agree that more special constables would do a great deal to reduce levels of crime, particularly if they were better trained and more adequately remunerated? Will he redouble his efforts to establish a corps of special constables who would play the same part as the Territorial Army vis-à-vis the regular Army?

Mr. Lloyd: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his opening remarks, after which perhaps I should be brief in answering his supplementary question. The specials certainly show the kind of public spirit and professionalism of the Territorials. The difference, of course, is that the specials are not preparing for a conflict that we hope will never happen. They are already directly and effectively involved in the fight against crime—which, alas, is all too real—and are performing the role that my hon. Friend wants them to perform.

Work Camps

2. **Mr. Speller:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide open air work camps for younger offenders serving custodial sentences.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mrs. Angela Rumbold): Purposeful work is an important part of the regime for young offenders. There are at present opportunities to undertake agricultural and horticultural work in the open air at 23 young offender institutions.

Mr. Speller: Is my right hon. Friend aware that her Department may to some extent be missing the point? There is general disgust at the short non-custodial sentences that are being passed because of the absence of space in prisons of various sorts. In view of the number of military establishments underused and basically secure, should not we use those—and, if need be, make use of military personnel, too—to enable us to stop the amazing amount of re-offending by those on non-custodial sentences?

Mrs. Rumbold: There are tough and dirty jobs for youngsters who are on probation and in non-custodial care, so I would not necessarily accept my hon. Friend's strictures on that point. I repeat what my right hon. Friend told the House on Tuesday: if the prison population continues to rise, he will consider calling on the assistance of the military and, possibly, calling for the use of military accommodation.

Mr. Fraser: Has it occurred to the Minister that the problem is that there are plenty of young people camped out in the open air, but that they do not have any work?

Mrs. Rumbold: The question refers to young offenders. Those in young offender institutions are occupied satisfactorily, to a certain extent, in open air work.

Mr. Marlow *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Mellor. No, Mr. Marlow.

Mr. Marlow: I am very flattered, Mr. Speaker.

What are we going to do about those young thugs and hooligans who have no respect for authority, no respect for law and order, no respect for property, no respect for elderly people and who terrorise communities? Is it not time that instead of having open air imprisonment we had an open air thrashing or open air stocks to stick them in?

Mrs. Rumbold: I well understand my hon. Friend's outrage at the behaviour of some youngsters today. Had he been in his place on Tuesday, when my right hon. Friend made the opening speech on the Loyal Address, he would have heard him say that the Government would introduce a measure to deal with the young thugs, as my hon. Friend calls them, who indulge in joyriding, a practice which hon. Members in all parts of the House deplore; those young people will, therefore, be offending.

Mr. Sheerman: Is not it time that the Minister ignored some of the siren voices behind her? She knows that the peak age for offending is 18. The 16 to 18-year-old group is the very group that has been punished by the Government. They have been punished by being stripped of their ability to claim benefit and by the pushing down of the real value of their training allowance. They have been punished in terms of unemployment and homelessness. Is not it about time that we had some more positive policies? Then young people would respect the Government.

Mrs. Rumbold: Is not it time that Opposition Members realised that there is an absolute necessity for young people to grow up with respect for the law, property and persons? There is absolutely no need for young people to

commit crimes when they have available to them perfectly good training courses that have been provided by the Government and with Government money.

Mr. Shersby: Does my right hon. Friend recall that until the Criminal Justice Act 1988 amended the law, the penalty for taking away a vehicle without consent was up to three years' custodial sentence? That penalty was reduced at the time to six months. Is it my right hon. Friend's intention to restore a custodial sentence of up to two years for that offence?

Mrs. Rumbold: Yes, Sir.

Policing, Cumbria

3. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from Cumbria county council on the question of policing in the county.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Kenneth Baker): I am considering the police authority's application for an additional 24 police posts for 1992-93.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Has the Home Secretary noted the dramatic 52 per cent. increase in crime in west Cumbria, which is reflected in vandalism, violence, intimidation of the elderly, intimidation of shopkeepers, ram-raiding and burglary? Does he regard those figures as appalling? When he talks about appointing 1,000 police officers nationally, does he understand that that means only 1·5 additional police officers per constituency, which does not begin to meet the problem? We need 30 police officers immediately. The people of Workington demand those appointments.

Mr. Baker: The hon. Gentleman will recall that since we have been in office, there has been an increase in the strength of the Cumbrian police of 110 uniformed officers and 144 civilians, making a total increase of 254. There were eight extra police officers this year, seven of them on patrol duties. I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern, because I have seen the reports of the increase in vandalism and hooliganism in Workington. I assure the hon. Gentleman that since we have been in office we have increased expenditure for the Cumbrian police authority by 80 per cent.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: It is not enough.

Mr. Baker: When Labour were in office they cut police expenditure by 2 per cent.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Do something.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Favell: My right hon. Friend may have read reports in the newspapers today that the European Commission wants to abolish newspaper boys and girls in Cumbria and elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Are the police likely to be involved in that?

Mr. Baker: Not as far as I know.

Mr. Hattersley: Is the problem to which the Home Secretary referred special to Cumbria or is it a general one? Can he tell us of one chief officer of police in Britain who believes that he has sufficient police officers to perform the duties imposed upon him?

Mr. Baker: About eight or 10 chief constables are not asking for an increase in police forces for next year—*[Interruption.]*—and I shall be glad to send the right hon. Gentleman a list. If he is so proud of police numbers, he should recall that when he was a member of the Labour Cabinet he cut police expenditure and left our police 8,000 under establishment. He is the guilty one.

Mr. Paice: I am sure that the public in Cumbria and elsewhere realise that no other Government would allocate these extra resources for the police. When my right hon. Friend is considering Cumbria's representations, will he also consider the position of Cambridgeshire, where the number of police per thousand population is the lowest in the country?

Mr. Baker: I shall certainly consider that. As I said, I have secured increased expenditure next year for another 1,000 uniformed police officers, in addition to the further 600 this year. Since 1979, there has been an increase of 15,000 uniformed officers, whereas their numbers were cut under the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley).

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker:

Mr. Speaker: No point of order arises from this.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I wish to raise the matter on Adjournment.

Mr. Speaker: On the Adjournment. Yes, all right.

Child Molesters

4. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on sentencing policy towards sex offenders who have molested children.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. John Patten): This is a serious issue. The Criminal Justice Act 1991 endorses the severity with which the courts view these offences and strengthens their powers to protect the public from offenders. Courts will be able to impose on a sexual offender who poses a serious risk to the public a longer custodial sentence than would be justified solely by the seriousness of the offence. The courts will be able to order longer and more intensive supervision and treatment for sex offenders.

Mr. Cryer: What does the Minister say to my constituents who, following abuse by their father for many years, summoned up enough courage to give evidence in court after he attacked the 10-year-old granddaughter of the family? After they had gone through the ordeal of giving evidence, their father, who was found guilty of eight serious charges with nine being left on the file, was put on probation and allocated to a hostel not two miles from where his last victim lives and where he can be seen by the family as they pass through the town centre. Does the Minister realise that that is deeply upsetting to the family, who have been devastated by the experience? Some form of custody—whether in hospital or in prison is a moot point—is required to give peace of mind to the people who gave evidence and who displayed much courage and fortitude in so doing.

Mr. Patten: I entirely understand the strong feelings of the hon. Gentleman's constituents and I sympathise with them. He will appreciate that I am not aware of the details of the case. The hon. Gentleman is concerned about the placement of this convicted person in a nearby hostel, so if he will give me the details of the case I shall have it investigated by Her Majesty's inspectorate of probation.

Rev. Martin Smyth: The Minister has shown concern about sentencing patterns, but does his concern extend beyond that to cases where the prosecution service has not been prepared to prosecute an accused person? Does not that leave others open to molestation as well?

Mr. Patten: The Crown prosecution service always faces the difficult task of obtaining adequate evidence to secure a conviction in court. However, it should be some consolation to the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) that in the past five years the average sentence for rape has increased by 70 per cent. The Criminal Justice Act will allow for much longer supervision of sex offenders after they are released from gaol. My opinion is that sex offending cannot be cured, but it can and should be better supervised and controlled.

Mr. Dickens: Does my right hon. Friend agree that many of the views that I have expressed in the House, which at times have been received with ridicule and dismay, have become law subsequently? If the Home Office really wants to stop the abuse of children and the rape of women, it must pass a law allowing the castration of the perpetrators, not for a first offence, in case there is a mistake, but for a second offence—unless people are unfit to plead. That is the way to stop it and that sanction would hardly ever have to be used because it would be the ultimate deterrent for men.

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend's suggestion is not the present intention of Her Majesty's Government. We intend to reinforce the courts,as we have done in the Criminal Justice Act 1991, by sustaining their powers to sentence convicted sex offenders to life imprisonment. The reforms introduced by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will mean two things: first, convicted sex offenders will, rightly, spend much longer in prison; and, secondly, they will be supervised when they are released.

Racist Attacks

5. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received urging him to take new action to combat racist attacks.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: In the new year I will publish a progress report on the work of the police service and other agencies in tackling the problem of racially motivated attacks. I make it clear that there should be no place for racially motivated attacks in our country.

Mr. Cohen: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that it has been calculated that there is one racial attack every 30 minutes and that the savagery of such attacks has increased? With racism on the increase in Europe and in this country because of high unemployment, is not there a danger that there could be yet more racial assaults in Britain? Have not calls for action by organisations such as the Society for Black Lawyers been met by Government intransigence? Is not it time to have a specific crime of racial harassment, as I proposed in my 1985 Racial Harassment Bill?

Mr. Baker: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's latter point. I recognise that there has been an increase in racially motivated attacks—there was a rise in 1990. As the hon. Gentleman knows from a debate on London which he attended, last year nearly 3,000 attacks were reported in London—an increase of 8 per cent. The clear-up rate is about 30 per cent. I assure the House that, in all the speeches that I have made at police meetings and conferences this year, I have repeatedly stressed to the police that I want them to give this type of crime high priority.

Mr. Janman: Clearly the tributary of the River Tiber that runs through Leyton is already foaming. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the best and most subtle way to prevent such attacks is to ensure that the British people know that they have a Government who are taking the steps necessary to keep firm control of immigration and particularly to prevent people from abusing our immigration rules by entering this country under the bogus concept of being political refugees? I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the steps that he has taken to do just that.

Mr. Baker: We have followed a policy of keeping tight control of immigration. As my hon. Friend knows, I shall introduce the Asylum Bill to deal with that problem. Over the years, successive Governments of all complexions have worked to improve race relations and Britain probably has the best record in Europe for harmonious race relations.

Asylum

6. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concerning the access to advice of asylum seekers.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Following my right hon. Friend's statement about asylum on 2 July, we have received about 100 letters from hon. Members and about 750 from members of the public and interested organisations. Most have included comments on the availability of advice for asylum seekers.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the Minister concede that the proposal in the Asylum Bill removes the right of people seeking political asylum to have access to green form advice? Is he aware that that proposal has been met with horror by advice agencies, legal aid practices and members of the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service? Should not he announce that he will withdraw those parts of the Bill and give people seeking political asylum the same rights to legal advice as anyone else would have, rather than introduce this appalling system under which they will not have the same equality before the law?

Mr. Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman is quite mistaken. There are no such proposals in the Bill and we never suggested that there should be. We have said that immigration and asylum cases are unique in that the Government and the United Nations fund a free, professional legal advice and representation service in the shape of UKIAS and the Government fund free solicitors' advice through the green form. With the extension of appeal rights to all asylum seekers, it is not unreasonable

to propose—as the Lord Chancellor and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary propose—that this anomalous double provision should end and that increased resources for advice should be concentrated on UKIAS, especially as the service has a better record of winning cases than solicitors and is more cost effective.

Mr. Nicholls: It is clear to solicitors and to many other people that our present asylum procedures are being abused. That should stop. Does my hon. Friend agree that it does the cause of racial integration no good at all that our procedures should be abused? Does he reject the comments that we have heard from the Opposition which have much more to do with their courting votes than with human rights?

Mr. Lloyd: Of course asylum procedures should not be abused. Those who are making asylum claims should have access to free professional legal advice, as they want it. We propose to deal with abuses and to ensure that asylum seekers have the free legal advice that they need.

Mr. Darling: Does the Minister accept that UKIAS is not capable of providing the same level of professional advice as can presently be provided under the legal aid system? Does he accept that individuals should have the right to choose representation which represents the best value for money and that there is no saving to the Treasury under his proposals? Will he explain why he wrote to UKIAS on 7 October threatening that unless it accepted the Government's proposals he would withdraw its funding or curtail it completely?

Mr. Lloyd: What I said to UKIAS—I have had two meetings with the organisation and written to it—is that the availability of green form aid is finally a matter for the Government and Parliament, not for UKIAS. I also said that as we are increasing UKIAS's funding and its ability to represent and advise, if it was unwilling to advise those seeking advice on asylum, it called into question whether the funding for advice, not representation, should go to UKIAS. There is an alternative. We could fund all advice through the green form, but that would not be especially helpful to asylum seekers, as UKIAS has a better record of success in giving advice and making representations to adjudicators and tribunals.

Mr. Lawrence: What proportion of asylum seekers come into this country on visitors' permits and then decide that they are in fear of persecution just as their permits come to an end? Is not it easy to give those people advice?

Mr. Lloyd: Yes. About three quarters of asylum claimants are already in the country, many of them legitimately as students or visitors and some of them illegitimately, as they have entered the country illegally. Each case needs to be considered on its merits. There can be reasons why people make a claim for asylum after they have been here for some time and we consider all cases properly. We believe that every asylum seeker, whether in-country or arriving at the ports, should have access to good free legal advice.

Free Television Licences

7. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will now introduce free television licences for pensioners; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: As I have made clear to the hon. Member on the many previous occasions on which he has asked this question, we have no plans to introduce free or concessionary television licences for all pensioners. That would be a crude and non-selective instrument of social policy costing £470 million a year. It would benefit many pensioners who can well afford the fee and would mean that other licence holders would have to pay £116 for their colour licence.

Mr. Skinner: This Tory Government are a hard-hearted bunch. Have not we reached a pathetic state of affairs when, as a result of the 1988 decision, 75-year-old widows in warden accommodation cannot have a free television licence, yet others who are younger might receive it because they qualified before 1988? Now, with all their claptrap about citizens charters, the Government have had the BBC send to every Member of Parliament letters carrying the Tory party propaganda that they cannot allow pensioners to have a free television licence. They should be ashamed of themselves.

Mr. Lloyd: Not merely does the hon. Gentleman ask the same question each time; he asks the same supplementary. The only difference this time is that arrangements have been made for the BBC to collect the licence fee, but the rules are precisely the same as they were when they were collected by the Government. The hon. Gentleman ought to bear it in mind that the rules are very clear. It is possible for local authorities to organise their elderly people's accommodation provision in such a way as to gain the concessionary licence. The benefit should be given to those who are most in need of it. We have concentrated the money that the hon. Gentleman would give to pensioners, whether they need it or not, into the income support rates of those who are worst off. That is the correct, fair and just way to do it.

Mr. Hind: Does my hon. Friend accept, however, that among pensioners, particularly those who took up residence in sheltered accommodation after 1988, there is a real fear of injustice, in that some of them have to pay the full licence and some of them do not? I hope that my hon. Friend will look at that problem, together with the BBC licence as a whole. Pensioners are aware that they do not have to pay for ITV or any other channels but that they are called upon to pay for BBC television programmes. My hon. Friend should look at the licence as a whole.

Mr. Lloyd: We are going to look at the whole question of BBC financing and the licence fee in the run-up to the renewal of the charter.

Mr. Salmond: Will the Minister reconsider the point made by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner)? Is the Minister aware that Members of Parliament, and anybody else with two homes, need only one television licence to cover both homes, the assumption being that they are not watching television simultaneously in both homes. Will the Minister therefore announce a concession:

that all old age pensioners should be given the right to watch television without having to pay for a television licence?

Mr. Lloyd: I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman correctly states the law. No doubt a BBC inspection van will be visiting him.

Television Franchises

8. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the recent allocation of regional television franchises by the Independent Television Commission.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The commission was carrying out the responsibilities laid on it by Parliament in the Broadcasting Act 1990. The decisions on channel 3, and other licences, are a matter for the commission.

Mr. Coombs: In view of the widespread and sometimes ill-founded criticism of the recent franchise round and despite the uniform excellence of the successful tenders, will my right hon. Friend nevertheless consider the possibility of providing a review system so as either to show up ways in which it could be improved in future or to demonstrate that an extremely good job has been done by the Independent Television Commission?

Mr. Baker: I think that a good job has been done by the ITC, but I am prepared to consider any representations that are made to me about the future determination of licences. The situation will change in the 1990s and beyond. There will be a greater proliferation of services, well beyond these licences, and at least one other channel, channel 5.

Mr. Maclennan: Does the Home Secretary share the view of the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) in her letter to the outgoing chairman of TV-am? Does he feel like offering a similar apology?

Mr. Baker: When there are 40 bids for 16 licences, some companies will lose out. The system has resulted in new blood coming into the television industry. Some of the companies that have been displaced have, in their time, displaced others. The opportunity that they now have is to become independent production companies, an opportunity that they did not have in the last round of licence decisions.

Dame Janet Fookes: Can my right hon. Friend answer a riddle for me? How is it that Television South West passed the quality threshold, offered by far the most money but still lost?

Mr. Baker: That is a riddle for the ITC, not me, to answer. The ITC made the determination and it would be inappropriate for me to comment upon the matter, especially as I believe that it is now sub judice, because the company has applied for judicial review.

Mr. Corbett: Does the Home Secretary, in common with his right hon. Friend the former Prime Minister, now feel too painfully aware that the franchise round has ended in farce, with some companies losing their licences for offering too much and others failing because they offered too little? Will the right hon. Gentleman now acknowledge that a system based on the highest bid was always likely to undermine the quality and variety of British television? What message has he for the 2,000 television staff who lost their jobs in the run-up to the franchise round, and the similar number who will now be put out of work?

Mr. Baker: I do not agree at all. New blood has come into the industry, and many of the companies now have the opportunity to become independent production companies. I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's assertion that the franchise round has been unsuccessful. On the contrary, we have always sought to increase viewer choise. We introduced Independent Television; the Labour party was against it. We have introduced new opportunities for television, and we will introduce a new channel—Channel 5. We believe in more viewer choice and more competition. That will improve quality, and the Labour party has always resisted that.

Mr. John Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Broadcasting Act 1990 placed on the ITC the requirement to ensure that all bids were sustainable and stable for the whole 10 years of the franchise? Is not the ITC's judgment that that is the case both with the existing franchisees who have retained their licences and with some of the newer companies? At the press conference at which the ITC announced the licences Mr. Simon Albery, who ran the campaign for quality television, said to me, "Quality has won".

Mr. Baker: I am sure that that will prove the case. Whenever there has been a change within television in this country there has always been the accusation that quality would suffer. That has not happened. Over the past 30 years, as choice and competition have worked their way through, variety and quality have improved.

Political Asylum

10. **Mr. Roger King:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the present level of those seeking political asylum; and what were the comparable figures in 1989.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Between January and September this year the average monthly total of those seeking political refugee status in this country has been about 3,800. The monthly average in 1989 was 950. These figures exclude dependants.

Mr. King: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the widespread concern at the large number of people seeking political asylum? Is he further aware that in a city such as Birmingham, where problems arise over bringing families into the United Kingdom, there is widespread disgust and dismay at the high number of bogus asylum applications? Is he also aware that he has the united resolve of Conservative Members for the speedy passage of his Bill?

Mr. Baker: I thank my hon. Friend. I said that the average number was 3,800. The actual figure for applications in October was 4,400 and the number is likely to reach between 45,000 and 50,000 this year, whereas we used to receive 2,000 or 3,000 applications. This is a serious and important problem which has to be tackled. That is why we shall introduce the Asylum Bill, which will be debated next week. I am surprised that the Labour party has decided to oppose it.

Mr. Madden: Is the Home Secretary aware of the legal opinion that to restrict access to legal advice and

representation in asylum and immigration matters may be a breach of the law? Will he instruct his Ministers to stop trying to bribe and blackmail the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service, which does not wish to collude in the Government's plans to pander to Essex man by restricting the longstanding traditional rights of people fleeing violence and persecution to seek refuge in this country?

Mr. Baker: This country has a long tradition of accepting genuine political refugees, but there is no doubt that the fact that three quarters of all applications are made by people who have been living in this country for weeks, months and, in some cases, years, is tantamount to an abuse of the system. What we must do is to distinguish between bogus and genuine refugees. That is what we will do, and we will do it fairly. Not only that—we intend to increase and extend the right of access to an appellate system, which does not exist at the moment.

Mr. Ashby: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the greatest injustice to genuine asylum seekers is to be found in the enormously long delays that occur in the processing of applications? What steps has my right hon. Friend taken to reduce those delays?

Mr. Baker: In May of this year, we were pressed by Amnesty International and other refugee groups to speed up the process of determination, and the Bill before the House, which will be debated next week, sets out a scheme that will allow determination to be decided within a period of three months. That applies not only to a decision but to appearing under an appellate process. That will speed up the existing time, which can be anything up to two to three years. It is important that we decide the matter quickly because, if we do so, the bogus applicants can be returned to the countries from which they came.

Rural Magistrates Courts

11. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has any plans to close or amalgamate rural magistrates courts in England and Wales during the next 12 months.

Mr. John Patten: No, Sir. Proposals for the closure of magistrates courthouses or the amalgamation of petty sessional divisions are the responsibility of magistrates courts committees after consulting those concerned.

Mr. Jones: What guidelines does the Home Department give to magistrates courts committees on how they should approach the closure and amalgamation of rural magistrates courts? I am sure that the Minister will be aware—representing a rural area, as I also do—that there is considerable concern about closures and amalgamations that lead to both defendants and witnesses having to travel vast distances. Does he agree that access to justice is more important than administrative convenience?

Mr. Patten: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman. That is an extremely important point, and access to justice in rural areas is, indeed, subject to guidance from the Home Office. Let me add that, in taking recent decisions concerning rural areas, the Home Office has almost invariably supported those who have felt that rural courthouses should be kept open. I have looked up my own record over the past six months, and I find that the only courthouse whose closure I approved was in Leicestershire and was precisely 500 yd from a new courthouse costing £8 million which we had erected to take its place.

Mr. Bellingham: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, if justice is to be seen to be done, it is far better for it to be dispensed closer to the community in which the crime took place? Will he join me in saluting the work done by some of the small magistrates courts in west Norfolk, such as those in Hunstanton and Fakenham, and does he agree that every effort should be made to ensure that they stay open?

Mr. Patten: It is extremely important that small rural benches—provided that they are large enough to provide the necessary range of skills and an adequate number of people to dispense rural justice—are kept. But it is also the case that suggestions for amalgamation of rural—or, indeed, urban—benches come not from my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary but from the magistrates courts committees in the areas concerned.

Mr. Randall: Is the Minister aware that the Opposition approve in principle of measures to enhance the cost effectiveness of our magistrates courts system? Is he also aware, however, that the Government's policy of strict cash limits can in some cases be seen as a blunt instrument whose use could result in closures of courts in many local communities? Will the Minister now tell the House how many local magistrates courts he estimates are likely to close as a result of the Government's new funding policy? Or has he not bothered to work it out?

Mr. Patten: The Government's new funding policy—which was supported by the Labour party during the passage of the Criminal Justice Act 1991, so the hon. Gentleman cannot complain about that—is aimed at ensuring that the workload is taken into account in allocating resources while encouraging the management of magistrates courts to improve the efficiency of local justice so that it is better carried out. Suggestions for closures and amalgamations come from the individual magistrates courts committees in the areas in question.

Sir Anthony Grant: Is my right hon. Friend aware that I am extremely grateful to him for the wise decision to retain the St. Neots and Huntingdon courthouses? Is he also aware that there has been considerable disquiet over the proposed amalgamation of the St. Neots and Huntingdon bench? Will he carefully consider the representations that I have sent to him on that subject?

Mr. Patten: I am glad that my hon. Friend believes that I took a wise decision over those courthouse closures and they remain open. I will of course carefully consider any correspondence that my hon. Friend has sent to me.

Electoral Register

12. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are his Department's plans to maximise the number of people on the 1992-93 electoral register; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: As in previous years we shall conduct a nationwide advertising campaign in the early autumn to encourage people to complete and return the electoral

registration form. We shall also continue our annual research into the working methods of electoral registration officers, and produce updated best practice notes to assist them in compiling an accurate register.

Mr. Barnes: The current electoral register is a mess. One million people are missing from it according to the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. There is to be a new register on which the general election could be fought. There is time to put the register right. Will the Government spend advertising money to achieve that? Only 0·3 per cent. of the advertising budget is spent on electoral registration. We have time to put things democratically right if the Government will act now.

Mrs. Rumbold: The hon. Gentleman should know that advertising money is being spent and electoral registration officers are working hard to ensure that their electoral registers are up to date and accurate.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Jessel:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 7 November.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): I have been asked to reply.

Hon. Members: Where is he?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I call the Leader of the House.

Mr. MacGregor: This morning my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister had a bilateral with President Bush in Rome. He is currently attending the NATO summit now under way there. That summit will set the future course for NATO to ensure that it remains as it has been—a bedrock of stability in a still uncertain world. The fact that Opposition Members should regret the fact that my right hon. Friend is in Rome, shows how little attention they pay to defence and NATO matters. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. This kind of thing gives a very bad impression elsewhere.

Mr. Jessel: On Europe, to put it beyond all doubt in this House, in the country, and on the continent, will my right hon. Friend reaffirm that it is the policy of Her Majesty's Government that Britain shall not go down the route of a federal Europe and that it is for Britain to decide on the future of her own currency?

Mr. MacGregor: I am happy to give my hon. Friend the assurance that we are not going down the route of a federal Europe. With regard to a single currency and economic and monetary union, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made it clear that the Government are not prepared to commit Britain now to a single currency. We will be able shortly to debate those matters more fully in the House, but we have on many occasions made it clear that this Parliament will decide on the single currency issue at some date well into the future if and when it should arise.

Mr. Kinnock: Is the—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I call Mr. Kinnock.

Hon. Members: Where is he?

Mr. Kinnock: All present and correct, Sir.

Is the Leader of the House aware that three times in the past 24 hours the Chancellor of the Exchequer has refused to answer direct questions about the Government's plans for further increases in VAT? Is that not surprising because the Chancellor has repeatedly been eager to make precise pledges of cuts in income tax to 20p in the medium term? Will the right hon. Gentleman tell us now, in precise terms, what are the Government's plans for making further increases in VAT?

Mr. MacGregor: The right hon. Gentleman will be all present on the Opposition Benches for some time to come and will not be leading for Britain at future NATO summits. In answer to his question, the right hon. Gentleman knows very well that the commitment to income tax is one that would extend over the lifetime of the future Parliament and perhaps beyond that. That is a general commitment for some time to come. No precise dates have been given. It is not for the right hon. Gentleman to ask questions about tax, given the very high public spending commitments to which his party is committed.

Mr. Kinnock: The Leader of the House has even changed the line on what the Chancellor said on income tax this morning. As far as talking about tax is concerned, I realise the right hon. Gentleman's sensitivity. His Government have, after all, lifted the tax burden on the British people to the highest of any Government in history. The right hon. Gentleman is wriggling. Since the Prime Minister has announced the target rate for income tax, surely he can announce the target rate for VAT. If he can tell us the one, surely he can tell us the other. Why are the Government so specific on income tax and so shifty on VAT?

Mr. MacGregor: The right hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that the commitment on income tax is a longer-term one and that we hope to achieve it as and when conditions permit and when it is prudent to do so. We have made that clear on many occasions. But it is really not for him to argue the case about taxes because, as we well know—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members do not like that. The reason they do not like it is that they are so sensitive about it. We know perfectly well that the Labour party has committed itself to an additional £35,000 million of public spending and no capping on local authority expenditure. The two combined would mean a very high increase in the tax and community charge burden on all people.

Mr. Kinnock: The longer that the right hon. Gentleman speaks, the less he convinces. Will he tell us now? After making huge rises in VAT in the past 12 years, what are the Government's plans to make further increases in VAT?

Mr. MacGregor: The Government have made their public expenditure plans absolutely clear, and they are clear on the normal basis. It is equally clear—the right hon. Gentleman has not refuted this—that, in fact, the £35 billion spending commitment of the Labour party would mean either a very big increase in income tax and/or a very big increase in VAT, and it would be likely to be both.

Mr. Michael Brown: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Government's proposals to introduce powers to

prevent local authorities from excessive spending by means of capping will be very well received by all those in Labour-controlled authorities who have to put up with excessive tax bills? Does my right hon. Friend agree also that those people will not welcome the pledge that was given from the Opposition Benches yesterday to ensure that high-spending Labour authorities can go with gay abandon to yet higher spending?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is a point that will have to be stressed again and again. On top of the increased taxes—direct and indirect taxes that would come from their spending pledges—the Opposition have now committed themselves to no capping on high-spending local authorities. That can mean only higher community charge and council tax bills as well.

Q2. **Sir David Steel:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 7 November.

Mr. MacGregor: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Sir David Steel: Is the Lord President aware that, at the end of last week, the Secretary of State for the Environment and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry warmly welcomed the Government committee report recommending, among other environmental measures, an increase in petrol tax? They have referred that recommendation to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Will he ensure before the Budget that, in any such conservation measure, account is taken of the needs of rural areas where—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Interruptions take a lot of time.

Sir David Steel: Admittedly including the area that we will represent after today, in rural areas in which the car is a necessity and in which the cost of petrol is alreay high, what compensatory measures are the Government prepared to support?

Mr. MacGregor: My right hon. Friends have not committed the Government to any position on tax, but I notice that, as usual, the right hon. Gentleman wants to have it both ways. As it would put it, the Liberal Democratic party claims to make people face up to hard decisions by increasing pricing and taxes. However, because some of its Members of Parliament come from rural areas, they want those rural areas to be protected. It is typical of the right hon. Gentleman and his party to make different noises in different places.

Mr. Lord: Does my right hon. Friend agree that nothing is more damaging to the fabric of a nation than the failure properly to educate its children? May I urge him to press for a return to traditional standards of teaching in our primary schools as soon as possible?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that what we are doing through the national curriculum, and especially in the testing of seven, 11, 14 and 16-year-olds, will ensure not only that we can monitor progress on standards, but that pupils who are falling behind will be given the assistance that they need to improve. The point of our educational reforms is to improve standards.

Q3. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 7 November.

Mr. MacGregor: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. and learned Gentleman to the reply that I gave a few moments ago.

Mr. Campbell: The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that 22 November is the first anniversary of the sinking of the fishing vessel Antares in the Firth of Clyde as a result of its gear being snagged by the submarine HMS Trenchant. However, is he aware that the Royal Navy is proposing to hold a similar exercise in the same waters on the day immediately following that anniversary? Is not the timing of that exercise particularly insensitive, and is there any reason why it should not be postponed for a period of, say, a week as a mark of respect to the crew of the Antares, all of whom perished when the vessel was sunk?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that the hon. and learned Gentleman knows the considerable steps that have been taken by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence and by the Minister of State for the Armed Forces to deal with the aftermath of that tragic incident. I shall draw the hon. and learned Gentleman's particular point to my right hon. Friend's attention.

Mr. Rathbone: As our Prime Minister is away at such an important summit conference—important for the security of the whole of the western world—does my right hon. Friend think it appropriate at this moment to reaffirm the Government's commitment to that European pillar, the Western European Union?

Mr. MacGregor: Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend. We have made it absolutely clear that, in our view, that body will play an important part in our future defence position. I am sure that that will be discussed today at the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

Q4. **Mr. Gareth Wardell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 7 November.

Mr. MacGregor: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave a few moments ago.

Mr. Wardell: In view of his admission some weeks ago that this Government have imposed the heaviest tax burden in British history, will the right hon. Gentleman now apologise for the Chancellor's wholly inaccurate statement to the House yesterday that the Government have been cutting taxes ever since 1979?

Mr. MacGregor: The truth of the matter is that we have seen a substantial reduction in direct tax rates, a substantial improvement in standards of living and, as a result of the reduction in tax rates, an improvement in the tax base, which has enabled us not only to achieve increased public spending on a large scale in our key priority areas, especially health, but to achieve a reduction in direct income tax and, overall, considerably to improve our public sector borrowing requirement.

Q.5 **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 7 November.

Mr. MacGregor: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave a few moments ago.

Mr. Mitchell: Does my right hon. Friend accept that there is widespread support among parents for the Government's proposal that schools should make their public examination results available for publication in common form? Does he agree that that would give parents an objective answer to the question, "How is my child's school doing?", as well as further pressing back the frontiers of choice in education?

Mr. MacGregor: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. He refers to an important part of the reforms that we are undertaking. I pay tribute to him for first raising the subject of league tables for schools' performances in the Bill that he introduced earlier in the year. League tables of examination results, destinations of school leavers, truancy rates and all the other items that we are suggesting will be an important aid towards improving parental choice. I was glad to note that that was endorsed by the chairman of the Audit Commission this morning.

Ms. Primarolo: Will the Leader of the House explain why the Government voted against the EC directive on maternity leave which would have given women a minimum of 16 weeks of maternity leave and protection from being sacked because they are pregnant? This is the second time in less than two weeks that the Government have failed to respond to the Prime Minister's so-called commitment to women's equality. Why should women believe anything that the Government say?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Lady is wrong. An agreement was reached yesterday which represents a sensible balance on maternity pay. It carries forward the interests of women without imposing an undue burden on employers. The Government abstained on a different aspect relating to the treaty of Rome basis. We did not believe that the issue should have come within that particular article. That is why we abstained. The political agreement was reached clearly.

Under our policies more than one in three of the jobs created in the European Community for women were created during the past eight years in Britain. That is a clear indication of the opportunity and choice that we give.

Q.6 **Mr. Thorne:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 7 November.

Mr. MacGregor: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Thorne: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the figures given yesterday for expenditure on the national health service, education and transport show our clear commitment to expenditure on those items? Does he agree that those people in the House who advocate expenditure without saying how much they are prepared to spend are entirely unconvincing?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend is right. The autumn statement yesterday demonstrated that we have substantially increased in real terms—after inflation—the spending in each of the three areas that my hon. Friend mentioned. Indeed, in health the additions announced yesterday represent £50 more for every man, woman and child in Britain. That means that the increase in health spending since we took office is 55 per cent. in real terms. My hon. Friend is also right to draw attention to the high additional spending programmes of some £35 billion advocated by the Labour party, which would put a crippling tax burden on so many families in Britain.

Business of the House

3.31 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): Will the Leader of the House tell us the business for next week, please?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 11 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Local Government Finance Bill (first day).

TUESDAY 12 NOVEMBER—Conclusion of Second Reading of the Local Government Finance Bill.

Consideration of timetable motion on the Local Government Finance Bill.

WEDNESDAY 13 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Asylum Bill.

Motion relating to the Social Security (Adjudication) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations.

THURSDAY 14 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Coal Industry Bill.

FRIDAY 15 NOVEMBER—Debate on the citizens charter on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

MONDAY 18 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Competition and Service (Utilities) Bill.

It may be for the convenience of the House to know that, subject to the satisfactory progress of business, the House should rise for the Christmas recess not later than Friday 20 December. It may also be for the convenience of the House to know that as Easter day is relatively late, on 19 April, the Easter recess will include the whole of the week beginning Monday 13 April.

Dr. Cunningham: Members and their families will be grateful to the Leader of the House for making the latter announcements. I certainly thank him on behalf of my right hon. and hon. Friends.

Can the Leader of the House confirm that the Competition and Service (Utilities) Bill will be not only given its First Reading tomorrow but printed and published so that we have the traditional two full weekends before the Bill comes before the House for its Second Reading?

Will the Leader of the House confirm that, well before the Maastricht summit, we shall have two days of debate on the important developments in the European Community? Does the Prime Minister intend to speak in that debate, as we believe he should? Can the Leader of the House assure us that the Government will table a substantive motion for that debate which sets out clearly and unambiguously the position of Her Majesty's Government and the details of that position?

Will the Leader of the House think again about the Government's apparent determination to railroad the poll tax No. 2 Bill through the House? May I remind him that the Prime Minister said on radio during the Conservative party leadership election last year that the Government and the House had been bounced into the poll tax because proper consideration and thought were never given to it? The Bill was railroaded through the House; there was never an honest majority for it.

Is it not ridiculous, given the chaos that the Government have caused in local government finance, to repeat that folly with the Bill to replace the poll tax, whose Second Reading will take place next week? I urge the Leader of the House, in the interests not merely of the Opposition but also of local government and all those responsible for and involved in the provision of services, to think again about how the House will deal with that Bill.

Has the Leader of the House seen the report that I have here—"NHS Reforms: The First Six Months", a survey of directors of public health medicine, which was carried out by Middlesex polytechnic? Is he aware that almost two thirds of directors responding expressed concern for the future well-being of the services and their ability to meet their obligations to patients under the Government's health service reforms? They also expressed anxiety about the future of funding from public expenditure for those services. Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretary of State for Health to make a statement in response to the serious matters raised in the report?

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his opening comments. As he knows, it was in fulfilment of a promise to the House that I would always endeavour to announce the dates of those two recesses as early as possible, because I well understand that that is for the convenience of Members.

It is the intention to publish the Competition and Service (Utilities) Bill tomorrow, as we are anxious to fulfil the commitment of two weekends' notice.

I confirm that I will arrange a two-day debate in advance of the Maastricht summit and that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will lead for the Government in that debate. We are considering the form of the debate, but at present we are inclined to have a substantive motion.

On the question of a timetable motion for the Local Government Finance Bill, we are providing two full days for the Second Reading on top of the debate yesterday in the Queen's Speech. In addition, as the hon. Gentleman will see when the timetable motion is published later today, we are giving considerable time for debates in Committee on that Bill. The crucial point is the need for local authorities to have time to introduce the council tax in place of the community charge. That is precisely our desire —to ensure that we get a replacement within the timetable that we have committed ourselves to—and it is important that local authorities have plenty of time to prepare for it. That is why, while giving full time for debates in the House, we are anxious to get on with the Bill with all due speed.

I have not had a chance to look at the NHS document that the hon. Member for Copeland referred to, but it does not seem to me to be an appropriate subject for a statement. The hon. Gentleman will know that we could have debated the health service this week if the Oppositon had so wished; and there will be other opportunities for health service matters to be debated in the House.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is great pressure on time today, and I regret that I shall have to put a 10-minute limit on speeches on the last day of debate on the Queen's Speech. I ask for single questions directed to the business for next week and not on wider matters.

Sir John Stokes (Halesowen and Stourbridge): In view of the poor coverage in the newspapers of the five-day debate on the Queen's Speech—on some days there was not a line of report even in the so-called quality papers —would my right hon. Friend consider——

Mr. Speaker: Is this to do with business for next week?

Sir John Stokes: Yes. I hope that it will be dealt with immediately, Sir. As a matter of urgency, will my right hon. Friend consider whether the high price of *Hansard* can be reduced so that the public may read what we are doing here?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not think that that is a matter for me. I believe that an announcement on this matter was made by one of my hon. Friends, but I shall look into it. We endeavour to cover the costs of *Hansard*. That is why the current move was made.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): The Leader of the House may know that on this Bench we do not have any objection in principle to timetabling legislation from the outset, but think that it should be done only if there has been proper consultation with all the Opposition parties and, indeed, with interests on the Government side. What steps has he taken or does he intend to take before tabling the timetable motion to consult widely throughout the House to ensure that particular matters of contention, including specific provisions relating to Scotland, are given adequate time for debate?

Mr. MacGregor: Consultation is taking place in the usual way, although it is open to hon. Members to make representations. The hon. Gentleman's general point is appropriate for the Committee under the chairmanship of my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling), which is looking at various matters affecting sittings and timetables.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Will my right hon. Friend consider rearranging one of next week's debates so that we can have a debate on the Labour party and its history, bearing in mind that its founders were men and women of conviction, determination and principle, none of which we are seeing on the Opposition Benches today? Does he also agree that the only person of principle on the Labour Benches is the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), who said the other day,

"If we've changed our mind to win, we could change our mind when we've won"?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not want to get too contentious in business questions, but my hon. Friend's point about the fact that the Labour party has changed a large number of its principles and certainly a large number of its policies is one that I make frequently as I travel round the country. The reason is that we have been successful throughout the 1980s in the principles that we have followed and the policies that we have pursued. My hon. Friend's comment about the statement of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) is accurate and needs to be repeated time and again.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): On a point of order——

Mr. MacGregor: Fortunately, the right hon. Gentleman's prediction will not happen.

Mr. Foulkes: On a point of order——

Mr. MacGregor: What may happen and is possible is to have, not next week——

Mr. Foulkes: Ah.

Mr. MacGregor: ——but on some future occasion an opportunity to debate these matters.

Mr. Foulkes: That is better.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that my plea does not fall on deaf ears. We have a heavy day ahead of us.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): Is it not morally offensive and a very urgent matter that people who, in order to sustain their breathing, now have to pay not only for nebulisers but also a service charge plus value added tax? Is the Leader of the House aware that people who are poor and chronically ill are now being charged £20 for servicing plus £3·40 VAT? Is that not the first tax ever on breathing? May we have a statement about it next week?

Mr. MacGregor: Statements have already been made. We have made it clear and spelt it out time and again that there can be no charges for national health services except where specifically allowed by statute.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): In the light of a continuing series of tragic events arising from hooligans snatching cars for so-called joyriding, can my right hon. Friend give the House any intimation of progress towards legislation, which, I am sure, would be agreed on both sides of the House, to deal with these outrages?

Mr. MacGregor: There is concern on both sides of the House about this matter and I am sure that both sides would agree that joyriding is not the right description. I am glad that my hon. Friend referred to it as "so-called" because it is far from joyriding. We are making good progress on the technical details of the legislation. I can confirm that we shall introduce the Bill as soon as we can.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Will the Leader of the House consider that, in the run-up to next Wednesday's debate on the Asylum Bill, Government Members, particularly Back-Bench Tory Members, and tabloid newspapers will attempt to create an atmosphere to justify the Bill by talking about numbers? Is it not a fact that in 20 of the past 27 years there has been a net outflow of people from this country? In July, the Home Office admitted to me that since 1964 786,000 more people have left Britain than have entered it. When we discuss the Asylum Bill——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Is not that the sort of speech that might be made in a debate? Will the hon. Gentleman ask a question about the debate?

Mr. Nellist: When we discuss the Asylum Bill next Wednesday, will it be in order for me to accuse the Government of playing the pre-election racist card?

Mr. MacGregor: That is an outrageous suggestion, and I refute it entirely. The hon. Gentleman has got it wrong, because the Asylum Bill deals with people seeking political refugee status. It does not deal with immigration generally, or net inflows and outflows. I make that absolutely clear to the hon. Gentleman. The Bill is about political refugees, and we have made it clear that there will be no change in the position of genuine political refugees. We are concerned, however, that the number of applicants for asylum status has risen from 100 a week only three years ago to 1,000 a week. Not all of those are likely to be proved to be genuine political refugees, so it is important that we improve the mechanisms for dealing with the position. The hon. Gentleman should not try to interpret the Bill in any other way.

Mr. Alistair Burt (Bury, North): During next week's debate on the citizens charter, will there be an opportunity to explain to the patients in my constituency why expenditure on the national health service fell by 2 per cent. between 1974 and 1979 and has increased by 20 per cent. since the Government took office?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right. I know that he carries out his constituency duties with great devotion on Fridays, but I hope that he will be here to make that point and many others on the citizens charter in relation to the health service.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): Will the right hon. Gentleman make it clear to the Prime Minister that the heritage lobby wants no feminist gesture in any impending and important appointments in the heritage field? Think about it.

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that there will be no gestures. I do not know what the hon. Gentleman is talking about, but I am sure that the decision will be taken on merit.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): Will my right hon. Friend arrange a debate next week specifically on local government in our inner cities? If we have such a debate, will the House be able to analyse why there is a peculiar triple achievement in too many councils? A combination of high spending and rotten services has been brought about by Labour councils.

Mr. MacGregor: It will be appropriate for my hon. Friend to raise those points in the two-day debate next week.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): On the debate to be held on Monday and Tuesday next week, will the Leader of the House advise us on whether the Government will publish additional information on the implications of banding and how it will affect people, in order to assess the level of payment that people will have to make? Is he aware, for example, that we have calculated that the Secretary of State for the Environment, who will lead for the Government on that Bill, will pay considerably less for his sumptuous home in Belgravia—his second or third home—than a first-time buyer in Scotland's Grampian region?

Mr. MacGregor: We have already published a great deal of information on the Bill and have no intention of publishing any more between now and Monday.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is grave concern that we shall not have a debate on Europe until 21 November, because during that time the Opposition's policy may change yet again and we shall not be able to hear why Labour Members are so enthusiastic for a single currency immediately?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend has in mind the seven changes that have already been made to the Opposition's position. We shall have to wait and see whether another change is made between now and the time that we hold the debate. I cannot absolutely confirm the date of that debate. We hope to hold it on 21 November. However, as I told the Committee chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale when giving evidence to it earlier this week, when one discusses business more than one week ahead, it must always be subject to changes that inevitably take place. We intend to hold the debate about 21 November, and my hon. Friend will have to be patient until then.

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Hillhead): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motions Nos. 46 and 47?

[That this House calls upon the Government to establish an inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the events in London in September 1986 in which Mr. Mordechai Vanunu was lured out of London to Italy, whereafter he was drugged, kidnapped and returned to Israel where he is currently serving a lengthy prison sentence in solitary confinement.]

In view of the bizarre and mysterious death in the Atlantic this week of the British publisher, Robert Maxwell, and the claims being made this morning that he may have been murdered, and given the riddle, wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma which the whole issue of the so-called Mirrorgate has now become, will the right hon. Gentleman allow a debate to take place and, in view of the call that has already been made to him—he said that he would give the request consideration—conduct a Government inquiry into the whole issue of Mirrorgate and the sinister and mysterious events?

Mr. MacGregor: Let us be clear about what I said when the matter was raised previously. I said that, if there were any allegations about companies involved in illegal arms sales, it would be right for those to be investigated. But I made it clear that there had to be specific allegations, and then the Department of Trade and Industry would look into them. That is what I said, and I wish to make it perfectly clear.

As for a debate in the House, I feel that in the light of yesterday's tragic incident—others have paid tribute to Mr. Robert Maxwell—I do not think that this would be the right time to discuss the matter.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): Given the increasing perception of the importance of the traditional and rigorous methods of education for improving standards in classrooms, and Government reforms in relation to the national curriculum assessment that is underpinning them, may I ask my right hon. Friend to arrange a debate next week to see what actually goes on in the classroom? We could then, in particular, refer to the desire of the Labour-controlled Manchester city council to introduce an idiotic form of anti-sexism by which it would ban the use of words such as "chairman", "manning the office" and even "master bedroom"? Is that indicative of the kind of non-rigorous standards which too often apply to Labour-controlled local education authorities and which are doing nothing to benefit education standards in this country?

Mr. MacGregor: I share my hon. Friend's views on that subject, and I recall other Labour-controlled councils doing such things in the past. It is a great waste of time, effort and money to pursue such courses. As for raising the matter in the House, we shall soon have the Second Reading of the Education (Schools) Bill, and that will provide an opportunity to raise some of those issues.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): May we have an early debate on the environmental importance of the planting of national forests such as that which is to be created shortly in Leicestershire? Is the right hon.

Gentleman aware that a local campaign—which rejoices in the name "Stump up for woody fund"—has had to be organised to raise funds for such planting? This matter should not be left to private donations but should be considered by the House as an issue of public concern.

Mr. MacGregor: There will be a debate tomorrow on the environment on the Government's progress report on the previous White Paper when all such matters can be raised and when we shall be making clear the substantial progress, over a wide range of issues of environmental concern, that we have made in the past year.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Will my right hon. Friend clarify which Ministers will open and reply to the very significant debate on the citizens charter next Friday? Has he any intention of ensuring that it is well structured and focused debate rather than just a well-intentioned meander?

Mr. MacGregor: I can confirm that the Financial Secretary to the Treasury will open the debate. It will be a well focused debate because there is a great deal of material about which we can talk. It will certainly not be a meander.

Mr. James Lamond (Oldham, Central and Royton): As next Tuesday's business will, in all probability, include the introduction of three new Members wishing to take their places here, may I ask the Leader of the House to arrange for a good turnout of the Cabinet on that occasion to welcome such of the Tory candidates who were able successfully to present Tory party policy to the electorate?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman is making a number of presumptions.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): Has my right hon. Friend noticed that, during questions this afternoon, there has been no objection from Opposition Members to a substantive motion to conclude the two-day debate on Europe? Does he suspect, as I do, that some of them wish to gag other Opposition Members so that they do not expose the differences of view on the Opposition Benches? Maastricht will determine the way in which the people of this country are governed for decades to come. It is absolutely vital that Members are free to speak unwhipped.

Mr. MacGregor: I do not doubt that there are still substantial divisions on this issue within the Labour party, just as there have been some last-minute conversions.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): In light of the discussions about extending the powers of Select Committees, particularly the suggestion that seems to be emanating from the Government that Select Committees should handle the Committee stage of Bills, does the right hon. Gentleman intend to consult the Ulster Unionist party on that matter, because we have an interest in it?

Does the right hon. Gentleman think that it is wise to hold next Friday's debate on the citizens charter when, despite the importance that the Government attach to it, they have still not managed to publish a charter for the whole United Kingdom?

Mr. MacGregor: We have published a large number of individual charters, and we shall continue to do so.

I do not know where the suggestion about Select Committees dealing with Bills came from, but it did not come from me and was not in the memorandum that I put before the Select Committee chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): May I join the shadow Leader of the House in his request for a debate on railroads so that, in light of yesterday's announcements, Conservative Members can highlight the fact that public transport investment under this Government is at the highest level since the Conservative Government of the 1950s, that in London it is three times the level that it was under the Greater London council and 25 per cent. more than in Paris? That would be better than having to listen to more figures being plucked out of the air by the Opposition.

Mr. MacGregor: I agree with my hon. Friend, who has made a good point. If my hon. Friend catches your eye, Mr. Speaker, he can elaborate on that point later today.

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): Being a Scot, is not the Leader of the House ashamed to fail to announce that next week he will move towards the setting up of a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs? Is it part of his master plan to wait until there are no Conservatives north of the border, so that he has a good excuse?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman knows well the position about a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs. He also knows that the Scottish Grand Committee has been meeting during the summer to discuss a whole range of Scottish issues. I am glad that we have been able to get that going again.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): When did the House surrender power to the European Community with regard to majority voting on such issues as maternity pay and hours of work? If the House has not surrendered those powers to European institutions by majority voting, can we sort the matter out before we consider surrendering any further powers and being taken for another ride?

Mr. MacGregor: We abstained because we were disputing the treaty base and legal base of the maternity pay issue—the only one that came before the Council yesterday.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): In the near future, may we have a debate, for which I have asked many times, on the prison population and the prison staffing system, particularly bearing in mind the fact that the first contract has now been awarded to Group 4 in respect of the new Wolds prison? Is it not time that we discussed the issue on the Floor of the House?

Mr. MacGregor: The issue could be raised today.

Mr. James Paice (Cambridgeshire, South-East): It would be helpful if my right hon. Friend could say when we will return after Christmas.

Will my right hon. Friend reconsider his rejection of the request of the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) for a statement on the health service? A statement or a debate would allow us to point out that yesterday's commitment to a further £2·7 billion is more than any previous commitment by the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) and is nearly up to the figures being wafted about by the Leader of the Opposition, from which he is now being forced to back down.

Mr. MacGregor: I gave our record on the health service a few moments ago, and I would be happy to elaborate on it. It is possible to elaborate on the public spending aspects of the health service in today's debate. The only reason for not finding time next week is that we have a lot of Bills to be getting on with and that will dominate the programme, as it always does, in the early weeks. I hope that we shall have plenty of opportunities to return to this issue.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): Does the Lord President recall that his predecessor, Lord St. John of Fawsley, led the way in setting up the procedure to enable Bills to be considered by a Committee of the House before being given a Second Reading or being considered in Committee? Did he support that, and if he did will he consider the appropriateness of using the procedure for the Asylum Bill, which has aroused massive opposition from all the bodies that are concerned with refugee and immigration matters? We need to have the facts from them before we consider the Bill in detail.

Mr. MacGregor: The Bill has also aroused considerable support among many people. I remember that procedural experiment. Indeed, one of the Bills that I took through Committee was subjected to it. But to get the real benefit, it must be used for particular types of Bill, and it would not be appropriate for the Asylum Bill.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): Will my right hon. Friend find time next week for a debate on overseas trade? A debate would give me an opportunity to draw attention more fully to the plight of three companies in my constituency, one of which has £24 million-worth of contracts in its pocket but the lines of credit to the USSR are not open. The second is having difficulty in getting payment from Turkey, and the third is having a job shipping its goods to Iraq because of United Nations sanctions. My local companies cannot be the only companies in this position. Therefore, a debate would be important.

Mr. MacGregor: These are complex issues and each case is different. I cannot promise my hon. Friend a debate next week, so he will have to find other ways of raising the issue.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: We have a heavy day ahead of us, but I am reluctant to curtail business questions. I shall call the hon. Members who have been rising, provided they are brief. But I hope to get on to the debate by 4.10 pm.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Provided the Prime Minister will stay in the country long enough next week, may we expect a statement from him giving his pathetic, cringing, whingeing reasons why the Conservative party lost all three by-elections today, or does the Leader of the House expect the Tories to win one of them?

Mr. MacGregor: Those matters are entirely hypothetical. Therefore, I shall not comment on the question of a statement because it does not arise.

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): Will the Minister allow time to debate the report of Dr. Forwell of the Greater Glasgow health board, which highlights the dire poverty in the Greater Glasgow area?

Mr. MacGregor: Not next week.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Is the Leader of the House aware that an inquiry is being held into toll increases on the Erskine toll bridge? Recent press reports state that the Secretary of State will privatise the toll bridge, sack its 32 workers and employ a private company. Will the right hon. Gentleman ask the Secretary of State to make a statement showing whether the public are wasting their time by attending the inquiry and whether all the money that was spent on setting it up has been wasted? My constituents' time is being wasted by the facade of an inquiry, because at the end of the day the Secretary of State will abolish the right of local people to have a say by privatising the bridge.

Mr. MacGregor: I shall put that point to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I am sure that he will have a satisfactory answer.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): Does the Lord President recall that, when the Prime Minister was a Social Security Minister, he announced the closure of the DHSS resettlement centres but assured the House that replacement beds in the private and voluntary sectors would be available for those who were displaced? Will he take it from me that, when the resettlement centres finally close next March, those replacement beds will not be ready? What is to be done, and may we have a debate in the House?

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot fit in a debate next week, and I have already mentioned the pressures on parliamentary time in the next few weeks. We have a full legislative programme—not only all the Second Reading debates but the two-day debate on European issues. I shall draw the hon. Gentleman's point to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Mr. Ron Brown (Edinburgh, Leith): Is it not clear that, in terms of the health service, most people have had their chips, particularly in the Lothian region, where the local health board is trying to set up a deal with Reo Stakis in order to produce the promised new hospital, which should have been resourced under the health service? Is this not disgraceful? Is this not backdoor privatisation? Should we not have a debate next week to discuss it?

Mr. MacGregor: I am not aware of that issue, but there is not time for a debate on it next week.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Given the continued financial speculation about the Maxwell business concerns, will we have a statement next week if, despite denials, the *Daily Mirror* is up for sale? Does the right hon. Gentleman recognise that it would be totally unacceptable for that newspaper to go into the hands of those who already have substantial press holdings? It is wrong that so many newspapers throughout the nation are owned by so few people. Indeed, that in itself should be the subject of an early debate.

Mr. MacGregor: As I think the hon. Gentleman recognises, he is raising hypothetical questions. All that I can say is that I have noted what he has said.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): In the interests of the citizen's right to information, will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that next Friday we have a statement on the furious row which is going on in secret between

Nuclear Electric and the nuclear installations inspectorate on the safety of Magnox reactors, particularly Trawsfynydd reactor No. 1? Problems discovered with the outlet valves which have caused embrittlement and corrosion could lead to a sudden collapse of the core because of pressure and could eventually result in ignition of the graphite and fuel in the core. This is an important matter because it affects three other Magnox reactors, and it should be publicly debated.

Mr. MacGregor: I shall look into the point with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy. As I am sure the hon. Gentleman recognises, because I do not know the details of any issue that may arise, I cannot promise a statement.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): Will the Leader of the House find time next week for a Government debate on cot deaths? There are more than 2,000 cot deaths a year throughout Britain. Recent evidence from New Zealand shows that, when the New Zealand Government mounted a nationwide television and publicity campaign advising mothers to put their children to sleep on their backs or sides, not to smoke and to breast-feed, the number of cot deaths was cut by half. Although the British Government accept that evidence, they have refused to fund a nationwide publicity campaign. Five children in Britain may die today in that way, yet their mothers and fathers are ignorant of that evidence. Why are not the Government acting urgently to publicise that information?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that we all share the hon. Gentleman's anxiety about cot deaths. His point about publicity and advertising could be raised in a variety of ways in the House, but I shall draw it to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): May we have a statement next week on the Bradford hospital trust, which is deeply in debt, has lost 300 jobs, closed a baby unit in St. Luke's hospital and is now in crisis because the chief executive, Dr. Mark Baker, is resigning and moving elsewhere before the whole thing tumbles down around his head? May we have an urgent statement about the absurd policy which brought a crisis to Bradford hospitals and a diminution of service to the people?

Mr. MacGregor: We have had opportunities for many debates on and questions about trust hospitals, and there will be other opportunities for the hon. Gentleman to raise points about that matter.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Why does not the Leader of the House throw his weight about with the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food? I have asked the Minister about half a dozen times to make a statement on dioxin in Bolsover and contaminated milk. Now he knows that Bolsover Coalite will close its incinerator at the end of the month. It will be revealed today in a television programme that there is a cluster of breast cancers among women in the area where the dioxin was found—50 per cent. more than in other parts of Derbyshire. Contamination levels in the River Doe Lea are 1,000 times higher than the appropriate safety levels. It is high time that a statement was made. The Leader of the House should tell the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to make one so that he can be cross-examined.

Mr. MacGregor: I have of course raised the issue with my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, because the hon. Gentleman has raised it before. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the problem involves three farms, and since the statement was made to the House last June, a detailed research programme on the affected and neighbouring farms is being undertaken by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Tests are also being undertaken by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution. The results of the initial testing by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food's programme were published on 2 October.

However, the analytical work is complex and time-consuming, and the results of the research programme are unlikely to be available before the new year. I assure the hon. Gentleman that they will be published as soon as the work is completed. It is obviously complex work, but I assure him that the results will be published as soon as the work is done.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Do the Government intend to debate the MORI report commissioned by the Department of Social Security to investigate the plight of 16 and 17-year-olds as a result of the Government's decision to deprive them of the right to benefit, in view of the fact that that policy, which I regard as probably one of the cruellest and most irresponsible pursued by this or any other Government, was the personal work of the present Prime Minister? In view of the fact that the MORI report commissioned by the Government found that decision to be the major cause of destitution among young people, is it not appropriate to debate it? As it is a Government report commissioned at considerable expense, would it not be an extraordinary waste of public money if the report were not debated in the House so that its terrible findings might be acted upon?

Mr. MacGregor: I have not especially studied the report, but, as I have said, Government time in the next few weeks is very short. Clearly other opportunities are available to hon. Members to raise such issues if they wish to do so.

4.10 pm

Prime Minister

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cummock and Doon Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it within your power to draw the Prime Minister's attention to the fact that his first responsibility is to the House of Commons, that there is a Prime Minister's Question Time every Tuesday and Thursday and that we have a Foreign Secretary and a Secretary of State for Defence who are quite able to deal with international and defence commitments overseas? The Prime Minister should be here at Prime Minister's Question Time—or is he afraid of the Leader of the Opposition?

Mr. Speaker: That is patently not a point of order for me.

Mr. Foulkes: But it is.

Mr. Speaker: Of course the House of Commons is important, but the interests of the nation are equally important.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is right to say to the House and to the nation that the Prime Minister is presently with the President of the United States and the Heads of State of most European Governments and others. They are discussing important matters which affect the future defence not only of this country but of the western world. I think that the vast majority of the nation would expect my right hon. Friend to be there with the other leaders.

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Mr. Speaker: With permission, I will put together the Questions on the statutory instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

That the draft Building Societies Act 1986 (Modifications) (No. 2) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Disability Living Allowance and Disability Working Allowance (Northern Ireland Consequential Amendments) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Merchant Shipping (Prevention of Oil Pollution) (Amendment) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Students' Allowances (Scotland) Regulations 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 1522) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Bathing Waters (Classification) (Scotland) Regulations 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 1609) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Testing in Primary Schools (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 1682) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Child Minding and Day Care (Registration and Inspection Fees) Regulations 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 2076) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Immigration (Carriers' Liability Prescribed Sum) Order 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 1497) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Family Credit (General) Amendment Regulations 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 1520) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [31 October].

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.—*[Mr. Peter Walker].*

Question again proposed.

The Economy

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition and also, for a Division only, the amendment in the name of the leader of the Liberal Democrat party.

In view of the pressure of time, I shall have to limit speeches to 10 minutes between 7 o'clock and 9 o'clock. I hope that the hon. Members who are fortunate enough to be called before will bear in mind that limit in fairness to their colleagues.

4.13 pm

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): I beg to move, at the end of the Question, to add:

But humbly regret that the Gracious Speech seeks to continue economic policies which have caused a deep and damaging recession, falling output and investment, rising unemployment and record levels of business failures and house repossessions; and call upon the Government to adopt a programme for recovery which will encourage investment and rising levels of employment by the promotion of sustained investment in the manufacturing sector, by encouraging industrial innovation through the application of science and technology and by fully exploiting the potential of the neglected regions through vigorous regional policies, and by providing new opportunities in education and training which are crucial to Britain's economic recovery and future prosperity.

Once again, in his autumn statement yesterday, the Chancellor of the Exchequer was forecasting an economic upturn. There is, of course, nothing new in that. Month after month, as the British economy has languished in a deep and damaging recession, the only reaction from a puzzled and beleaguered Government is the claim that it is not as bad as it seems and that good times are round the corner.

Right from the beginning, it was even denied that there was a recession at all. At the time of last year's autumn statement, both the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer were deeply involved in just such an exercise. When it could no longer be denied that there was a recession, the Chancellor retreated to his second line of defence. He told the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee that the recession would be "shallow and short-lived". As we know, however, from the evidence contained in yesterday's autumn statement, the recession has been deeply damaging to Britain's economy.

In 1991, growth disappeared, falling to minus 2 per cent., instead of taking the upward direction predicted by the Prime Minister when he was Chancellor, only 12 months ago. Fixed investment has collapsed by almost 11

per cent. Manufacturing investment has fallen by almost 20 per cent. Manufacturing output is expected to decline by 4·25 per cent. this year.

No one could possibly pretend that this debilitating economic experience was, or is, shallow or short-lived. But never a word of apology, let alone a word of explanation, ever comes from Ministers whose incompetence has caused Britain to be at the bottom of the league tables among the leading industrial nations: bottom of the league for growth, bottom of the league for investment, bottom of the league for job creation. Not a word of apology, or even of explanation, to those who have suffered the consequences of their mismanagement of the economy—those who owned and worked in the 45,000 business enterprises that failed this year, with 860 failing in every week of the year, and the 85,000 families who have lost their homes as a result of the record level of repossessions, running now at 1,635 every week.

Mr. Conal Gregory (York): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman also confirm that this Government have achieved the highest fall in inflation of any country in the European Community?

Mr. Smith: But it was a fall from a very high level of inflation. In case the hon. Gentleman's purpose is to divert me from the consequences of the recession, let me remind him that I was referring to the 85,000 families who have lost their homes.

Most of all, however, one should have regard for the 750,000 people who have lost their jobs since last year's autumn statement, which blithely proceeded on the wholly mistaken assumption that there would be no increase in unemployment. Once again—as the Chancellor revealed in a reply yesterday to my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice)—the Government are assuming, in this year's autumn statement, that there will be no rise at all in unemployment in the year ahead. Frankly, no one should take that seriously. None of the economic commentators who the Chancellor claims agree with him in his assessment is prepared to go along with that assumption. That is an error right at the heart of all the calculations in the autumn statement, just as it was an error right at the heart of all the calculations in last year's autumn statement.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): The right hon. and learned Gentleman says that he is concerned about unemployment. We accept that he is concerned about unemployment, but he knows—although I am sure he will not admit it—that if the heavens were to fall in and there were to be the return of a Labour Government, there would be the mother and father of a financial crisis. In those circumstances, what would the right hon. and learned Gentleman do? Would he increase interest rates and abort the recovery? Would he devalue the pound and embark upon another cycle of inflation? Or would he—the only other alternative available to him—cut the necessary expenditure on sensible and sensitive issues like the national health service? What would he do?

Mr. Smith: My concern about unemployment is so generous that I am prepared to consider the future of the hon. Gentleman, who I think is going to be unemployed a little sooner than he thinks. He is one of those who are arguing for the general election to be delayed for a personal reason. What I shall be concerned about in the economic policies that I shall follow will be to seek to rescue this country from the financial consequences of this Government's period in office. The next Labour Government will not have a fortunate inheritance, but the hon. Gentleman cannot blame Opposition Members for that. The Conservatives have been in power for 12 years; it is a little late for the hon. Gentleman to notice the problem.

The price of the recession has been and remains high in economic, political and human terms. After all, this is the second worst recession since the second world war, exceeded in severity only by the recession in the early part of the Government's period in office. Neither the Government nor the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) should be under any illusions that the public may be in an easily forgiving mood.

Indeed, I notice that one business man is so furious and frustrated with the Government's economic mismanagement and its effects on his business and livelihood that he is suing the Treasury in the High Court. As was reported in the *Financial Times* on 1 October, the Government sought to have the action struck out before the High Court, but the motion failed and the case appears to be proceeding.

The plaintiff is a Mr. Mark Harries, a Cardiff business man. He accuses the Government of, among other things, the following errors:

> "Selling valuable public industries, such as water and the telephone service, at one quarter of their worth".

[HON. MEMBERS: "Guilty."] Mr. Harries has a strong case, as the House will realise as I proceed through his pleadings. The other charges are:

> "Creating a false economy in the 1980s and causing property prices to inflate at a time when he purchased four properties on mortgage;
>
> Not keeping proper control over the Bank of England, so that interest rates almost doubled and he had difficulty keeping up payments on his mortgage loans;
>
> Creating an economic climate in which demand for properties diminished dramatically, so that he was deprived of his collateral and was unable to borrow more money . . . or diversify into other business;
>
> Causing continual and increasing unemployment which deprived him of enough customers with money to use his services;
>
> Causing him great emotional stress owing to the danger of total business failure and subsequent 'unemployment, penury and destitution'".

These views are wholly objective:

> "Mr. Harries says that he has no political affiliations and no personal animosity towards the government or any of its members."

In saying so, he shows himself a man of great generosity as well.

I remind Treasury Ministers that the case is still proceeding and they may have to give evidence at some stage. After the initial hearing, Mr. Harries said:

> "We are prepared to go the whole way to win the point. It will cost thousands of pounds, but it's a matter of principle. You can forgive the odd one or two mistakes, but you can't forgive mistake after mistake, blunders all the time."

How true.

The case will be interesting. I shall be fascinated to see what defences the Government produce to Mr. Harries's case. I must confess that I would not mind presenting the case in the High Court myself, even though I see some potential problems. Too many witnesses will probably want to give evidence against the Government. Those

[Mr. Smith]

could include the 45,000 businesses that have gone under this year, let alone the 85,000 families who have lost their homes and the 750,000 extra unemployed people.

I wondered whether the Chancellor had remembered that litigation when he presented the autumn statement yesterday, for that could provide useful material for the plaintiff and his advisers. After all, it revealed how much of a confidence trick last year's autumn statement was. When he speaks today, the Chancellor should have a care not to undermine further the Treasury's case for the defence.

I have in mind some of the misleading answers that the right hon. Gentleman gave to questions following his statement yesterday. The House may recollect an exchange that took place between my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) and the Chancellor during questions on the autumn statement yesterday. My hon. Friend asked the right hon. Gentleman about the Government's prospective intentions to increase VAT, and asked him to answer the question yes or no. A similar matter was canvassed on the "Today" programme on Radio 4 this morning. In reply to my hon. Friend's allegation, the Chancellor said:

"The hon. Gentleman is totally wrong",

and went on to give us this pearl of wisdom:

"One can increase spending and cut taxes at the same time. I do not know where the hon. Gentleman has been—he has not been in this House very long—but we have been doing that ever since 1979."—[*Official Report*, 6 November 1991; Vol. 198, c. 468.]

That is simply not true. The Government have not been cutting taxes since 1979. In fact, it is not a matter of dispute between hon. Members on each side of the House that the proportion of national income going in taxation has risen—from 34·25 per cent. in 1979 to 37·75 per cent. in 1991. How can the Chancellor have been cutting taxes since 1979? When the Chancellor was taxed with the matter this morning, he said that the Government had been cutting taxes since the early 1980s. That is the oldest trick in the book.

The Government get into power in 1979. They increased national insurance contributions by 2·5 per cent. —[HON. MEMBERS: "Come off it."] They do not like to hear this: they hope that the public have forgotten all this. The Government increased national insurance contributions by 2·5 per cent., which is almost the direct equivalent of 2½p on the standard rate of income tax: to most people, it means much the same thing. The Government then almost doubled VAT, from 8 to 15 per cent. Although they had said in the election campaign that the Labour charge that they would double VAT was deplorable gutter politics, they did it within a couple of weeks of getting into power.

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: Before the hon. Gentleman leaps to his feet, I should just like to finish my point.

The change in the proportion of income going in taxation since 1981 is quite different from the change since 1979, and to use 1981 as the starting point is conveniently to leave out the years in which taxes were actually increased. The House and the nation need to be treated somewhat more seriously than the Chancellor has been treating us. We are not as gullible as all that.

Mr. Ashby: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman say by how much he would increase taxation were a Labour Government to get into power?

Mr. Smith: We believe that we need to introduce a much fairer system of income tax, and we have spoken about that on many occasions. [HON. MEMBERS: "How much?"] The proposals are well understood by the public.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): The right hon. and learned Gentleman says that he will increase public expenditure —presumably over and above the increases announced yesterday. To finance such a move, he will have to have recourse to higher taxation or higher borrowing and interest rates. By how much will taxation be increased? How much more will the basic rate taxpayer have to pay under his Government?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman completely fails to take account of how much of yesterday's public expenditure increase was committed to the costs of recession—about £4 billion of that money was committed to such costs. The answer to his question is that, if we run an economic policy that does not lead us into recession, we shall have the resources to increase public expenditure.

Despite the Government's recent experience, they appear to have learnt very little. Once again, when they talk about the future of the economy, they advance a case based on bogus reassurances about sustained and successful recovery. It is the same technique as they have used month after month, as the recession has deepened and spread through all parts of the economy and all parts of the nation. In June, the Chancellor detected what he chose to call "vague stirrings" of recovery, which he thought would first manifest themselves in the housing market. He told David Frost on his morning programme, "The signs are there."

Hon. Members will recall that in an earlier debate I referred to the robust rubbishing of that proposition by the president of the House-Builders Federation, Mr. Upsall. When Mr. Upsall heard about these "vague stirrings", particularly in the housing market, he wrote to the Chancellor the following day:

"I have consulted widely within the housebuilding industry and there is no foundation whatsoever for your assertion."

In case the Chancellor believes that that is the only evidence that I am going to introduce on that point, I noticed that, undeterred by the Chancellor's experience of being rubbished by the president of the very industry on which he was commenting, the Secretary of State for the Environment, that bold gentleman, claimed only this week that recovery was evident in the housing market. In *The Guardian* on 5 November, he claimed that the evidence of housing starts

"powerfully reinforce the Chancellor's message."

He went on to say:

"They herald renewed hope for all those anxious to move house. Britain is pulling out of recession."

However, the House-Builders Federation was once again alert to the Government's claims. I am glad that it pays such close attention to Ministers' comments. The federation represents builders accounting for 70 per cent. of national output. Again on 5 November in *The Guardian*,

Mr. Roger Humber, a director of the federation, gave an equally sharp response. He said "Rubbish" to the Secretary of State for the Environment. He also said:

"Customer confidence is falling, house sales are weakening, and confidence is clearly undermined by rising unemployment."

So much for the "vague stirrings" that we were promised last June.

In support of the case made by the House-Builders Federation, house prices fell for the third month in succession in September. According to the Halifax building society, there is no sign of an early recovery. The latest figures for mortgage lending issued by the Building Societies Association show a further decline in September.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I am pleased that my right hon. and learned Friend has referred to the housing market. The situation has become so bad that the ex-Prime Minister has her house in Dulwich on the market and she has had to cut its price twice. According to the newspapers, she has now resorted to placing it in the *Evening Standard's* small ads in an attempt to sell it.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend's kindness takes me aback. His generosity is as great as his perspicacity, and I am grateful to him for drawing that point to my attention.

One of the executives of the Building Societies Association told *The Financial Times* on 24 October:

"There is normally a clear upturn in the market when people return from holiday at the end of August, but there has been absolutely no indication of any renewed activity this autumn."

As the Chancellor's "vague stirrings" seemed to lack persuasive power, he has taken to gardening metaphors. In Blackpool he claimed to have detected "green shoots" of recovery. Against that background of blinding blue, he saw some green shoots of recovery.

I had the pleasure of listening to the Chancellor at the Guildhall. On that occasion, he talked about being

"on the road to recovery"

on the basis of a claim that retail sales were on an upward trend. Unfortunately for the Chancellor, Sir Ian Maclaurin of Tesco was in the audience. Immediately after that speech, he pointed out on "Newsnight" that that was not the case. He said that there was no rise in the trend in retail sales—*[Interruption.]* I do not think that the Chancellor heard what Sir Ian Maclaurin said, but I did. I took part in that programme. He said that he worked in the industry, was in the retail trade and, I believe, is a chairman of one of the federations. He denied what the Chancellor had said.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Norman Lamont): I rushed back from Mansion House especially to hear the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), because I am always entertained by his interventions. Sir Ian Maclaurin made it clear that he was talking about grocery sales. Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman tell us whether retail sales over the past three months were higher than in the previous three months, and were they higher than retail sales in the first three months of the year?

Mr. Smith: I am glad that the Chancellor raised that point. I have the retail sales figures in September issued by the Central Statistical Office—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] I am entitled to produce the evidence. The Chancellor's case was that retail sales were on a rising trend. Let us consider the figures. In July, they were 120·8; they fell in August to 119·3 and were unchanged at 119·3 in September. During the immediately preceding three months the trend was downwards—from July to September—not upwards. Perhaps even more significantly, the trend was down in September 1991 as against September 1990. How on earth can it be claimed that there is a rising trend when, over the past three months, it has been going downwards and is lower than it was a year ago?

Only yesterday, the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders published the most recent figures on car sales. Almost unbelievably, in October, the sale of new cars was down by 22·5 per cent. on the same month last year. That reversed the trend of the previous three months when the rate of decline and demand had begun to ease. The motoring correspondent of the *Financial Times* gives his opinion today:

"The sharp drop in sales appears to confirm industry fears that the intense marketing campaigns of recent months served merely to pull sales forward from the final quarter."

Vauxhall said that there was

"no sign of an end to the current sales slump."

Those worrying trends in the car industry come on top of the latest manufacturing output figures, which show a drop of 1·1 per cent., and a 2·7 per cent. fall in engineering output.

Having failed to produce very much in the way of facts for his Guildhall audience, the Chancellor hit on a new theme. The vital ingredient, he said, was confidence. With perhaps unconscious irony, he said:

"Confidence doesn't come from politicians' speeches."

How certainly true that is, particulary of this discredited and incompetent Administration, who specialise not in creating by their policies a basis for real confidence about our economy but in the year-in, year-out peddling of worn-out and increasingly unconvincing confidence tricks. What could be the basis for confidence would be an investment-led recovery from recession. That is exactly what the Government are not achieving. Although the Government forecast an extremely weak recovery in fixed investment last year—in the autumn statement, it was predicted to be 1·25 per cent.—we know from experience and from comparing last year's autumn statement with this year's that we should not accept Government predictions uncritically.

Since we heard the Chancellor on the radio this morning claiming that one should accept his forecasts because other forecasters agree with him, we should look at what other forecasters predict for fixed investment in 1992. The Chancellor says——

Sir Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me, I am, as he must know, in the middle of giving some statistics.

A range of other forecasters—*[Interruption.]* I am very good at giving way. Conservative Members cannot complain. I have given way to every hon. Member who asked me to give way. I shall give way to the hon. Member for East Lindsey (Sir P. Tapsell), who is quite happy to wait for me to finish the part I am dealing with, and if he could nod to the unruly members of the Cabinet on the Government Front Bench and ask them to cool it a little, I will get round to him all the more quickly.

Plus 1·75 per cent., says the Chancellor. The IMF forecast minus 2 per cent., the CBI minus 2·3 per cent., the London business school minus 1·9 per cent., Phillips and

[Mr. Smith]

Drew minus 2·4 per cent., Greenwell Montague minus 2·5 per cent., NatWest bank minus 2·7 per cent., Shearson Lehman minus 2·1 per cent. *[Interrupton.]* They are all out of step except our Norman when it comes to those predictions. Even more ominously, both the CBI and the National Institute of Economic and Social Research forecast manufacturing investment to fall next year by between 8 and 9 per cent. Of course, that fall is after taking account of the precipitous decline in manufacturing investment this year.

Sir Peter Tapsell: As the right hon. and learned Gentleman is making, as he is fully entitled to do, a most interesting tour d'horizon of the economic scene, what does he criticise, if anything, in the autumn statement? In particular, does he think that the Government should have announced further increases in expenditure for 1991-92 above those that were announced yesterday?

Mr. Smith: I do not want to be discourteous to the hon. Gentleman, but I spent some time criticising precisely those matters when we discussed the autumn statement yesterday.

I should, however, like to make one relevant point on that matter. One substantial omission from the autumn statement was the Government's failure to increase investment in industry and training. There is no question about that. The Government talk about priority areas, but as soon as one identifies a priority area, one also identifies non-priority areas and, sad to say, the Government's non-priority areas include industry and training. What really needs to be done—*[Interruption.]* The Government should finally realise—*[Interruption.]* This is relevant to my response to the hon. Member for East Lindsey.

The Government should finally realise the importance of the manufacturing sector to the British economy. I suspect that the hon. Gentleman would agree with Opposition Members when we emphasise the fact that manufacturing is the basic wealth creator for our economy and our society. It is also—this should concern the Government, who are predicting a deterioration in our balance of payments—the indispensable, internationally tradeable part of our economy.

As we face the challenges of the single market after 1992, which are coming nearer by the day, the Government should realise that Britain will remain at the bottom of the economic league unless we consciously stimulate sustained investment in manufacturing and promote science and technology, so that our economy operates at the leading edge of innovation and produces new products, and unless we embark on a skills revolution to mobilise the undeveloped skills of our people, especially our young people, for the benefit of our economy and society.

The Queen's Speech does not show a proper appreciation of the deadly damage that has been done to our economy by a Government who are now running out of time, just as they have already run out of ideas. As Mr. Harries, that determined plaintiff to whose action I wish every success as he proceeds with it in the High Court, reminded us,

"You can forgive the odd one or two mistakes, but you can't forgive mistake after mistake, blunders all the time."

No matter how long the Government seek to delay the election, that will remain the judgment of the electorate.

4.42 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Norman Lamont): I apologise to the House because I have been caught by surprise. I thought that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) was just beginning his attack on the Government.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman devoted a certain amount of time to the economic forecast, but it must have been quite clear to my right hon. and hon. Friends that what really upset the right hon. and learned Gentleman about the forecast that I published yesterday was that it is good news for the economy and therefore bad news for the Labour party. It shows that we are on track for recovery, and that recovery will gather momentum next year.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman also [illegible]ked about the forecast that was made at this time last year, when we said that we would make dramatic progress on inflation. He has not told the House his view of that forecast on inflation. When we said at this time last year that we would get inflation down to 4 per cent., the right hon. and learned Gentleman scoffed, but that forecast has been vindicated. Today, inflation is 4·1 per cent. and it is set to fall further. With unit labour costs actually falling, underlying inflation will continue to fall throughout next year. As I have made clear, inflation according to the retail prices index may rise a little early next year as special factors, especially mortgage interest payments, drop out of the calculation before falling back again to 4 per cent. by the end of 1992. Factory gate inflation will be at its lowest level since the 1960s. That is the measure of our considerable achievement.

I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman mentioned inflation but, unlike him, we have never wavered from the view that the defeat of inflation is a necessary condition for growth and economic success. Unlike the right hon. and learned Gentleman, we have never flinched from the measures that are necessary to deal with opposition—*[Interruption.]*—to deal with inflation—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] we have never flinched from the measures that are necessary to deal with both of them. The story of the past year has been about the dramatic progress that we have made and the lack of support and the lack of determination to defeat inflation that has been evident from the Opposition.

As inflation has fallen, we have cut interest rates, but after each of those cuts, the right hon. and learned Gentleman for Monklands, East has leapt to his feet, rushed to the television studios and demanded another cut, another 1 per cent. As one of the newspapers said, he is "Mr. One Per Cent." Whatever the level of interest rates, the right hon. and learned Gentleman thinks that they should be lower. He was at it again the other day immediately after the Mansion House speech when he said that, if he were Chancellor, he would hope to cut interest rates "quite quickly". The truth is that, if he were ever to become Chancellor of the Exchequer, the only thing that he would do "quite quickly", would be to put up interest rates. He would have to do that. "Mr. One Per Cent." cut would become "Mr. One Per Cent." rise.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman does not understand that it is precisely because our approach has been prudent that our interest rate cuts have been sustained. As a result, businesses and the foreign exchange

markets have realised that we are on course for stable and lasting low inflation. That is, and will continue to be, the achievement of this Government.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): If those changes have been the consequence of prudence, what has been the cause of the rising levels of interest rates that we have seen in the past two years?

Mr. Lamont: The right hon. Gentleman knows well that we increased interest rates, and that we did not flinch from doing so, to deal with inflation. That has been the main object of our policy and it is the basis for achieving growth again. It is because I can reply to the right hon. Gentleman in that way that the markets have confidence in us. They know that we will stick to the policies that are needed. That is why confidence in our prospects is beginning to show through.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East ridiculed the latest CBI survey that showed that business optimism is at its highest level for three years. He did the same thing the other night on television, but if the right hon. and learned Gentleman had done his homework, he would know that that survey has a well established track record as an excellent predictor of output.

In addition, the rate of growth of narrow money—another good indicator of GDP—is now above the centre of its target range. Export optimism and output expectations are up. Manufacturing output, exports and retail sales—I shall come to the right hon. and learned Gentleman's point on retail sales in a moment—have all increased in the past three months compared with the previous three. There is every reason to believe that we are emerging from recession.

The whole House will have heard what the right hon. and learned Gentleman said about retail sales. The facts are that, in the last three months for which there are published figures—July, August and September—retail sales are up 0·5 per cent. on the previous three months —*[Interruption.]*—0·5 per cent. was what I said— *[Interruption.]*—on April, May and June. In the three months to September, the index was 119·8 compared with 119·1 for the three months to June. I ask the right hon. and learned Gentleman to withdraw his earlier remarks, which were quite wrong.

Mr. John Smith: I ask the Chancellor to explain why, if this is a recovery, the figures are down 0·5 per cent. on the same period last year.

Mr. Lamont: The right hon. and learned Gentleman knows perfectly well that I was making the point that retail sales are beginning to recover from their low point. The whole House will have observed that the right hon. and learned Gentleman did not only misrepresent the facts, but sought to misrepresent the views of the other people on that television programme.

Mr. Smith: In that case, and if it is a rising trend, will the Chancellor explain why the figure in September— *[Interruption.]* I am sorry, I mean July. Will the Chancellor explain why the figure for July is higher than the figures for August and September? *[Interruption.]* Perhaps the House will listen for a moment because this is an important point which is crucial to the Chancellor's case. How can there be a rising trend when the July figure drops in August and drops again in September?

Mr. Lamont: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is being absurd. He takes one month's figure and says that —*[Interruption.]* No. The right hon. and learned Gentleman is utterly absurd. I quoted the figures to the House. The House heard the figures and heard clearly that the level of retail sales for the past three months is up on the previous three months. It is also higher than for the first three months of this year. I ask the House whether in its opinion that is or is not the beginning of a trend.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): Does my right hon. Friend concede that his autumn statement yesterday and his remarks today in the House have been so well received by the City, the confidence of which we must always maintain, that shares are rapidly rising today? That is how confident the City is.

Mr. Lamont: I am glad to have that up-to-date and welcome news from my hon. Friend.

The second half of this year will see a modest rise in output, just as I predicted in the Budget. I forecast that in 1992 the economy will grow by about 2·25 per cent. That is a cautious forecast. It is a realistic one. It is similar to that made by the London business school, the National Institute of Economic and Social Research, the International Monetary Fund and, indeed, the majority of City forecasters, contrary to what the right hon. and learned Gentleman sought to imply.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Repeatedly in recent months, the Chancellor has gone on television and tried to assure the British people that manufacturing output was rising. Yesterday, he said:

"manufacturing output may also now be picking up".—[*Official Report*, 6 November 1991; Vol. 198, c. 452.]

Why is he changing his position? Why was it "may" yesterday when he was sure that manufacturing output was rising only a few weeks ago?

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Gentleman is mistaken. Manufacturing output for the past three months is higher than that for the previous three months, as is industrial production. I was referring to total output in the whole economy, for which we do not yet have the figures.

As the impact of the interest rate cuts that we have made continue to feed through to demand, the recovery will gather momentum. We predict that the increase in output from the second half of this year to the second half of next year will be 2·75 per cent. In 1992 exports will rise by about 6 per cent., manufacturing output will rise by about 3·25 per cent.—the right hon. and learned Gentleman professed to be interested in manufacturing —and domestic demand will rise by about 3 per cent.

Of course, the right hon. and learned Gentleman does not want to know. He has to distort the figures. He does not believe in recovery. He does not want a recovery. He is terrified that there will be a recovery. That is why he and some of his hon. Friends have sought on television and in the House to say that we shall be in recession until investment starts to rise and unemployment starts to fall. That is their definition of recession, and it is an interesting one. Business investment was falling during half the term of office of the last Labour Government, and unemployment was rising for four years out of five. So under that definition, the economy was in almost permanent recession under Labour.

Next year non-oil GDP is forecast to grow by 2·25 per cent. If that is a recession, we were in recession for the

[Mr. Lamont]

entire period during which Labour was last in power. Growth in non-oil GDP was never higher than 2 per cent. in any year of Labour's term of office.

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): On the subject of the growth rate, could the Chancellor tell us whether the estimate of 2·25 per cent. of non-oil GDP growth next year was made by the same person or the same group, or on the same basis, as the forecast that this year growth would be 0·9 per cent. when it has been minus 2·5 per cent.?

Mr. Lamont: The right hon. Gentleman knows very well that that estimate is in line with the majority of forecasts. It is not simply an optimistic Government forecast: it is one which is supported by the IMF, the Confederation of British Industry and many other reputable organisations.

The Labour party has sought to deploy another argument. It seeks to belittle bringing inflation down. Its line of argument is that getting inflation down is easy in a recession. That is the point that the Leader of the House keeps making. There is just one problem with that argument. If it is so easy, why did not the last Labour Government do it when they had the chance? In their recession in 1974-75, GDP fell by 3·25 per cent. Manufacturing output fell by almost 11 per cent. Unemployment rose and disposable incomes fell. But did Labour's recession help to get inflation down? In 1974, prices rose by 16 per cent. In the following year, they rose by 24 per cent.

The Leader of the Opposition conceded in the House the other day that we were on track to get inflation down to German levels, but he then dismissed that achievement by saying that Germany was growing while we were in recession. The right hon. Gentleman might like to know that, again according to the IMF, we will grow faster than Germany next year. He did not admit that.

Britain is on track for a steady, non-inflationary recovery. That is precisely what business and industry need —a recovery that will gather in strength and will be sustained. It will be sustained because it will be soundly based. It will be based on low inflation and the supply-side reforms that have transformed the British economy during the past decade: lower taxes, simpler taxes, less regulation, privatisation and trade union reforms. Those are the reforms that have revolutionised the competitiveness and productivity of the British economy.

Mr. John Smith: The right hon. Gentleman mentions lower taxes. Will he now justify to the House of Commons his remark in this place that the Government have been cutting taxes since 1979? Given the increase in national insurance and the huge increase in value added tax from 8 per cent. to 17·5 per cent., how can he possibly justify what he said?

Mr. Lamont: The right hon. and learned Gentleman knows that we have cut tax rates. On almost every occasion that we have done so, the right hon. and learned Gentleman has voted against the cut. The right hon. and learned Gentleman says that the burden of taxation in the whole economy has increased since 1979. We have admitted that. It is true. We replaced excessive borrowing amounting to up to 9 per cent. of GDP with sound finance.

Let me ask the right hon. and learned Gentleman a question. If the burden of tax has increased, that seems to me a good reason to try to bring it down. Why does not the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree? Why does he say that we are wrong to reduce taxes? Why does he vote against tax reductions every time that we make them? Why does he want to fight the next election on a platform of increasing taxes? That seems a most extraordinary thing for the right hon. and learned Gentleman to do.

Mr. Smith: The right hon. Gentleman just admitted that the burden of taxation has increased in the way I described. How then can he say that the Government have been cutting taxes since 1979? Will he be a man and withdraw that claim?

Mr. Lamont: I admitted what has been admitted many times in the House before. In the first two years, where did the burden come from? To some extent, it came from increased North sea oil and corporate taxes. We have been reducing income tax rates steadily since we have been in office, and we intend to continue doing so.

Another matter in which the right hon. and learned Gentleman was not interested was export performance, which, of course, has been outstanding. We are not only holding our share of world markets but increasing it. It looks likely that our share of world trade in manufactures will rise for the third year running, for the first time in at least a quarter of a century. That again gives the lie to those who said that Britain's businesses could not compete within the exchange rate mechanism.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman talks a lot about investment. What about the £19 billion-worth of direct investment which flowed into the United Kingdom last year—investment which shows the confidence that our policies command with overseas investors. The right hon. and learned Gentleman went to Tokyo recently. We know why he had to go. I am sure that we all sympathise. He had to try to convince the Japanese that they could trust a Labour party run by the unions. Did he tell them about Labour's plans to introduce a minimum wage? Did he tell them about his plans to legalise secondary picketing? Did he tell them about the unions who, at the Trades Union Congress denounced Japanese investment as "alien"?

Who would want to invest in Labour's Britain? The foreign investment we are now seeing would be inconceivable under a Labour Government. That investment is already helping to reduce the trade deficit, and by the mid-1990s, that investment will make Britain a net car exporter for the first time in two decades.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lamont: I shall give way, but I am anxious to make some progress after this intervention.

Mr. Williams: I was in charge of inward investment in the last three years of the last Labour Government. By the time that we left office, there were more than 1,500 foreign companies operating in Britain. I negotiated with Hitachi, Toshiba, Aiwa, Hoffman-La Roche, and with Ford to bring that company to Bridgend. The right hon. Gentleman need not lecture us about inward investment. The Government did not invent it—it was there when they arrived.

Mr. Lamont: I am well aware of what the right hon. Gentleman did and I congratulate him. He should communicate his enlightened attitude to his friends in the trade union movement.

Overall, business investment rose by 45 per cent. in the three years to 1989 and was at a record level in the first half of 1990. At that time, businesses in this country were investing a sixth of national income—the highest share for the past 30 years.

Even after the fall during the past year, business investment is still higher than in the first half of 1988, itself a record at the time. In fact, the proportion of national income going into business investment today is higher than at any time under the last Labour Government. Business investment lags the cycle, but it will recover during next year, picking up as the recovery gathers pace. It will increase by more than 4 per cent. in the year to the second half of 1992.

I heard the Leader of the Opposition refer to manufacturing investment. As in many things, the right hon. Gentleman is a bit behind the times. He has quoted figures on manufacturing investment, but what he does not always understand is that much investment which used to be done by manufacturing companies is now subcontracted to service companies. What is the result? If one studies the figures, one will find that core investment in plant and machinery—which is what Opposition Members are really interested in—is 50 per cent. higher today than it was in 1979. That tells us about investment in manufacturing industry.

Nor should we forget that the quality of investment, by which I mean its profitability, has improved dramatically at the same time. The corporation tax reforms of 1984 made the system simpler and fairer. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East wants to reintroduce those tax breaks, at a cost of billions. Perhaps he would put corporation tax back up again to pay for them. Whenever the right hon. and learned Gentleman is asked a difficult question, he recites his favourite phrase—investment and training, investment and training, investment and training. I must warn him that he is beginning to sound like a parrot that has learnt one thing. It is true that he has some colourful markings, fine feathers and a wonderful beak, but his repertoire is very limited.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman ought to learn a few new words and themes. What he cannot grasp is where money for training and investment comes from. Business does not need his tax breaks to invest it needs profits—the word that he never mentions. In the 1970s, profits were eaten away by inflation, but in the 1980s they rose sharply. As we come out of recession, profits are beginning to rise again. That is exactly what British business needs to train more, invest more, and create more jobs. It does not need the help of the right hon. and learned Gentleman: it just needs the right conditions—low inflation and high profits.

In the past few months, the rate of increase of unemployment has fallen sharply. Unemployment may continue to rise for some time yet, but it will peak sooner and at a lower rate than it did following the last recession.

The way to get unemployment down is to get inflation down. That is the lesson from all the best performing economies in the world. Delivering low inflation is the most important way that the Government can help people back into jobs. But it is not the only thing that we can do. We can reduce unemployment by making the labour market work better, so that, when jobs are created, the people are there to fill them at a wage that employers can afford to pay.

That is why we have introduced training credits for 16 and 17-year-olds. By the end of the next Parliament, they will cover the whole country, and we are expanding initiatives to help the unemployed.

Next year we shall spend more than two and a half times as much in real terms on training, enterprise and vocational education as the last Labour Government. However, publicly funded training is only part of the story. Employers' training expenditure, as the latest CBI survey reveals, shows clearly that businesses are spending at record levels on training even in a recession. That is a measure of how business has become better and more energetic in its training, and it is partly a tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment and his policies.

Yesterday, we announced extra resources to help to increase student numbers. In 1979, in Labour's "Opportunity Britain", only a privileged few—12 per cent. —of our young people went on to higher education. Next year, it will be one in four—60,000 students more than this year. By the end of the decade, it should be one in three. That is a remarkable achievement. It is a Conservative Government who hold out the ladder of opportunity to our people. As a result, Britain has the best educated, most skilled, most highly trained work force in its history.

There was one remarkable omission in the speech of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East. Earlier in the debate on the Queen's Speech, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister spelled out at some length our position on the intergovernmental conference on monetary and political union. We cannot say that the right hon. and learned Gentleman made the position of the Labour party at all clear.

The Leader of the Opposition talks about what he calls the illusion of sovereignty, as he called it on the "Today" programme, and he attacks the Government for not being positive enough. However, when I asked him what he meant and why he said that, he would not answer. He avoided the question by saying that he wanted more regional policy and that he wanted to give away our fiscal freedom. He wanted more of our taxpayers' money to be spent not by the British Government in Britain on what the House decides, but by the Community elsewhere in Europe on what the Commission decides. The right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) agrees with me and knows that what I am saying is precisely right.

So I ask the Leader of the Opposition again. In the national executive committee document, the Labour party says that it supports a single currency and that it thinks that that is the only way to stop the currency speculators. The Opposition are still living in the 1960s world of Harold Wilson, obsessed with currency speculators. What we need to know now is which of the conditions that we set during negotiations they would drop. Are they urging us to give a firm commitment in favour of a single currency? We have made our position clear. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East has said that they favour an unconditional commitment to a single currency. Unless the right hon. and learned Gentleman denies it, that is the only conclusion that we can draw.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I would like to be clear about what the Chancellor is saying. Is he saying that the Government will accept a single currency on conditions that he can now define?

Mr. Lamont: The Government have made it clear that we are not prepared to give a commitment to move to a single currency. We believe that, if monetary union happens, it should be on an evolutionary basis, driven by the market. That is and always has been our position. It is the position of the Opposition that is shrouded in obscurity. When we listened to the right hon. Gentleman, we heard that he wants to give a commitment to a single currency without any conditions whatsoever. That appears to be his position.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Would my right hon. Friend make it clear to the Opposition that their illusion of a regional policy in an enlarged EC may be a different kettle of fish from what it used to be. Few, if any, of our regions would qualify for assistance under regional criteria, and Opposition Members ought to know that.

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend makes a shrewd point and is precisely right. Any expansion of regional policy is not likely to be to the benefit of this country, and I am gratefui to her for drawing our attention to that fact.

Yesterday, I announced our public spending plans for the next three years. Once again, we have shown that there is no contradiction between our prudent policies and high-quality public services. We have honoured our commitments and allowed expenditure to rise to meet the unavoidable consequences of the recession. But neither spending nor the PSBR will rise to the heights of previous recessions. Government expenditure will peak at 42 per cent. of GDP, compared to 47·5 per cent. in 1982-83 and a skyscraping 49·25 per cent.—very nearly half the nation's income—under Labour.

We remain committed to balancing the budget over the economic cycle. In 1987-88, we repaid debt equivalent to 3 per cent. of GDP, comparable to our assumption next year of a 3 per cent. PSBR. Compare that with Labour's peak of 9·5 per cent.—the equivalent of £55 billion today.

Our objective remains to balance the budget over the cycle. Just imagine how preposterous a goal that would be for the right hon. and learned Gentleman to state. Even yesterday, he wanted more money for training, for transport and for industry. Now that he has had a day to reflect, the whole House will be waiting for his answer to some vital questions. Does he accept the pledges made by Opposition spokesmen to spend more than we plan to? How would he pay for them? [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."]

Let us start with the National Health Service. I announced an increase in plans of £1·5 billion for the NHS —£1·5 billion which will help the NHS upgrade buildings and hospital equipment. Spending on hospital and community health services will rise by more than 5 per cent. in real terms between this year and next, bringing the total real increase in NHS spending since 1979 to well over 50 per cent. We could not have made our commitment to the NHS clearer. What a contrast with the Labour party —the party that cut nurses' pay and, in one year, cut NHS capital spending—hospital building—by 22 per cent. Fine words but poor action from the Labour party. So would the right hon. and learned Gentleman spend more? Now is his chance to tell us how much. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."]

We also announced an extra £1·4 billion for British Rail and London Transport. Next year they will invest more than three times as much as they did in 1979. If the right hon. and learned Gentleman were standing here, would he spend more? His hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) would like to, but would he? Now is his chance to tell us how much. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."]

What about education? We have more students in higher education than ever before. Pupil-teacher ratios in our classrooms are at their lowest ever, and spending per pupil is up more than 40 per cent. The leader of the Opposition plucked a figure our of the air and said that he would spend £2·6 billion more. We he licensed to do that? Would the right hon. and learned Gentleman give him the money? If he would, how much? [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."]

Next year, the aid budget will increase by 2 per cent. in real terms. Again that is not good enough for the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd). She wants to put it up in a single Parliament by more than £3 billion. Would the right hon. and learned Gentleman give her the money? Now is his chance to tell us. How much? [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."]

In April, the right hon. and learned Gentleman published what he called a shadow Budget. Why does not he publish a shadow autumn statement? Then he could give us the answers. He must tell us this; is the level of spending that we have announced too high, too low or just about right? Is the level of borrowing too high, too low or just about right? We have set out our expenditure plans for the next three years, on which we shall fight the election. The country wants the same from the Labour party.

In the document "Meet the Challenge, Make the Change" the Labour party promised that it would publish its detailed spending plans at the time of the election. now that the election is a little closer, the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) tells us that it will not publish its plans. What is the Labour party hiding? We know what it is hiding: the cost of unaffordable spending plans and the massive increases in taxation that it knows are needed to pay for them.

We have costed the hundreds of pledges made by the right hon. and learned Gentleman and his colleagues, and we know that they add up to £35 billion. The right hon. and learned Gentleman has never quarrelled with the detail of any of our estimates. The £35 billion of extra spending means £35 billion of extra tax—perhaps not right away. Perhaps he would try to borrow some more, but he could not delay the evil day for long. Eventually, it would mean skyscraping taxes, not only for the better-off, but for everybody. The right hon. and learned Gentleman always forgets that what the Government give, they first must take away, and a Labour Government would take away a lot from the British people.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman claims that he would get the money from growth. We have heard that one before. That is what Labour Oppositions always say, but Labour Governments always fail to deliver, because their policies of intervention and regulation throttle recovery. Growth would peter out under Labour.

Even if Labour could somehow spend the growth created by Conservative policies, the right hon. and learned Gentleman still would not have the money. He clearly has not read the public expenditure plans any more carefully than he has read the forecast. The plans that we

have published for the next three years already take account of growth. Those plans are consistent with our objective of balancing the budget over the medium term. If the right hon. and learned Gentleman wants to spend more, he must either borrow more, or tax more, or both.

The British people have seen through Labour's deceit. They know what a Labour Government would mean. Since the war, living standards have risen half again as fast under Conservative Governments as under Labour. Since 1979, living standards have risen by almost 37 per cent. We have cut income tax rates. The plans that I announced yesterday show that, even when times are difficult, we will continue to improve public services and to honour our commitments.

It is this argument that leads to the right hon. and learned Gentleman's increasing desperation—a desperation that manifests itself in his peculiar determination never to have one consistent policy when he can have two contradictory ones. He thinks that we should cut interest rates further and faster; but at the same time says that we should stay in the exchange rate mechanism. We know that it is our cautious approach that has enabled us to cut interest rates and keep the pound stable. He wants to increase spending; but he claims that he will not put up taxes. We know that it is our firm control of public spending that has enabled us to cut tax rates. He says that we should improve competitiveness and strengthen the supply side; but he wants to introduce a minimum wage and bury business under a mountain of bureaucracy. We know that low inflation and a more flexible labour market is the way to create wealth and jobs. He says that there is no recovery. A few weeks ago on the radio, he said that the recovery would be weak and faltering. His right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition has told us that the recovery is heading for an inflationary boom. We know we are headed for sustained, non-inflationary growth.

A Labour Government would bring higher taxes, higher inflation, higher interest rates and higher unemployment. Their policies would leave the nation with no prospect of economic recovery and no hope of improving the public services. This Government are dedicated to a sustainable, economic recovery based on stable, low inflation.

We are dedicated to a tax system that gives people the incentive to work and the opportunity to save. We are dedicated to using the fruits of these policies to improve the public services of the nation—not only providing our health, education and transport systems with increased resources, but securing improved performance from them.

This Government's objectives are shared by the nation, and the economic policy which serves those objectives deserves the support of this House. I ask the House to reject the amendment and to support the Loyal Address.

5.18 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): There could hardly be more of a contrast between this year's debate on the Loyal Address and our debate last year. Hon. Members may have forgotten in the interval what happened.

Last year's debate was marked by a speech by the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe), who was in the Chamber a moment ago, rather like Banquo's ghost, but has disappeared, in rather the same way. That speech was probably one of the most dramatic and remarkable, although it was quiet in delivery, that many of us have heard in the whole of our time in this House, because it was the undoing of a Prime Minister.

The speech pointed to the impossibility of papering together deep divisions over Europe by the use of sophisticated language. It blew open those divisions, but did not stop the present Prime Minister saying, when he spoke as Chancellor in that debate:

> "I believe that they will vote for the consistency, courage and conviction with which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has led this country so successfully for so long."—[*Official Report*, 14 November 1990; Vol. 180, c. 599.]

Conservative Members did not wait to find out whether people would vote for that courage and conviction, but bundled out the then Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) pretty quickly once they had had the encouragement of a Liberal Democrat by-election win and the exposure of the divisions by the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East.

In the same debate, the then Chancellor forecast the same growth that has been forecast today—a growth that did not happen. It was the beginning of the protracted end of the Government. The next stage in that process has been a Gracious Speech full of apologies. The apologies may be veiled and may take the form of a reversal of previous policies, but they nevertheless constitute the admission of how wrong the Government have been. The council tax Bill exists because the poll tax was the disaster that so many hon. Members said it would be. That view was expressed by everyone on the Opposition Benches and a few Conservative Members, but was ignored as the Government arrogantly used the power of an artificial majority to force the poll tax through.

Similarly, the Gracious Speech is an apology for the privatisation process that has taken place, because it has led to the wholesale transfer of monopolies from the public to the private sector without serious competition, or adequate regulation to replace competition where it could not exist. That is why the Queen's Speech contains a commitment to introduce legislation to reinforce the regulation of privatised utilities. It concerns privatisations that have taken place in the past few years under processes and with measures of regulation which the Government said were more than adequate, dismissing all our criticisms. The Government's admission that they must return to that issue is another apology, but return they must, as anyone who considers what is happening in British Telecom—the bills paid by the customers or the salary received by the Chairman of that company—will be quick to point out.

Another apology has been made in all the charter proposals for public services. It is an apology for the steady decline in public services during the decade or more in which the Government have been in power. That decline will not be arrested by charters of citizens' rights in those services, desirable though some aspects of those may be. Yet again, it is an apology for failure.

The apology that is missing from the Queen's Speech is for the recession. Nowhere do the Government admit that they have produced a recession which they regret, or that they have magnified the extent of that recession by past policies. Rather, they tell us what they told us last year—that they will maintain conditions for sustained growth. Are those the conditions that provided the recession or are they something different? Sustained growth sounds unconvincing in the mouth of the Government because, in

[Mr. A. J. Beith]

the past few years, Britain has grown at a rate well below trend growth and below the OECD average, managing a paltry 0·75 per cent. in 1990 and with a projected fall of 2 per cent. during 1991.

The Government cannot maintain conditions for sustained growth if they do not introduce such conditions. That must include long-term investment in key areas of training, education, research and development, and transport. Governments should concentrate on such matters. They are no good at running industries, and probably not much good at picking winners and deciding where in the economy investment can best be directed. They must ensure that the matters for which Governments must be relied on are properly provided. Education and training are at the heart of that list, as is an adequate transport system.

The conditions for sustained growth outlined in the autumn statement appear to be based on the idea of a revival in consumer spending rather than an investment-led recovery. It is hard to envisage how that will happen. Much of the consumer spending boom of the 1980s was based on rising house prices and the enormous withdrawal of equity from housing that fuelled the inflation of that period. That will not happen now. House prices will not rise in the same way and consumers who have been through that experience have been hard bitten by it. In many cases, the victims of that period cannot engage in much consumer spending now. If they can, they are much more cautious as a result of the experience of the past few years than they have ever been.

The autumn statement contains something that I have never seen in an autumn statement before—a chart designed to show not figures showing what might happen in the economy but estimates of consumer confidence based on Gallup poll evidence. The Treasury Select Committee will have fun discussing the precise significance of that measure, which is another attempt to talk up the economy and persuade consumers that it is all right to spend now. People will not be kidded that easily. They have seen what it is like to be unable to meet their mortgage repayments and be faced with redundancy and unemployment.

The Gracious Speech also refers to

"policies designed to reduce inflation further".

I am in favour of such policies, but a little confused about the Government's current attitude. Only recently, the Prime Minister said that the Government had inflation "licked". I am sure that he is honest and believes that that is so. He must believe, then, that 3 or 4 per cent. inflation is a reasonable long-term rate for the United Kingdom economy. That view is not shared by many pensioners. Many hon. Members will have had the experience of constituents who say, "I don't understand how inflation can be coming down when prices are still going up." That may be expressed in simple terms, but it is the reality. As long as inflation exists, prices go up. Lower inflation may please economists and be an index of an improving trend, but it is not what most people want. They want price stability. We need an economy that is dedicated to price stability.

The most effective proven mechanism to achieve price stability is an independent central bank dedicated to that objective. I still wonder what happened to the paper produced by the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), which the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Finchley, threw into her waste paper basket with what oaths and cries we shall never know.

The right hon. Member for Blaby may not like the idea of a European central bank, but he is clearly on record as saying that he believes that in this country's economy an independent central bank would be a guarantee against inflation. Indeed, it would have done some good to have one when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer, as it would have made a significant difference to some of the measures that he took, which stoked the fires of inflation. I am not yet convinced that the Government have the policies to counter inflation. They are in danger of becoming complacent now that we have reached welcome lower levels of inflation, and are lulling themselves into believing that the problem has been "licked".

The Government make commitments in the Gracious Speech in which there is no substance. The commitments have been abandoned before they have been voted on. It is unusual to have an autumn statement in the middle of a debate on the Queen's Speech, but it has at least given us an opportunity to test the veracity of the promises that have been made.

One of the promises is that the Government will promote enterprise and training. Before we have had the opportunity to vote on that policy, the autumn statement has informed us that the Government will not promote training or fill the training gap that has developed in recent years. It says that the money which it was prepared to commit to training will not meet the pleas of the training and enterprise councils, which are struggling to deliver the training guarantees which the Government have committed them to providing, and which cannot go beyond the delivery of that guarantee to extend training opportunities in a serious or significant way.

The £470 million announced yesterday will be taken up in large part by programmes that have already been announced, such as the employment action programme, by money for job clubs and by funds for departmental redundancy payment schemes. The money left over is unlikely even to provide for the current training budget to keep pace with inflation.

The Government say that they will promote enterprise. Why, then, do they not do more for small business and look again at legislation on the late payment of debt? Even the chairman of the National Westminster bank has conceded that they should look at that issue. It is a matter of deep concern to many small businesses—it is killing some of the most enterprising small firms—that they are not able to obtain proper payment of debt, often from larger and better-funded institutions than themselves.

Another commitment in the Gracious Speech to which, I suspect, there is little substance is the commitment to introduce legislation to reinforce the regulation of privatised utilities. We shall look with interest to see what that legislation will be.

We would support any moves to increase the powers of the regulators to give them stronger teeth. That is particularly necessary in the water industry, where there is no prospect of competition. The idea put about by Ministers at the time that there would be competition in the water industry—because people would compare one region of the country with another—is unrealistic. That is not how competition works. Competition works if one can buy an alternative product at a better price from

somebody else. That cannot happen in the water industry, so there must be much more effective regulation than has existed in the past.

We must look also at other areas of privatised industry. The recent profit figures of British Telecom tell their own story. We must examine the Office of Fair Trading's recent comments on British Gas. We argued from this Bench that the regulatory machinery for British Gas was totally inadequate and that the basis of the privatisation was wrong. We shall also have to look at the electricity industry, where the Government produced two large generation companies solely to try to privatise nuclear power. They had to abandon the privatisation of nuclear power, leaving themselves with a highly monopolistic structure.

I do not believe that, deep down, the Government are committed effectively to fighting monopoly and promoting competition. Some Conservative members may have a desire to do so, but there is no real strength of commitment to the promotion of competition and, for example, to the toughening up of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission and the greater detachment of that body from the powers of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who seems more interested in the argument about French nationalised industries than in the promotion of competition in our domestic economy.

There are significant and eloquent omissions from the Gracious Speech. For example, there is not a mention of the words "single currency", despite the fact that it is one of the most fundamental issues facing the country today. That is recognised by its supporters and opponents alike. Although it is the subject of a crucial conference which is about to take place, the Government do not have a real policy on it. Indeed, their policy is not to have a policy. Their policy is to try to avoid making a decision this side of the general election. That is precisely what the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East described a year ago. It is an attempt to find a form of words around which people of different views can unite.

The Labour party has had similar problems and has gone a step further. Labour Front-Bench Members seem to have committed themselves to a single currency despite the fact that some of their Back-Bench supporters continue strongly to oppose it, although they are having difficulty with the question whether a European central bank would be independent. Their recent policy statement will cause some heart searching on the part of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and some of his hon. Friends.

Mr. Skinner: My position is quite clear.

Mr. Beith: The Government are still trying to get away with having no policy. Imagine what would happen if Britain sought to remain outside a single currency and European monetary union. That is ultimately the issue facing Britain.

Mr. Skinner: It would be a good day's work.

Mr. Beith: I appreciate that the hon. Member for Bolsover and the right hon. Members for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) and for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) believe that that would be a good day's work. Neither of their respective leaderships agree with them. I do not think the Prime Minister imagines that this country's future would be secure if we remained outside.

A single currency and European monetary union are coming: there is no question about that. The issue is whether Britain is in or out. If we are outside, we shall not enjoy the advantages of a single currency or have the investment in this country of those companies—our own and overseas firms—which want to invest in the core of Europe and enjoy full access to all that goes on in Europe. We shall not be able to influence events that control our destiny. Anyone who imagines that a British Chancellor of the Exchequer could, wholly independently, determine interest rates here without considering what was going on in a Europe with a single currency, with all the other member countries belonging to it, is totally wrong.

Mr. John Butcher (Coventry, South-West): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that one estimate of the costs saved by industry by our joining EMU is 0·05 per cent., while other estimates show that there would be an unnecessarily high increase in unemployment from being locked into EMU under current trading conditions? Has his party analysed those comparative costs?

Mr. Beith: The hon. Gentleman is talking about transaction costs. I believe that the saving in those costs would be higher. But that is only a small part of the single currency argument. The most crucial aspect is whether we want our currency to be locked into a stable currency in Europe or whether we want to be able to devalue our currency in the hope of averting unemployment. What we almost certainly would do by such a devaluation process —from which the Labour Front Bench is now trying to distance itself—is to postpone decisions which industry would have to take in the end, anyway. The benefit to competitiveness would be short-term, while the damage to our credibility as an economy would be massive.

That is why there are only a few recalcitrants on the Back Benches on either side of the House—among whom the hon. Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher) is an honoured member—who still advocate a devaluation-based policy and the maintenance of our ability to devalue.

Mr. Skinner: Why does the hon. Gentleman's party believe that, because the Common Market has been in existence for a few decades, it will continue as though nothing is happening to stop it? Spanners are being put in the works of that gravy train. Through a thousand years of European history, nation states have come closer together. Every so often, they have become so close that they cannot stand the sight of one another. Then they begin to fall apart. That is happening in Russia, Yugoslavia and to some extent in Canada.

I urge its adherents not to believe that philosophically the members of the Common Market will continue to get ever closer, even towards the end of this century. Eventually we shall see—I know that I shall see it—the breaking up of the Common Market.

Mr. Beith: The hon. Gentleman should devote his time and energies to trying to convince his hon. Friends on the Labour Front Bench of that. They have rejected the view which he espouses, just as the Government have rejected it and as we have rejected it since the 1950s. We believe that there is a determination in Europe to create institutions through which Europe can be economically more successful.

[Mr. Beith]

That is not to say that we shall lose difference and divergence in Europe. Anyone who imagines that a single currency, or even the steps for political union that we advocate, means an end to divergence is imagining things. Differences in national view and culture will remain, just as they remain within the United Kingdom. Indeed, it comes ill from the Government to argue that power would become too centralised in a European system when they have centralised power in Britain, taking power away from the nations that make up the United Kingdom to bring them to the centre.

The costs to Britain of staying out would be immense, as would be the costs of remaining in the slow lane. If we remain ambiguous about whether Britain should be fully in the European Community and in the single currency, the same adverse effects on investment will apply. The Gracious Speech should have made it clear that Britain is committed to the achievement of a single currency and monetary union, in which we shall be a full participant.

5.38 pm

Mr. Terence L. Higgins (Worthing): The Treasury Select Committee will look forward to taking evidence from the Chief Secretary and from the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the autumn statement before reporting to the House, and it would be wrong of me to anticipate what that report might say.

However, I think that I shall carry the Committee with me in welcoming the fact that the Chancellor has accepted the recommendation we made after the Budget this year when we said strongly that he should not inhibit the operation of the so-called automatic stabilisers which were likely to increase the deficit, and that he should take the opportunity to make some supplementary discretionary increases in public expenditure. Both those actions, while they increase the deficit, will be of great help in reducing the depth and duration of the recession.

I welcome the increase in expenditure on the national health service announced in the autumn statement. It is significant that the shadow Chancellor made no reference to it in his speech, although I have noticed that in the press some Opposition Members have been saying that the increase in national health expenditure is in some sense an election bribe. If that is so, it is necessary to look at the massive increases in extra expenditure on the health service which took place last year, the year before and the year before that. If it is an election bribe, it has been going on for a long time, probably since the last election.

The Gracious Speech says that the Government will

"continue to play a constructive role in the two Inter-Governmental Conferences on Political Union and Economic and Monetary Union".

I want to refer particularly to economic and monetary union, to which the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) also referred. The single currency is not mentioned in specific terms, but the IGC is mentioned in the speech. I want to make some important points. I am neither a Euro-sceptic nor a Euro-maniac. I should form a group slap in the middle. I have always believed that it is right for Britain to be a member of the European Community.

There has always been something of a trade-off between the costs and disadvantages of the common agricultural policy on the one hand and the potential advantages of the single market on the other. What gives me grave cause for concern in present circumstances is the way in which the Commission seems to be extending its operations into other areas such as the environment and whether a bypass should go here or there. We get no quid pro quo, and the principle of subsidiarity, about which we used to hear a great deal but have heard very little recently, seems to have been forgotten.

I hope that we shall have an opportunity to speak about economic and monetary union in the debates that are scheduled to take place shortly. However, some points in the negotiations need to be dealt with at this stage, and hon. Members should be able to express an opinion at this stage. It would be totally wrong to have a referendum in any shape or form on this issue. I am totally opposed to referendums on any issue. We operate in a representative parliamentary democracy. If there is any issue that should not be dealt with by a referendum but which should receive the considered opinion of people in the House, it must be the single currency. One has only to speak to members of the electorate to realise that the crucial distinction between a single currency and a common currency is not generally understood by members of the public. Therefore, the issue should be considered in the House.

The basis of power of the House of Commons and this Parliament has always rested on the control of money—taxation and public expenditure. It rests on our supply procedure, ways and means resolutions, the argument that money should not be handed over to the Executive until grievances have been redressed, and so on. Therefore, I am profoundly concerned at the proposals in the Dutch draft treaty with regard to control of budget deficits of members of the EC.

The proposals in the draft are unbelievably ludicrous. They are quantitative with regard to borrowing and the national debt, and propose to impose penalties and reports from the Commission for those who do not comply. Option clauses or not, that is totally unacceptable. I am not sure whether my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has fully taken this point, but, even if one were in favour of a single currency, as a number of people in Europe are, it is still not necessary to control deficits in order to achieve it. The extension into fiscal policy is something else.

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Higgins: I want to continue, because this is a complex argument.

It is being shuffled in as a side wind, as if it is necessary for a single currency. That is not so. The evidence that the Treasury Select Committee has received on this issue shows that, even if one has multiple currencies, it is not possible to tell in which direction an exchange rate would move in response to an increase or decrease in the deficit. This is a complex issue, and no doubt one can pursue it elsewhere. However, that is the evidence that we have had from Treasury officials, and it is important to bear it in mind.

Because of its complexity, I wondered how it could be explained in more simple terms. While talking to my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) this afternoon, it suddenly occurred to me how it could be done. A massive deficit in Illinois or Texas would in no way prevent the United States from having a single currency. If the deficit were of sufficient scale, it might alter

the relative position of the dollar against the deutschmark or sterling, but it would not mean that the deficits of individual states would have to be controlled. Therefore, the basic argument put forward by Delors and others that there must be control of deficits in order to have a single currency is totally invalid.

Mr. Denzil Davies: There is a fallacy in the right hon. Gentleman's argument. There will be no united states of Europe. It is necessary for the Commission to control budgetary deficits because we will be transferring monetary policy to a supranational central bank. Therefore, there has to be some control over the national deficits. If we had a united states of Europe, the position would be different.

Mr. Higgins: That is not the case, for the reasons that I have pointed out. There may be a wish to transfer greater authority from here to the Community, but the single currency does not require control of the deficits. It may be that the argument for economic union as against monetary union is put in those terms, but, as I have said, the House should not give such authority to the Community, because it is the basis of our power.

The so-called opt-out clause has been given a great deal of publicity in the press. In the words of the draft treaty, one can be an "exempt" country. In fact, the opt-out clause opts out of only a very small part of the draft treaty. The Delors report put forward the argument for a single currency which would mean giving up for all time the main means of adjusting for differential movement in costs and prices over a wide geographical area. The argument at that time was that, if that causes distortions and so on and there is a variation in costs and prices in a particular part of the Community, there is no need to worry, because there could be a transfer of regional and structural funds from one part of the Community to another. One may think that doing that for Liverpool has not been terribly effective, and there is no guarantee that, if we accept a single currency, the Germans will be prepared to perpetually subsidise, for example, the Spaniards.

Mr. Butcher: Quite the opposite.

Mr. Higgins: Indeed.

If the others go along with a single currency and we make use of the exemption clause, it is not likely that they will say that we are also exempt from the cost of the transfer funds that are necessary because they have a single currency. That will not be the case.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has a slightly difficult task ahead of him. His attitude so far has been appropriate. I do not think that it is true that we do not have a policy. We have a policy to negotiate a deal that is appropriate for the United Kingdom. I hope also that, during the negotiations, we will consider not only our own interests. I profoundly hope that my right hon. Friends the Chancellor and the Prime Minister will seek to avoid the dangers for Europe as a whole that will arise if we rush prematurely along a particular direction with disastrous consequences.

5.49 pm

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): The speech of the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) was impressive. The House will accept that he devoted much time and thought to it. He began by saying that he was neither a Euro-maniac nor a Euro-sceptic. I think that that precisely defines my position. I remain one of the few hon. Members who in 1971 voted against a three-line Whip to join the Community. I find myself outflanked by hon. Members who are more recent converts, but I still maintain my position roughly in the centre. We needed to enter Europe because the advantages and disadvantages weighed in our favour. That must be our position. There must be no Euro-mania and no Euro-scepticism—only, what can we negotiate and how is it to our advantage? If we can negotiate a deal that is to our advantage, I shall be delighted, but if not, we shall have to find some other way of proceeding.

The autumn statement, perhaps because an election is approaching and spending is becoming more important politically, has received much more attention than previous ones. It is useful to hold this debate so soon after the autumn statement because we shall consider its detail in a public expenditure debate early in the new year, by which time we should have the most valuable comments of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee.

The autumn statement is one of the few decisions taken when it is known that there will be an election before the next year is out. As in 1964, when there was a similar situation, spending is rising rapidly, partly for good reasons, partly because these matters have become more intensely political, and partly, too, because dogma and ideology tend to take second place to the realisation of the need to win an election. When the Labour party took office in 1964, we found the cupboard bare. In fact, it was more than bare—it was overdrawn. I suspect that we would find a similar situation today.

Privatisation will be one of the main sources of finance for the extra expenditure. Previously it was thought that privatisation proceeds would amount to £5·5 billion a year. We now understand that those proceeds will rise to £8 billion a year in the years 1991-92 and 1992-93 before dropping again. That is a major change. Where will the Government get that money from? I suppose that it will come from privatising the Post Office, British Coal, British Rail and London Transport. But those are only thoughts —I assume that there are no plans yet—and what frightens me is that they will lead to the hurried reconsideration that we have experienced in the past. That money will not be made available to a Labour Government, which is one of the big problems that we shall face.

I feel very strongly about the way in which we rush forward into privatisations. Of course I have political differences with the Government, but I also have differences about the way in which these matters are handled. Again and again, the Public Accounts Committee has stated that sales should be dealt with in tranches. The Government should not flog assets in one go but should try to establish the right price and to achieve that price.

The Government sell gilts every month. They do not sell off the year's Government gilts but wait for the market to decide how much they are worth, and if they get that wrong they get it right in the next tranche of sales. Again and again, we have had hurried sales and have failed to get financial advantages that might accrue, at least in part. If the Government are going to sell the family silver, for heaven's sake let them get a proper price for it.

The proposed privatisations are not based on ideology, as the first ones were, but, increasingly being used to provide money for expenditure, and there is a limit to how far the Government can go in that direction. I urgently

[Mr. Robert Sheldon]

plead: for heaven's sake, let us have proper valuations on assets. In several sales the Government did not bother with a valuation of the component parts of the assets. Again and again, the Public Accounts Committee has asked for proper valuations before sale. It is the only way that one can be sure of getting a decent price.

The rise in unemployment has had financial consequences. The extra 1 million unemployed people will cost between £3 billion and £4 billion. We would be delighted to see that money used for other public expenditure that has a more useful output. That will only be paid for by manufacturing industry. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) points out again and again—I am delighted that he has taken on board the importance of manufacturing industry—that only through manufacturing industry will we pay for the measures that we want. It is not so much the employment created in manufacturing industry, desirable though that is, as the exports and currency earned overseas.

Manufacturing output is so important. The Chancellor frequently speaks of manufacturing exports, but fails to take into account the problems of manufacturing imports; and the two have to be taken together. It is just as bad for imports to close our factories as it is for us to fail to capture export markets.

The forecasts show that at the time of the last Budget it was assumed that there would be a 3·75 per cent. increase in manufacturing output over the three years 1989 to 1991. The summary in the autumn statement shows figures of minus 0·5 per cent., minus 4·25 per cent. and 3·25 per cent.—a total of minus 1·5 per cent. A move from plus 3·75 per cent. to minus 1·5 per cent. is a loss of about 5 per cent.—a serious loss. The Chancellor mentioned the skills that we have in manufacturing industry, but he should travel around the country and talk to people who understand the problems of training for the skills that are needed.

I should like briefly to mention European monetary union. When we consider convergence, we should be clear what we mean. To some people, it means interest rates and inflation. That is not too difficult to achieve. What I mean by convergence is convergence of enterprise, industrial performance and wealth creation. It is what it means to ordinary people when they see their living standards rise, and it is the convergence of economic effects that I really wish to see. That is much harder to achieve. No one knows precisely how to deal with growth rates. There are some indicators and some ways in which it is obviously sensible to proceed, but the outcome cannot be delivered in the same way as that on interest rates and inflation. The extent to which we can influence growth rates determines my attitude to economic and monetary union.

I am aware that our control of the Bank of England is not as good as it should be. Often, control has not been exercised. There must be day-to-day independence in the running of the Bank of England, but that can lead to much wider independence and to the problems that every Chancellor of the Exchequer has had. That is why we nationalised the Bank of England; and many Tories agreed because of their direct experiences.

In future, we will not just give the Bank of England independence; we will transfer that independence to others in other countries and rely on ECOFIN. What is that? The Economic and Finance Council consists of 12 Finance Ministers. They will meet once a month. At least now we can just ring up the Governor and ask him to come along. In future, we shall have to rely on a Finance Minister going to the central bank—which, unfortunately, may not be situated in London—and he will have to argue with the other Ministers. There will be indecision, or perhaps no decisions.

I hope that we find solutions of the kind that I want to see—and I am delighted to support my party's statement on this matter. Let us hope that we find regional aid solutions. I am willing to be convinced, but I am afraid that the argument is only just beginning. If we find the right solutions, obviously we can proceed a little further.

The figures for Department of Trade and Industry expenditure have been £1·6 billion in 1989-90, £1·1 billion in 1990-91, £900 million in 1991-92 and £800 million the year after—the amounts are declining rapidly. Does that matter? Yes. I spoke to Lord King, the chairman of British Airways, earlier this week. I was worried about the treatment of Rolls-Royce over the purchase of Boeing aircraft. Boeing aircraft are being bought by British Airways, and in a parallel deal General Electric has been granted some form of entry into Cardiff to renovate engines. Rolls-Royce is being dealt a double blow: because its competitors are being brought into this country, and because of the failure to purchase Rolls-Royce engines.

Rolls-Royce is one of the most important companies in Britain. Much was expected from it. I asked Lord King why those decisions were made. He pointed out that it was because of commercial considerations. I asked him what discussions he had had with the Department of Trade and Industry, and he had had none. I asked him whether he had approached the Department, and he said no. I asked him whether the Department had approached him, and he said no. I do not believe that any other country—first world, second world or third world—would conceivably have dealt with the matter in that way. It is totally absurd. Rolls-Royce did not think that it was worth thinking about the country's importance, and the country did not think that it was worth thinking about Rolls-Royce's importance. Japan, Germany or France would not have acted in that way.

I am not a believer in total intervention or in totally free markets. We must look at the arguments on their merits and, in this case, the merits were outstanding. Instead of waffling on to the Confederation of British Industry, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry should have been looking at Rolls-Royce and British Airways and trying to find a way to reconcile their differences in the interests of our country, of the people who work there, and of our science, technical and engineering efforts. What happened is scandalous, especially at a time when there is a need for the Department of Trade and Industry. Thank goodness my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), who has the right ideas, is likely to be taking these matters further.

We are in a recession, although the Government have denied it. I called it a slump, which was not an exaggeration. The way in which the Government have let the decline continue is scandalous. When a Parliament runs its full term, there is always a danger that the Government will spend without caring too much about the consequences. The balance of payments is in deficit—it is, they say, at the bottom of the trough. If we are at the bottom of the trough, what will happen when we start

rising out of it? How will we recover? The Government have not told us anything, but this is the most serious matter of all. We have had our second deepest recession, bringing unemployment up to 3 million. Even with our balance of payments figures, we have not been able to achieve the steady increase in growth which was predicted.

This gloomy picture is made more gloomy by the fact that much of the money will be spent before the Labour party forms the Government. It will be a tough time for the Labour Government, but luckily we have the people and the means to deal with it.

6.6 pm

Sir John Farr (Harborough): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on what he said yesterday and today. He dealt effectively with the two points that were made from the Opposition Front Bench. His comments yesterday were excellent. People in my part of the east midlands, in Leicestershire, believe that his statement was excellent.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor not only on what he said and the manner in which he said it but on doing what many people want. How on earth can the Opposition fight, for instance, his plans to improve expenditure on health? Although I know that the NHS and hospital services should be improved even more, my right hon. Friend has struck the right note at the right time. People are determined to enjoy a better health service. Increasing expenditure by the amount planned—5 per cent. in real terms next year—is a feather in the Government's cap.

Yesterday, in highlighting the Government's expenditure plans, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor also spoke about the transport industries. British Rail and London Transport will have £1·4 billion extra in 1992-93. I have heard much of the debate, but not much mention has been made of the fact that, during the past 10 years, our national trunk road network has been transformed. Ten years ago, there was a dreadful backlog. Bypasses were much needed and our motorway programme needed to be extended. One can never say that we have a modern road network and that that is sufficient.

Wherever one goes, work is still being carried out, even in the remotest parts of Wales and elsewhere, and it is a delight to visit such places. Unfortunately, one cannot get to Northern Ireland in that way, but perhaps that is coming. One now takes for granted the many billions of pounds that the Government have spent on roads in the past 10 years, and I congratulate them on what they have done.

My right hon. Friend also touched on the issue of extra expenditure for defence. I should like to take this opportunity, looking away from the European scene, to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on sticking to his planned defence cuts. It would have been so easy to give way to—one could say—the regimental pressure which was applied to many in another place.

However, the world has been transformed. It is no longer divided into two blocs—the east and the west—glowering at each other and armed with nuclear weapons. Therefore, bearing in mind the continuing impact of the Gulf, it makes sense that defence spending is planned to fall between 1990-91 and 1994-95 by about 6 per cent. in real terms. In view of the transformation of the international scene, that is the least that my right hon. Friend could have done.

However, there is one issue that has not been dealt with to my satisfaction at least, and that is employment. One of the plans announced by my right hon. Friend yesterday takes account of the additional employment measures which were announced in June. Total provision for employment spending in Great Britain in 1992-93 has been increased by £0·5 billion. But is that enough? From the evidence of my daily post bag, I do not believe that it is anything like enough, and I shall tell the House why in a moment.

Yesterday, all my right hon. and hon. Friends rejoiced at the continued decline in public expenditure. I remember that, a few years ago, public expenditure as a proportion of gross domestic product was more than 40 per cent. Ten years ago, the Government promised to reduce public expenditure and, as my right hon. Friend said yesterday, in the past 10 years the ratio of public expenditure to the national economy has declined by more than five percentage points.

There is still a long way to go, but progress has been made, and in the next few years I hope that the proportion of public expenditure as a percentage of our national economy will continue to decline. It is still far too high, but a new Conservative Government after the general election can consider aiming for a target of about 20 per cent. as the maximum public expenditure element in our national economy. There will be many further candidates for privatisation—British Rail and British Coal to name but two—so it is clear that that figure can be reached in a few years, given a new Conservative Government.

One would have been ridiculed if one had said even 10 years ago that we should seek to achieve a public expenditure percentage of only 20 per cent. of our national economy. That is no longer so because, apart from the effectiveness of our policies leading to the next century, Britain, led by my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) and followed by my right hon. Friend the present Prime Minister, has pioneered a great shift from the policy of the state knowing best, of state intervention and of the individual counting for so little. We have pioneered a policy that the rest of the world is following, a policy of rejecting state controls and state interventions, of freeing the individual to do his own thing—good or bad—with self-respect and dignity and of being one's own master, as my right hon. Friend told the Commonwealth in Harare the other day.

Unfortunately, the Commonwealth is still one of the worst offenders with regard to human rights. I was glad to see the other day that Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia put his repressive policies to the test and secured the correct democratic answer. I hope that what happened in Zambia will soon happen in the rest of Africa and the world.

As I said, I want to refer to what I believe to be the too little that we have done for jobs. My right hon. Friend said that more would be given to the Department of Education and Science. He said that the number of university students, which is already high, would increase to the highest ever level by the end of the century. He rightly took pride in that, but I do not think that he has taken on board what I call ABE—adult basic education. Every day my post bag contains letters about ABE. I receive 15 or 20 letters a day about the failure—as the writers see it—not of the education of young people but of the training and

[Sir John Farr]

retraining of adults. As technology grows apace, as—I hope—the job situation begins to improve, and as the number of unemployed begins to fall, I trust that there will be more demand for expert retraining for adults.

It is wonderful to have a pattern to which youngsters can look forward. One in three will go to university by the turn of the century, but there are still many people who may be at work today but who, by the turn of the century, could be out of a job because of modern technology and the use of modern machinery. The purpose of ABE is to retrain adults, but it also plays an important role—more of a social role—in persuading people who have a mental or physical defect that they are not finished and are not for the scrap heap.

I could cite to the House numerous examples of people who, only through personal perseverance on an almost one-to-one basis and through devoted caring and teaching, have given tens of thousands of people hope and a purpose in life. Without ABE and without substantial funding of training, some people would be on the scrap heap of life. I want more money to be spent on retraining older people, particularly on the training in basic skills of those who are not physically equipped to do a job.

The recession has not yet ended. According to a report today in *The Times*, some parts of the country are now doing better, but unemployment in the midlands is climbing alarmingly. It is all very well for my right hon. Friend to say that unemployment is not increasing so quickly now and that there will be an improvement shortly, but many small businesses, employing two or three people, are still going to the wall. They say that it is because of the cost of repaying loans for essential new machinery and other new equipment.

The Chancellor should have reduced interest rates even further. He told the House that he has done as much as he can, but has he been entirely honest? Has he done as much as he could have done? Is not one of the bitter rewards of being in the exchange rate mechanism the fact that we are no longer free agents when it comes to interest rates? My right hon. Friend had to calculate whether a further 0·5 per cent. cut would cause us to bump along the bottom even more under the constraints of the exchange rate mechanism. We are already very close to doing that. However, unless my right hon. Friend cuts interest rates by a further 1 per cent. by Christmas, many companies will go to the wall, with the result that the economy may be beyond repair.

The exchange rate mechanism has provided a discipline for many companies. It may be an unwelcome discipline for the Chancellor. In my view, it has prevented him from reducing interest rates still further. Nevertheless, as a member of the exchange rate mechanism, we have been provided with independence. I do not believe that the Labour party would do anyone a favour if it introduced a single currency forthwith, were it to form the next Government. The adoption of a single currency after the next election would be disastrous for Britain, and disastrous for British jobs.

6.23 pm

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr). In particular, we appreciate his comments on the improved road network throughout the United Kingdom that has been brought about during the last 10 years. We on this Bench have good cause for feeling grateful to him for his support in times past in our modest request that communications between the constituent parts of the United Kingdom should be improved, yet avoiding falling into the trap of demanding exorbitant expenditure, thereby wasting national resources. The hon. Gentleman may be interested to know that a debate is raging elsewhere about the improvement of cross-channel routes being continued. My hon. Friend the Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs) would be glad to speak in due course to the hon. Member for Harborough.

I paid close attention to the competent and impressive speech of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), but it was not clear, at the end, whether he had finished his speech or whether he was merely giving way to certain Conservative Members. I am thinking of a phrase that we used when the Labour party was in power: it sounded as though he had terminated prematurely. I had hoped that he would utter literally one word—Maastricht—with all that would flow from that and all that we should associate with it, but we were disappointed.

To be fair, the Chancellor of the Exchequer did not linger on the question put to him: why was it necessary to raise interest rates in the first place, and what was the root cause of inflation? I shall not press that question on either Chancellor of the Exchequer or the Leader of the House, but at some stage I hope that the Chancellor will risk embarrassing former colleagues and lift a corner of the veil, for the benefit of us all.

We are indebted to the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) for what he said. He told us that it was important that European matters should be touched upon in the context of this most important debate of the parliamentary year. On the first day of the debate on the Gracious Speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) supported the Prime Minister's earlier assertion:

"What this country needs is sound money".—[*Official Report*, 31 October 1991; Vol. 1, c. 39.]

That ought to be the objective of any Government in their right mind. We have always supported that objective.

My hon. Friend the Member for Londonderry, East was justified yesterday in inquiring gently whether there had been a decisive shift away from that doctrine in the autumn statement. After a careful study overnight of the statement, I am bound to say that I share my hon. Friend's unease. We have travelled a long way away from the sound financial policies of the early 1980s when we—in particular, Enoch Powell—supported firm control of the money supply during the reign of the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe).

In the mid-1980s, that control began to slip. The cause was a loss of nerve on the part of some—if not in the Government, certainly among those who sit on the Government Benches—in the face of criticism of the alleged cuts. I say "alleged". The Government contrived to get the worst of both worlds in the last 10 years. They appeared to extol and even to boast of the virtue of cuts when no real cuts were made. That is the view of the hon. Member for Harborough.

We have begun the 1990s with a budget deficit. I should like to share the Chancellor's optimism that this dip is a one-off feature in a cycle of years. I hope that it is a cycle,

not a centipede. However, I am haunted by the fear that yesterday's autumn statement will give a degree of permanence to that deficit, unless the grip on expenditure is tightened.

I should also like to share the Chancellor's projection for economic growth. I hope, for all our sakes, that he is correct, but there can be no guarantee, no assurance, that will restore confidence. As the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) said today in *The Times*, if the expectations are not fulfilled, the £10·5 billion borrowing requirement may turn out to be an underestimate. The right hon. Gentleman was correct to warn of borrowing difficulties which would have an adverse effect on interest rates, inflation and capital investment.

Yesterday, the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) was right to confront the Chancellor—and, for that matter, those on the Opposition Front Bench—with one brutal reality. If the public sector borrowing requirement rises above 3 per cent. of gross domestic product, the Chancellor would, indeed will, be caught in a trap if Her Majesty's Government signed the present draft of the treaty of economic and monetary union.

I must not neglect Her Majesty's Opposition. This morning, I wondered whether their amendment to the Loyal Address was drafted before yesterday's autumn statement. If so, that was a great mistake. Today, it reads as though they were urging the Chancellor to go further and faster down the road to financial damnation. The Official Opposition are no help to Members on both sides of the House who are doing their best to save Britain from a suicide leap into a Jaques Delors-style superstate, with a growing roll of absurdities.

Both sides of the House would do well to heed the bugles sounding retreat from bodies ranging from the CBI to the National Farmers Union. Even in the City, many people are beginning to spot the traps, and they have not yet realised that the single currency referred to is merely a cover name for single economic authority.

It was all very well to give a nod of approval in 1972. I was then a member of the Conservative party, and the House was told that this was merely a body to promote economic co-operation in Europe. I was not certain whether I believed that, and one or two Conservative Members agreed with me and voted accordingly. Now, however, we have moved from general approval to consent to particulars. That is a different story, as the distinguished bodies that I have mentioned confirm.

The proverbial man in the street will, indeed does, increasingly resent Community intrusion into the nooks and crannies. The crucial test will come later, over the issue of control of supply. That issue was touched upon earlier. Control of supply has been the mainspring of our system of parliamentary democracy for hundreds of years. Whether we like it or not, and whether other people like it or not, that test will come at Maastricht next month, when the Government, pressurised no doubt by the Labour Front Bench, may be tempted to "sign up in principle". A form of words will be cobbled together by the Foreign Office in the vain hope that we as a nation can somehow escape the consequences of our commitment to a principle.

The two main parties in the realm cannot get away with that on the eve of a general election. What will their candidates say on the doorsteps? Will they be honest and confess that they represent parties which have sold the voters out? Will they admit that they will continue the process of reducing the House of Commons to the status of a county council? Will they assure the voters that they will not go through the pretence of redressing grievances, "Because, dear elector, you will have to approach Brussels, not Westminster."

Will the Labour and Conservative parties send a joint eve-of-poll message to the nation, exhorting the electors to make the most of the morrow's opportunity to vote in the final meaningful general election after 700 years of British democracy?

6.34 pm

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): As the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) observed, with his usual perception, the shadow Chancellor's speech was remarkable for what it did not say—for what was left out. Indeed, the House quite expected a second half after the interval, but that did not come.

Notably, the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) left out an exposition of the Labour party's official stance so far on taxation, with its official commitment to swingeing increases in the taxation of the incomes both of higher rate taxpayers and of standard rate taxpayers. [HON. MEMBERS: "Rubbish."] It is not rubbish, because the Labour party is officially committed to uncapping the national insurance contribution. I am surprised that Labour Members should say, "Rubbish." The official Opposition position—I use my words carefully here—is that they would increase the rate at which taxation is paid by higher rate taxpayers by about 22 per cent. and by many standard rate taxpayers by about 27 per cent. That is quite aside from any increases in income tax planned for later—those, too, have been threatened.

When one hears the right hon. and learned Gentleman speak about confidence, one stands amazed that he is not aware of the major torpedo effect that any such proposals for massive increases in personal taxation would have on confidence and on the British economy.

Bizarrely, the right hon. Gentleman also omitted any reference to European monetary union. That issue is important, and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, in a splendidly robust speech, dilated on it at some length. I do not want to speak too much about that matter; I simply marvel at one aspect of the Opposition stance. I understand the traditional position of the Labour party and the Labour movement—that the idea of a central bank, the Bank of England, being totally independent is anathema to them. For reasons dating back to their folk memory of the 1930s, they strongly believe that the Bank should remain under tight political control. For reasons related to their Keynsian love affair, they believe that they should have great freedom to operate ample budget deficits. Whatever the deficit may be, they would like the freedom to make it larger.

The Labour party holds those views sincerely, and has done so for most of the 20th century. Yet those two views are removed and totally undermined by its commitment to European monetary union and the draft Dutch treaty, which demands not only that the European central bank be totally independent, but that it includes central bank governors from completely independent banks and lays

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down all sorts of ferocious penalties for any deviation in budget deficits. Such are the wonders of the Opposition stance.

Let us leave the debate there until we return to it in a week's time, but it rather sounds as though the Labour party's attitude to the Dutch draft proposal is that it is yet another scrap of paper treaty—"Sign it and disregard it."

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor, in his projections, shows that he hopes for a steady non-inflationary recovery. He believes that it will come, and I hope that he is right. I think that the recovery will come, but it will develop in hostile surroundings. Conditions outside this island will be unfavourable.

The United States economy was not much mentioned either in the autumn statement or in today's debate. At the moment, it is faltering disastrously. One has only to look at the daily headlines in the *Wall Street Journal* to see the most catastrophic figures—plummeting house sales and retail sales, faltering confidence and weakening investment. Sadly, we see in the United States the classic double dip shape—the W shape of recovery. The line went up a bit in the summer, but now it has gone rapidly down again. That is very serious for us—perhaps not as serious as in the 1930s, but the United States still represents 28 per cent. of the world's GNP.

If the United States economy will not move—clearly, it is not moving yet, despite the further cut in interest rates there—that will have a depressing effect on the entire world economy, including the economies of Europe, and on our own economy. We might as well be realistic about that. Certainly, the present situation is sending President Bush into something of a spin as he realises that his political popularity and position may not be quite as impregnable as he thought. That is a difficulty that he must now face. The question is to what extent he can correct and overcome the debt-sodden, debt-deflated state of the United States economy by lowering interest rates further or urging Mr. Greenspan to do so. His efforts may have some effect, but it may be a very slow process and we must make that a factor in our equation.

After America, with 28 per cent. of the world's GNP, the next greatest economy in the world is Japan, with 14 per cent. The Japanese economy has been slowing down markedly, with the corporate earnings returns of the major Japanese companies now looking utterly miserable. What the Japanese call "slowing" may still be quite fast by European standards, but, as a motor of economic growth in the early 1990s—in 1992 and 1993—Japan will not be as powerful as it has been, and we must take that, too, into account.

If we look further through the gloomy catalogue, we may note in passing that the Scandinavian financial system seems to have collapsed and that the whole of Scandinavia is ridden with bankruptcies. We may also note that, as the former Soviet Union disintegrates, it is dipping into the abyss of hyperinflation, already running at 200 per cent. The most serious deficiency of all is that the former Soviet Union is not too clear what its currency should be—let alone how it should be stabilised.

As yet, there is no agreement on whether to have a single currency—echoes of western Europe, here—or on whether that single currency should be the rule and, if so, how it should be stabilised. The former Soviet Union may go for several different currencies—a Ukrainian rouble or dollar or whatever, for instance—in which case, no agreement has been reached on how they should be stabilised. That issue has not begun to be resolved and, until it is, the effects on the rest of us will not be negligible. The process will have a destabilising influence on the rest of the world economy.

I come to the final factor in my catalogue of gloom. We must remember that, despite the promise of at least getting some of the participants who contribute to the instability of the middle east to talk to each other in Madrid and elsewhere, that deeply dangerous man, Saddam Hussein, is still alive and well and living in Baghdad. He is beginning to wait for the time when he can use renewed oil revenues to build up his arms once more and so increase instability, and when he can again threaten his neighbours in the middle east—as he will do as long as he is there. All that adds to our difficulties and to the weakening of confidence at a time when we want confidence strengthened to produce a good world recovery.

It may be said that I have painted too gloomy a picture. I have done so deliberately, to set out the context in which we must struggle to move out of our recession—which we are undoubtedly doing. It will be very tough going indeed, and we should have no illusions about that. I draw hope, nevertheless, from some of the things that are happening —sufficient hope to lead me to agree with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor that we are on the path to a recovery.

This island's exports are strong; we are performing remarkably well on that front.

We have heard a great deal about the state of our manufacturing industry. In fact, the manufacturing position is not nearly as miserable as Opposition Members keep insisting it is. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said, our manufacturing output is 25 per cent. higher than it was in 1979. Moreover, in its latest document on manufacturing, the CBI says specifically that it has deliberately understated the size of the manufacturing sector because—as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor rightly pointed out this afternoon—throughout the 1980s, and as the information revolution has taken place, increasingly large numbers of the activities previously designated as manufacturing activities have been contracted out to other firms.

I beg the Opposition to understand that, in the past 15 years, the essence of the manufacturing process has changed. The trend has been to increase the knowledge content—the software content—in the manufacturing process, and to reduce the hardware content. That makes for smarter, better, more efficient manufactured goods.

In reality, the word "manufacturing" itself is a bit out of date. The "manu" element is no longer the main element. We are now talking more about the brain and, if anything, the word ought to be "mentefacturing" or just "facturing". The essence of the process by which the key exports that will drive the economy forward are produced is the very high degree of knowledge content—much of it contracted out from the traditional manufacturing sector. By harping constantly on the old traditional manufacturing process, Opposition Members betray their lack of understanding of the fast-changing nature of the industrial process and of where we should really be putting our muscle.

There is another cheerful conclusion to be drawn from the British scene—despite the world gloom that I have

described—based on the enormous inflow of foreign investment, notably from Japan, which has now invested no less than £13 billion in the United Kingdom. As the CBI again pointed out, in 1990 the Japanese invested more in the United Kingdom than in the whole of the rest of Europe. Those investments are accompanied by Japanese assertions—which we must take at face value—that the Japanese now regard Britain as the best European country and the one in which they will enjoy the best and most favourable welcome.

Above all—I hope Opposition Members will share my pride about this—the United Kingdom is the country in which the Japanese find work practices and co-operation at the workplace by representatives of the trade union movement by far the most satisfactory. The Japanese know that, whereas 12 years ago this country was cursed by perhaps the most counter-productive, difficult and destructive trade union movement on the planet, today —partly as a result of the many trade union reforms, partly as a result of the enlightened views of modern trade union leaders and partly as a result of changed work practices induced precisely by that heavy investment from Japan—we have one of the best trade union movements and some of the best work practices in the world. That is something in which we can all take pride.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): That is not what the Chancellor would say.

Mr. Howell: I am glad that the Opposition like that.

I draw cheer also from the German performance. Of course, the huge onward rush of the German economy is set to slow down a bit as the Germans run into a vast deficit to finance what was formerly east Germany, but a sort of German miracle is rolling along none the less. Many people may have doubted that this would happen, but there is now no doubt that the economy of east Germany—in sharp contrast, I am afraid, to those of Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia—is being turned round at a colossal speed.

It is also being turned round at a colossal cost, and the former west German taxpayer is having to put his hand deep into his pocket in order to finance the process. The net effect, however, is that east Germany will be operating in the way in which west Germany used to operate, not in five or 10 years but in two or three. That will provide a vast additional motor, as well as a vast additional competitive force, in the world market. Given that our exports to Germany are doing very well, they should do better still.

Finally, I suggest that we raise our eyes and look outside Europe. We may think that the structure of Europe is changing, but so is the structure of Asia, and there too, there are real prospects that might help increase our exports, provided that we get our policy and posture right. Around the southern edge of China, in Guandong and Fujian—the area of which Hong Kong is the pivot —the most fantastic growth is taking place, and a new miracle is unfolding even as we speak. The economy of an area of roughly the same size and population as Japan is beginning to grow at rates that make all our percentages in Europe look minuscule.

In the past year, Hong Kong has increased its exports to the surrounding areas by 29 per cent., and I am told by those who have travelled up the Pearl river recently that one can hardly tell where the Manhattan-like outline of Hong Kong ends and the Manhattan of the Pearl river, in the People's Republic, begins—so fast is the growth there of great new cities, skyscrapers and industries, all of which will produce a vast amount of wealth and products that will be highly competitive and all of which will offer opportunities for British investment, exports and markets in due course. That reinforces our need to get our management of the Hong Kong situation and its politics right so that we can benefit as mightily in Asia as we can in Europe.

Set against the gloomy tone in which I began my speech, those reasons show that we have opportunities. We have secured low inflation and that is very good. Interest rates need not rise, although there is much talk about upward pressure on interest rates. As dollar interest rates have gone down, the Germans have found that the pressure on them to raise their rates is drifting away. We will not be troubled by such problems. However, it will be very hard to seize the opportunities that are now opening out.

I have four brief propositions for my colleagues on the Treasury Bench to consider as they ponder how best to seize the opportunities that have been created by their policies as we come out of the recession. I will make the four points in question form, but of course we obviously want answers.

First, how do we mobilise more private sector funds for the infrastructure of this country? On the first day of the debate on the Queen's Speech, the Leader of the Opposition referred to private funds in public transport and said that the Government would not do that. The day before he said that—I know that 24 hours is a long time for the Leader of the Opposition—the Dartford bridge was opened. That enormous project involved private money mobilised in public transport. I hasten to declare an interest, as I am director of Trafalgar House, the company which designed, built, owns, operates and will eventually transfer back to the public sector, that enormous structure. I hope that that is one of many such projects to come.

I hope that my colleagues in the Treasury will learn lessons from that project. They will know that the restraints and constraints on the project were considerable and at one point threatened to sink the whole affair. If we are to develop such techniques, we must overcome some of the shibboleths and delays and difficulties that were embodied in the Ryrie rules back in the 1980s. They declared the mobilisation of private sector funds in infrastructure to be virtually out of bounds.

Secondly, how are we to build on the amazing capital-owning democracy that we have constructed which has brought millions of people into share-holding? Those shareholdings are shallow and passive. The dream of those of us who considered the capital-owning democracy a decade ago was of turning earners into owners in millions. We believed that that should give the capital-owning democracy real depth and involvement and that it should not simply be a matter of millions of people owning only a few shares. We must develop our ideas on that most aggressively.

Thirdly, how are we to create much stronger links between business and local administration and local government? I regret the fact that the uniform business rate has broken that link. There is a missing element in the regeneration and new dynamism in this country. We must recreate effective links between local administration and local business development around the country.

[Mr. Howell]

Finally, given that, like the United States, we have deep Anglo-Saxon liquid capital markets—which is fine, as they have mobilised capital very well—how do we combine them with more involved ownership and backing for long-term investment? The trouble with deep capital markets is that there is an easy availability of capital and a rapid transfer of capital and assets, but people are not prepared to hang on to those assets in equity long enough for long-term investments, particularly in research and development, to be mobilised and held.

I hope that my Treasury colleagues will address those four issues. They have set a good scene and there are many opportunities for us to pull ourselves out of the recession despite the unfavourable world circumstances that I have described. I congratulate them on the point that they have reached, but there is much more work to be done.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. Mr. Speaker announced at the beginning of the debate that it may be necessary to impose a 10-minute limit on speeches. In view of the current state of play, I am glad to inform the House that that will not now be necessary. However, if everyone is to be called, I appeal most strongly for speeches to last not longer than 15 minutes.

6.54 pm

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): The trouble with the right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell)—I say this without malice—is that when he says that he is being cheerful, he still sounds gloomy. He was right to be gloomy, and he should have remained gloomy to the end. There is probably more gloom about the British economy than about several of the economies that he mentioned in the gloomy passage at the beginning of his speech.

This debate is unusual because it comes against the background of the autumn statement, which is often debated separately, and the meeting in Maastricht at the end of the year, which may decide on economic and monetary union. No doubt we will have another debate before then on economic and monetary union. However, while the views of my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) on Europe have not always been similar to mine, I was pleased to hear him say that he could not see how it was possible for 12 Finance Ministers in ECOFIN—about which we hear a great deal these days—to control a European central bank established on the model set out in the present draft treaty prepared by the Dutch Government.

If we sign that treaty or accept its principle, that European central bank will be totally independent. It will be more independent than the Bundesbank, because no Government will be able to control it. If we pursue that path, we must realise that we will be transferring basic fundamental power over our economy to a supranational body of unelected, well-heeled bankers who will be able to take economic decisions that affect the livelihoods of millions of people. We should not allow that, because that would be a contempt of democracy.

The spirit of the age, and of Europe in particular, is for more, better and wider democracy. However, some people want to entrench canons and principles of economics into an absolute treaty. Devaluation, monetary control and inflation are important issues, but some people believe that they are absolute rights which should be enshrined in a treaty. I hope that we will debate those matters again.

Over the past six or 12 months, public discussion about the British economy has been more sterile than usual. The only questions that seem to have excited the commentators are: is the recession over? When will it end? Why is it not over? So far as I can see, unless there are fundamental changes in the British economy, the recession ain't going to be over for a considerable time because the economy is in such a state.

I disagree with the right hon. Member for Guildford. He does not like to talk about manufacturing. All right, let us talk about the production of goods that people buy in shops and the production of machine tools that industry wants to buy. Unless we can raise our production of goods, unless we can become more efficient and unless our manufacturing sector can become larger, there will be fundamental defects in the British economy and we will never get out of the recession.

Mr. David Howell: I am sure that that is a very good definition. However, the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) asserted that we were at the bottom of the league. The CBI report on manufacturing, even in its narrow understated way, shows that we are not at the bottom. Some countries are above us and some below. In terms of manufacturing value added, we are doing reasonably well. It is not the miserable story that the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues keep recounting.

Mr. Davies: The problem is that our manufacturing sector is shrinking. Perhaps certain parts of it are more efficient than they were 10 or 15 years ago, but the sector is shrinking. It now accounts for only 20 to 25 per cent. of the total gross domestic product of Britain. If we are to come out of the recession without increasing inflation, we need to sell more goods abroad and at home in competition with imports, but we will not be able to do that.

One has only to look at the economic forecasts. The forecast for next year is for a £9·5 billion balance of payments deficit. That is described in the Treasury's paper as a modest increase. It is an increase from about £6 billion to about £9 billion. On my mathematics, that is a 50 per cent. increase, against a background of, probably, rising unemployment, growth not exceeding 2 per cent., and, if not a recession, certainly no expansion in the economy. Our problem is that, however efficient it might be, our manufacturing sector is just too small to enable us to rely upon it. Its expansion could take us out of the recession without further inflation and increasing unemployment.

Sadly, whether we like it or not, Britain is now a service economy. Large sections of Britain, especially in the south of England, have opted out of the production of goods. In many parts of the south of England, only about 7 or 8 per cent. of the total employed population are employed in production—in making goods that can be sold and bought. Our service sector is now so large that it is an obstacle. It is concentrated in one part of the country, and it is an obstacle to economic growth and to our coming out of the recession without increasing inflation.

The service sector does not help the balance of payments. Only about 20 per cent. of what is produced in the service sector can be traded internationally. Everything

else is consumed within the national economy. If the economy were boosted, most of the extra revenue and income would go into the service sector, money would be spent on our imports, and the balance of payments would get worse.

Also, the service sector is inflationary. In most countries, a service sector is inflationary. For instance, Japan's service sector is very inflationary, but Japan is able to keep down its general rate of inflation because its manufacturing sector is so large and efficient. That is not the case in Britain. Until last October, the RPI showed that the service sector component in terms of inflation was 9 per cent. The ability to be more productive is more limited in the service sector. By its nature, the service sector of any economy is bound to be an inflationary part of that economy. Of course, unless we have a large efficient manufacturing sector, inflation will always be higher than it otherwise should be.

During the debate on the exchange rate mechanism, we were told that entry of the ERM would exert discipline and that inflation would come down as a result. That will happen in respect of manufacturing industry, but entry into the ERM has very little effect upon the service sector. The service sector is not affected by the ERM, because the services are not internationally competitive. A large service sector and a small manufacturing sector inhibit growth in the economy.

Ironically, we have a problem with unemployment in the service sector in the south of England. One reason for that is that most of the thousands of people who travel on those wretched trains to come to London to work are either unskilled or semi-skilled, to use the terms of the manufacturing industry. They work in shops, offices, building societies and banks. They sit in front of little screens and press little buttons, but no skill is involved. It is no condemnation of those people, but that is semi-skilled or unskilled work.

When there is a contraction in the economy, when the money supply has to be cut, there are no other jobs for them, because they have no skills. When the people who buy and sell shares in the City lose their jobs, they have nowhere to go, either, because they have no skills. Indeed, in many parts of the south of England, there are no other jobs to go to because the manufacturing sector—the productive sector—has been almost wiped out.

Another irony is that the service sector needs inflation. The Government seem to think, "If we can keep inflation down, everything will be fine and we will be electorally popular." Not at all. There will be inflation, an increase in the money supply and, especially, house price inflation. I was going to ask the Chancellor whether his views about defeating inflation apply to house price inflation. I am not sure whether they do. Of course, with house prices stagnant or falling, there are not many votes for the Government—certainly not in the south of England.

The service sector—the financial sector which produces nothing—needs inflation. It needs an increase in the money supply and high house prices to fuel conveyancers, estate agents, building societies and lending institutions. The Government wanted to create a property-owning democracy, and they did so, but that property-owning democracy needs inflation to maintain itself.

If we are to move to an era of low or nil inflation and to the European way of doing things, whereby house prices will not increase, I do not know what will happen to the economy of the south of England or to unemployment. Perhaps the Government have not considered those matters. The size of the service sector is an impediment to economic growth because it depends upon inflation to a considerable extent.

Another way of getting out of the recession is by increasing public expenditure. The Chancellor did his best in the autumn statement. His statement implies that we are not yet out of the recession, so let us borrow some more, increase the PSBR, and do the Keynesian thing which, a few years ago, we did not think we should do, and perhaps that will get us out of the recession by the time of the election. That will not work. Interest rates will go up.

The PSBR is also back. The PSBR was supposed to disappear—that terrible thing that Labour Governments had. Under the sound money party, it is back with a vengeance—£20 billion next year. If we take privatisation receipts out of the fiddle which is contained in the heart of the forecast, the figure will be £20 billion or £25 billion. Of course interest rates will go up. I do not believe that the PSBR can be financed. The Government are hoping that the election will have come and gone and that interest rates will go up to try to finance that PSBR.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) said that, if the PSBR exceeds 3·5 per cent. or whatever, the ghost of Jacques Delors will descend upon Great George street. He will be there all the time. When the IMF people came to us, they stayed in Brown's hotel for about two months and then they went. They filled in their forms and off they went. But Jacques Delors's ghost will be here all the time. He will not move. He will watch the PSBR every year.

The right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) seemed to think that somehow—I take issue with him, despite his great knowledge—it is because of a common currency that we need controls over public sector borrowing. If we transfer monetary authority and control of our interest rates to a European central bank and still retain 12 national Governments, there must be control over the amount of money that those 12 national Governments borrow, because that borrowing will affect the interest rates which the central bank will lay down.

A consequence of monetary union is control over our public borrowing. It must happen. If we are to accept the transfer of monetary authority, we must accept control over the public deficit or the public sector borrowing requirement, or whatever it is called. Therefore, there is no salvation in increasing public expenditure unless we deal with the fundamental problems of the British economy. Nor will there be any salvation through cutting interest rates, unless we deal with inflation and its associated problems.

The Government are in a hole, as, unfortunately, is the British economy. The trouble is that the British establishment—we have heard from some of its members tonight—do not really believe in production or in manufacturing industry. They do not want to know about manufacturing; nor do the so-called "chattering classes", who like to think of themselves as outside the establishment but who are really part of it.

They are prepared to march for all sorts of worthy causes. They will march against the bomb and for the ozone layer. They will write constitutions and entrench a Bill of Rights, but they will not march for manufacturing industry. They will not meet in Manchester, Birmingham, London or anywhere else to discuss the problems of wealth creation and of manufacturing, because such matters are

[Mr. Davies]

too difficult. Instead, they chatter away about all sorts of things. The pressure groups are the same. They come along with their begging bowls, not caring about the other pressure groups, because all they want is more money. Again, however, there are no pressure groups for manufacturing industry,.

As I have said, British society is not interested in manufacturing industry, but if we continue to take no interest in manufacturing and if we do not do anything to help it in the 1990s, our public expenditure will have to be restricted. Our public services will be run down and we will not have the trains, the roads or the health service that people want.

Our first priority must be the production of goods. In the 1980s, the Government lost a marvellous opportunity to try to do something about producing goods. They threw away that opportunity, and with it a chance that no other Government have had since the war. Although that opportunity has gone, my right hon. Friends know what has to be done and they understand the difficulties of doing it, but only a Labour Government can do it.

7.11 pm

Mr. Malcolm Thornton (Crosby): The right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) tempts me, as someone who comes from Merseyside, to say that I will not be lectured by him about the problems of manufacturing industry. The policies of the Government whom he served left a bitter legacy on Merseyside. Job after job was destroyed because of Government intervention and because of pandering to trade union practices which were a disgrace. That legacy is still with us today, not only on Merseyside but in many other parts of the country. That is a matter of fact which we must all accept.

The right hon. Gentleman began by saying that this is a rather unusual debate on the Queen's Speech. He referred to the forthcoming summit in Maastricht. None of us would disagree with him about its importance. One of the reasons for its importance is that it marks the start of a general election campaign. Let us be honest about it —it marks the last Session of this Parliament: some time, within the next six months or so, we will be going to the electorate. The electorate have the right to expect the political parties to set out their stalls and to say what they stand for and what they will do.

Today's debate on the economy is central to any political party's presentation of its future policies. That is why I spent some time this morning looking at some of the things that have been said about this matter. I read some of the comments of the Chancellor of the Exchequer who said that the latest forecast showed a PSBR of £10·5 billion this year and of £11·5 billion for the following year. That does not quite square with what we have heard, but those were not the words of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, but of the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) on 15 December 1976, when he came to the House for the ninth time since the Labour Government had been elected with yet another series of measures designed to try to restore the fortunes of the economy that his Government had so signally destroyed.

The right hon. Gentleman said that he wanted to reduce the PSBR and that its level of £10·5 billion comprised about 9 per cent. of the gross domestic product. He added:

"To achieve these objectives, the Government are proposing adjustments to current plans amounting to £1¼ billion in 1977-78 and £2 billion in 1978-79 . . .

The fiscal adjustment in both years will come mainly from savings in public expenditure rather than increases in taxation. This is for two reasons. First, although the level of our public expenditure, as a proportion of GDP, is no higher than in some other industrialised countries, it has grown much more rapidly in recent years than has our industrial output, and our industrial output itself is relatively low."

The House should remember that that was said by a Labour Government in 1976.

The right hon. Gentleman continued:

"Secondly—and perhaps this is not unconnected with our low level of industrial output—people at work are already highly taxed on their incomes, and face a further drop in their living standards in the coming year . . . Inadequate financial incentives to work and to invest could put our economic recovery at risk."

Who could possibly disagree with that? Is not that exactly what we have been saying—that if a Government overtax people, they destroy the incentive to work?

However, much more was revealed that day, when the right hon. Member for Leeds, East reduced local authority expenditure and said:

"There will be a reduction in housing capital programmes . . . New construction will be suspended or curtailed in several other central and local government programmes, including roads, other environmental services, school building . . . and capital spending by the water authorities."

That was the start of the legacy that we inherited when we took office in 1979.

However, that was not all. Let us consider education, a subject in which the House knows that I take a keen interest. The right hon. Member for Leeds, East said:

"Besides reductions in school building . . . the programme for current expenditure on education will be reduced by economies in the administration of school meals, by deferring the operation of Section 9 of the Education Act 1976 dealing with school milk, and by other minor savings".

That is the real effect of socialism, but there was still more. The right hon. Gentleman also reduced the defence budget, saying:

"Despite the big cuts which we have already made in defence expenditure . . . We are looking to defence for further savings of £100 million in 1977-78 and £200 million in 1978-79."

Even overseas aid was cut, when the right hon. Gentleman said:

"There will be reductions in the provision for overseas aid."—[*Official Report*, 15 December 1986; Vol. 922, c. 1525-29.]

That was the speech made by the Labour Chancellor in 1976. It was an appalling indictment of the inability of a party that was elected, having made very much the same sort of promises that the Labour party is making today, to deliver its promises to the British people. What a contrast to my right hon. Friend's statement yesterday.

Strangely enough, the figures tie in. My right hon. Friend is expecting a PSBR of £10·5 billion, but instead of that accounting for 9 per cent. of GDP, it constitutes only 1·75 per cent. of GDP. Instead of cutting the public sector programmes, we are increasing them. We are increasing expenditure on health, housing and education. I was delighted to note that the Government have adopted the recommendations of the Select Committee on Education, Science and Arts that we should increase expenditure to improve the standards in our schools. The House has heard me recommend that course many times. We have also seen increases for defence, transport and, yes, for overseas aid. What a contrast.

It would be foolish for any Conservative Member to pretend that mistakes have not been made. No Government have not made mistakes in their career. Sometimes those mistakes can be rectified and, indeed, we have gone a long way towards rectifying the mistakes that I believe were made about two years ago.

We have also shown that it is possible to expand services and maintain strong control of public expenditure. We have shown beyond peradventure that only with a strong economy can we expand the services that people want expanded.

We are seeing a new agenda being set for the 1990s. We have transformed the economy of Britain and done much to undo the damage done by the disastrous policies pursued in the 1970s, which led us into the position that we faced in 1979. We are seeing the benefits of that transformation flow through. Improved services are required, but they can be provided only with a strong economy and a Government who are determined to provide a strong economy. That means a Government who are not afraid to take tough and sometimes unpopular decisions.

We have taken those decisions many times. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor and his colleagues have shown their determination not to indulge in some cynical pre-election giveaway but to keep the economy firmly on track. A change in philosophy has brought about the transformation in the economy. My right hon. Friends show every sign of continuing to apply that philosophy with great benefits to the British people and the economy of Britain.

We cannot return to failed policies. They failed in the past and are doomed to fail again. When is a priority not a priority? I suggest that it is when everything is a priority. By definition, priorities stand out from other items. However, Opposition spokesman after Opposition spokesman says that every spending area is a priority. They do not seem to have learnt anything whatever from the past.

A study by Liverpool university's economic model shows that if Labour's policies were pursued they would result in declining growth, growing inflation, unemployment and worsening incentives. It estimates the cost to be at least £29 billion per year. It says:

"it hardly seems possible that they can so comprehensively ignore the lessons of the past decades . . . these lessons are:

1. that high borrowing and its accompanying money supply growth lead to inflation.
2. that worsening incentives, whether by taxation or regulation, reduce economic growth".

We are already seeing, in industry, the City and many other areas, shudders of horror at what it would mean if the Labour party were elected to government and pursued one half of the wild spending plans that it has put before us so far. However, Labour's Treasury spokesmen signally refuse to admit to the cost of those plans. They will not say what their proposals would cost. We have tried to cost the proposals. We have tackled Opposition Treasury spokesmen on whether they would back up the spending pledges. They have failed to do so.

In his speech yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor showed that the economy is firmly on track. I listened this morning, as I am sure that many hon. Members did, to the "Today" programme on the BBC. In the usual way, it had to scour the corners of the country to find Oliver Twists asking for yet more. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said this afternoon, it does not really matter whether we have given enough or whether we should give more or less. The fact is we have increased our spending programmes. When the Government do things which they are constantly urged to do, not only by the Oppposition but by other people, they receive little credit. I get tired of that.

I welcome yesterday's statement, because it sets out firmly the Conservative party's intentions not only for the general election year but for future years. It shows how we see the economy going and that prudent policies which are working will continue to work. The Conservative party puts that firmly before the British people.

We must expose the prospectus—if, indeed, it is a prospectus—that the Labour party put before the British people. We must show clearly that it is not costed and will not be costed. The only yardstick by which we can measure it is past performance. On past performance, the Labour party fails on every single count. My message to my colleagues on the Treasury Bench and all my right hon. and hon. Friends is that, during the next months, we must expose this sham. There is no quick and easy way to economic recovery, as the Labour party pretends, whether in manufacturing industry or elsewhere.

The Labour party must come clean and tell the electorate how it would create an economic recovery. It must cost its programmes so that the electorate can make a judgment. If the Labour party does not come clean and cost its programmes and continues to be unwilling to do so, the electorate will make their judgment. They will judge the party on its record, and that will mean that the Labour party will lose at the next general election.

7.26 pm

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central): I do not know whether the hon. Member for Crosby (Mr. Thornton) has read the amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition. The amendment sets out a framework for manufacturing. It is interesting to see several Conservative Members now reading the amendment. The Gracious Speech offered nothing to the 7,500 unemployed people, or 21·7 per cent. of the population, in my constituency. The Gracious Speech does nothing for manufacturing industry in Sheffield. The hon. Member for Crosby referred to manufacturing industry.

The manufacturing base in Sheffield was just recovering from the first recession in the early 1980s only to be hit by the second recession. I do not know where some Conservative Members obtain their advice or whom they consult, but if they spoke to some of the industrialists in Sheffield and south Yorkshire, which was a major manufacturing area and a centre of excellence in engineering and steel, they would find that people are extremely disgruntled. They believe that the Government have abandoned manufacturing industry and allowed it to be opened up to competition from companies in European countries and elsewhere which had support from their Governments.

That was graphically illustrated by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), the shadow Chancellor. He set out clearly where the Government had abrogated their responsibility to manufacturing and for wealth creation. The social consequences of that decline in manufacturing have been

[Mr. Richard Caborn]

picked up not only in my area but in many industrial areas by the local authorities. They have had to do so with reduced budgets. For example, Sheffield has to cope with a substantial reduction of £30 million in its budget, yet it must deal with all the social problems that have arisen from the decline of the manufacturing base.

Mr. Gregory: Why does the hon. Gentleman continue the Labour party's obsession with manufacturing? If he truly represented the people of Sheffield and south Yorkshire, he would give at least a cursory glance at the service sector. He has a major part of the Midland bank in the area and the area is a major centre for tourism. Yet we never hear from him or the Labour party about that. Instead, Labour Members constantly run down that part of the country and the electorate who work in the service sector.

Mr. Caborn: I am pleased with that intervention. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will take great care to listen to my speech because I shall cover many of the matters to which he refers. I think that he will agree that the Government have not supported industry in those sectors either.

As the amendment outlines, we need to create a framework within which commerce and the service sector as well as industry can flourish. That was once again graphically outlined by documentation on manufacturing industry put before the country by the CBI just before its conference. Yet again, the Government have ignored the advice. Yesterday, in the autumn statement, and today, they have walked away from the solutions that the CBI was asking to be implemented.

Like many other cities, Sheffield has tried in the face of adversity to develop a partnership not only between local commerce and industry but also including local authorities, the academic institutions, representation from the community, the development corporation and the TECs. That partnership has been operating for about six years, and it embarked upon a programme to find the highest common factor in the city rather than aiming for the lowest common denominator.

In the past three or four years, it has developed the infrastructure of the area—the airport and the supertram. Technology transfer has been developed. There is a new technology centre and science park, which is a partnership between the university, the polytechnic, the chamber of commerce and the local authority. Cable is another development, and Sheffield has developed an investment trust—the Hallamshire Trust—and Meadow Hall, a major service sector development. The partnership covered all those areas.

The development was an attempt to diversify away from a purely manufacturing base, to try to develop service industries, to introduce technology transfer into the structure and to ensure a transport system that was adequate to carry people and goods in and out of the area. There has been a combined effort, even in the face of all the obstacles that have been put in the way by the Government.

After a fairly meticulous survey throughout the country, about five years ago Sheffield decided to develop a centre of excellence for sport. We spent £150 million to develop some of the best sporting facilities in the world—the swimming complex in Sheffield is ranked as the best in the world—and we ran the world student games.

What was the Government's attitude? At first the Secretary of State for the Environment wrote to say that he would support the development but that there would be no financial commitment to it. After embarking on the project, we got little support from the media or from central Government. On 14 July 1991, we staged the largest sporting event that has taken place in the world this year. There were 6,000 participants and 100 countries were represented. When Princess Anne opened the games on 14 July 1991, seven Sports Ministers from around the world were present and more than 100 embassies were represented in Sheffield on that day. The International Olympic Committee was represented, and there were experts from around the world representing most of the 11 sporting disciplines to be performed in the following 10 days.

Those games were the first multi-sport event in the world to include athletes from the new nation of Namibia. That event on British soil was the first time that 200 young people marched under the flag of the new Germany. However, no senior Minister from the British Government was present—not even the Minister for Sport. When the Canadian Sports Minister asked, "Where is the Prime Minister for the biggest sporting event in the world this year?", we said, "We have not even got a senior Minister here."

I am telling the hon. Member for York (Mr. Gregory) what Sheffield, South Yorkshire and the north of England did—gave a window of opportunity to the world and left a legacy in Sheffield, and we shall reap the fortunes of it in years to come. The Government could not even acknowledge that type of development among the public and private sector, the academic institutions and 6,000 volunteers who made the event happen. Had it not been for the presence of my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell), the shadow Minister for Sport, the attitude of many sporting organisations from around the world would have been much worse. He at least smoothed over some troubled waters and said that, even if the Government did not support the event, at least the majority of the British people did.

I raise the subject because, as the amendment says, there needs to be a new structure within the regions to carry out the regeneration that the Labour party stands for and has been advocating for the past two or three years. A delivery mechanism is necessary. Many projects in the north of England such as the world student games are being stifled by centralisation of power. That applies not merely to central Government but to the media and to major decision-makers because they are domiciled in London or in the south-east.

A branch line of the civil service exists—a few puppets are put in an area and they feed back to central Government. All the decision-making is here. It is not influenced by what is happening in reality in the regions where wealth creation exists whether in the service sector or the manufacturing sector. The amendment challenges the structures that govern us, the structure of how decisions are made, decisions that impinge on industry and commerce in the regions.

The centralisation of power has once again been graphically underlined because hon. Members have been

talking about public expenditure—where will we get money from and where will it be spent? The North of England Regional Consortium studied the distribution of public expenditure. I shall not bore the House with all the figures, but some should be given and probably the most graphic are the figures for expenditure per head of population.

In the north of England in 1989-90 total public expenditure per head of population was £1,707. In the south-east it was £1,876. If one takes investment-led expenditure by the Departments of Defence, Trade and Industry and Transport, more devastating figures emerge. The 1989 figure for the north of England is £248 per head, whereas it is £546 in the south-east. There is a major disparity in the distribution of public expenditure and, moreover, between 1981 and 1990 the trend was worsening.

The overheating in the south-east has been aided and abetted by the Government's decision to continue that trend. That is in stark contrast to what is happening in the rest of western Europe. Every country outside the United Kingdom has gone for some form of devolution or regional government. The West German experience has been mentioned many times, and it has been suggested that that is the way that we should proceed. If one studies the West German experience closely, one finds that the lander structure has asisted the development of wealth creation and of manufacturing industry far better than the centralised structure that we have in the United Kingdom.

The amendment begins to tackle the north-south divide and to make proposals that may start to regenerate the under-utilisation of the north of England. We have to stop this debacle. We have to stop the Secretary of State for the Environment going round the country like a modern-day Haile Selassie, dropping crumbs from the master's table in the form of city grants. We are a modern industrial nation, but authorities are having to bid for a small pot of money. It is like a Dutch auction. We are trying to regenerate our industrial base in the north of England. Surely civil servants and those in London are not the fount of all wisdom. There are industrialists and people in commerce, local authorities and the trade unions in the regions who know what is required for the regeneration of their area. Yet the Government pay them scant regard.

The amendment is constructive. It lays the framework that the CBI and British chambers of commerce have asked for—not to pick winners and losers, but a structure in which industry can operate. It would give industry a fighting chance. Industry is asking for no more and no less than what is happening across western Europe.

In support of that argument, Howard Davies, the controller of the Audit Commission, in his article in the *Financial Times* of 28 October, said:

"Yet the European Commission is open about its desire to create a *Europe des régions*. There's a European Assembly of Regions and regional and social policy are oriented towards regional needs.

It's certainly arguable that without some sort of regional structure, the UK will be increasingly disadvantaged with no way of influencing Community regional policy."

Clearly there is support for the type of structure described in the amendment of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition. What Tory Members have said does not hold with industrialists, chambers of commerce or, indeed, the British people.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I call Mr. Gregory.

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As there is now a special report from the Select Committee on Health about the breach of privilege, may I ask you to confirm two points of procedure? First, am I correct in thinking that the matter will go automatically to the Select Committee on Privileges? Secondly, what is the position of the hon. Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor), parliamentary private secretary to the Secretary of State for Health, who has disclosed only this week that he was in possession of confidential information as far back as July, pending the reference to the Select Committee on Privileges?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: As I understand it, the hon. Lady is saying that there may have been a breach of privilege. If that is so, I recommend her to follow the normal course: to write to Mr. Speaker and inform him of the matter so that he can consider it.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. What is the position of the Secretary of State for Health, who acknowledged that the report was in the wrong hands and ordered its destruction, with reference to the Select Committee on Privileges?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That would be a matter for the House to consider, if the Committee reported to the House. If there is an allegation of a breach of privilege, the correct procedure is to write to Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Further to those points of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have not fully understood them, but is it true that they are about a leak from the Select Committee on Health, involving a Tory Member who is linked to the Department of Health, to weaken a report that was critical of hospital trusts? If that is the case, it is more than simply an individual breach of privilege; it undermines the whole Select Committee system that the House set up for the purpose of scrutinising and examining Departments.

It seems from my hon. Friends' remarks that a Tory Member has conspired with civil servants to leak information and even to arrange for amendments to be tabled to the report, which were then backed by Tory Members. I should be grateful for your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but it seems that all hon. Members who voted for those amendments in the knowledge that they were part of a shabby conspiracy should also be dealt with by the Select Committee.

Mr. Malcolm Thornton (Crosby): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As the Chairman of a Select Committee that has suffered from the effects of a leak, I should like to ask for your advice. Is it not the case that there is a procedure which this House has laid down and which should be followed in this case? When the procedure is followed, the appropriate Committee investigates the matter and then makes appropriate recommendations. The matter raised is not a point of order that should be pursued in this way at this time.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield) *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is this on the same point?

Mr. Hinchliffe: On a different point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As a member of the Select Committee on Health, my central concern is that we may well have witnessed——

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): What is the point of order?

Mr. Hinchliffe: I shall come to the point of order. It seems that the Department of Health may well have drafted amendments that were moved in July by a Tory member of the Committee—[HON. MEMBERS: "What is the point of order?"] My point of order is this: will the Secretary of State for Health make a statement on this matter? The House has a right to know whether his senior officials and his parliamentary private secretary were directly involved in this shabby affair.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You gave the advice to my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) that the matter could be taken to the appropriate Committee and that she should write to Mr. Speaker. This is more serious than that. Surely it is a matter for the House to decide as early as possible.

In view of the serious allegation that civil servants were involved in framing amendments which were then put to the Select Committee in the name of a member of that Committee, and if the Secretary of State was in any way involved, may I suggest that he should make a statement? Even if he was not directly involved, he is responsible for his Department. A request should be made to the Secretary of State that he should make a statement tonight. We should not wait until next week.

The Select Committee system was established in 1979 on the basis that the Committees would be separate from the Ministries. If, however, they have become merely a forum in which the Secretary of State can use some Members for his own party's purposes, it is a serious matter. The Secretary of State should come here tonight to explain what has happened.

Ms. Harriet Harman (Peckham) *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I will hear the hon. Lady, but I remind hon. Members that they are interrupting an important debate on the Loyal Address.

Ms. Harman: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We are facing an unprecedented situation. Would it not be right for the Minister to come to the House? It seems that the Government, having lost the arguments on the health service with their own Back Benchers, sought to interfere with the Select Committee to block its report on opting out. Should not the Minister be here to explain the complicity of his parliamentary private secretary in the activities surrounding this report?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All I can say to the House is that, if it is alleged that there has been a leak from a Committee, there are well-established procedures for either the Committee or the House to deal with it, depending on the circumstances of the case. There is nothing more that I can say now.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for copies of the report to be widely circulated on the Opposition Benches? Even the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman), the Opposition spokesman on health, seems to have a copy of the document. Is it on general release for all colleagues?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We have had a very good run on this. From what has just been said, the matter may be automatically referred to the Privileges Committee. We cannot take the matter further now.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Ms. Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I said that I shall take no more points of order. An important debate has been interrupted——

Ms. Primarolo: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have done all I can to assist the House and explain the automatic procedures in such cases.

7.50 pm

Mr. Conal Gregory (York): I return to the important matter of the Gracious Speech. I am sure that the House welcomes the opportunity to discuss the economy in detail.

The Government's approach to the economy is in stark contrast with that of the other political parties represented in the House. The Government are clearly committed to reducing inflation. Since we joined the exchange rate mechanism, interest rates have fallen from 15 to 10·5 per cent. and inflation has fallen from 10·9 to 4·1 per cent. —close to the level in Germany. Although the Opposition do not want to hear these words of wisdom, that means that in the past year, Britain recorded the largest fall in inflation in the European Community, which is no mean achievement. Manufacturers and those leading the service sector in insurance, banking, tourism and legal services, rightly fear that a forthcoming Labour Government would immediately opt for devaluation, and the rest of Europe recognises that genuine worry.

The Gracious Speech was heard against the background of encouraging reports from the Confederation of British Industry, the Association of British Chambers of Commerce and the Institute of Directors. Their combined view was that the end of the recession was in sight. Indeed, exports have risen to the point where the trade deficit with Europe has been eliminated.

The amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition refers erroneously to the Government pursuing policies that would damage investment. Quite the contrary: only the Conservative programme will ensure investment and reinvestment. It is in stark contrast to the Labour party's policy, because the Labour party is pledged by clause 4 of its constitution to renationalise companies such as British Airways, BAA, British Steel, British Gas, Rolls-Royce and even British Telecom.

Such socialist policies would be disastrous for Britain. They would mean stealing shares from employees, who had owned them perhaps for the first time, reversing companies' efficiency, putting union barons in control in place of competent managers, and raising taxes to record levels to pay for the dogma of greater socialist control. Not

content with that, Labour's policies would reduce the scope for individuals to invest in the British economy, which is the envy of the western world.

One recalls with a shudder the view held by travel agents of British Airways before denationalisation. They rated it even lower than Ethiopian Airways. Today, the denationalised BA is a flag carrier which is envied throughout the world. Similarly, the chance of finding a clean working public telephone was slim under Labour. Today, consumers find British Telecom's services vastly improved. In the days under Labour, who would have thought that they would find a British Telecom that would compensate for delays in receiving telephonic messages? Competition and denationalisation together have achieved that.

However, it is not only in large companies that Labour would aim to reverse our recovery. Yesterday, the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) made the extraordinary comment:

"There will be no provision for capping in any legislation" —[*Official Report*, 6 November 1991; Vol. 198, c. 472.]

that Labour introduces. That was not a throwaway remark but obviously a considered one. When my right hon. Friend winds up the debate, will he say whether he agrees that such a spendthrift policy would mean no control over the loony left? We could expect the excesses of Camden in cities such as York. Just imagine studies by Karl Marx becoming the subject of a council presentation. Such are the heroes of the far left that they could even invade local government working.

For far too long, public services have not been adequately accountable. The citizens charter should reverse that, because it will ensure that the individual counts. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's initiative will certainly be attacked by the trade unions, which foresee their cosy world being put under the spotlight. Sadly, I predict confrontation between the Government and trade union barons like the newly elected Transport and General Workers Union chief, who is an avowed communist. Instead of seeing the benefits of the charter, union activists in York simply carp. One despairs that they will ever act constructively and champion the cause of the individual, rather than big brother.

The Gracious speech referred to plans to denationalise British Rail. Such a move is long overdue. It would benefit users—passengers and freight operaters—rail employees and taxpayers. We have already seen the success of those parts of British Rail that have become independent. I refer to British Rail Engineering—BREL—Golden Rail, Sealink, the former BR hotels, and on-station catering.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport suggested last month that British Rail need not wait for the enabling Bill to accept competition. British Rail already accepts limited links with the private sector. In its publication, "Future Rail", it calculated private sector investment in freight as some £3 billion and has joint ventures in, for example, parcels, property development, station retail and catering outlets. Such collaborative arrangements are welcome, but do not ensure full competition, participation by employees in greater productivity or fair value for taxpayers.

Let the House consider a key part of British Rail that has been denationalised—BREL. In contrast to the days of the old socialist era, when BREL was under their control, its order books in York, for instance, are now full. There is today a spirit of confidence and export orders are being won. Let the House compare the figures for the basic weekly pay of BREL shop floor employees with the basic rate for staf at British Rail's maintenance division. Staff in the denationalised part of the company enjoy between 24 and 31 per cent. higher pay, although they do comparable jobs in comparable pay bands for the same 39-hour week.

In addition, when BREL was released from the shackles of the state sector and was privatised, most employees were awarded free shares which, according to their most recent valuation, were worth more than £450. Yet the Labour party threatens to renationalise such parts of British Rail, forcing staff in York and elsewhere to take a substantial drop in their earnings.

Although Conservative Members are disappointed that British Rail has not used its resources efficiently, we are not prepared to see its poor performance continue. That is why the Government announced yesterday that they have added almost £1 billion extra to their plans for British Rail for 1992-93. That means that British Rail's total external finance—borrowing and grant—will amount to more than £2 billion next year, which is substantial support. Indeed, it is greater investment in British Rail than in the days of steam. The high increase in taxpayers' support announced yesterday will allow British Rail to proceed with investment despite lower forecasts for revenue and asset sales. This will include the new passenger rolling stock through the channel tunnel from London and the north as well as freight wagons and infrastructure works.

Let us now see British Rail place its orders for better rolling stock—which can be built at its carriage works in York—and organise better on-train services, with catering in evidence on every train. I travel on trains frequently and I have yet to come across a train journey on which, throughout its length—unlike American and French trains —catering is available all the time.

Let us see more developments at railway stations. British Rail is one of the largest property owners in the United Kingdom, but its lack of imagination is deplorable. In the whole of Britain, there is only one railway station at which one can cash a cheque. Compare comparable cities — for example, York with Utrecht. At the railway station in Utrecht, one can find perhaps 250 shops, offices and restaurants to which people want to go. Is there a railway station anywhere in the United Kingdom to which one would take one's partner for a special lunch or evening out? There is not, and that will not be conceivable so long as British Rail stays shackled in the state sector.

Despite British Rail's lack of progress, the Conservatives are committed to the railway industry. We have given it the taxpayers' support it deserves and have not starved it of the working capital and investment in the way the socialists did. The paymasters of the Labour party —in this context, the NUR and ASLEF—deplore such success, deplore the idea of the staff having shares and deplore the export achievement and lack of dependence on the closed shop.

Looking introspectively and backwards, Labour refuses to say how far it will borrow, how much it will borrow and by how much it will increase taxes. Labour's policies could never achieve the Conservative success in terms of higher living standards. It is right to consider the Gracious Speech in that context.

Under Conservative rule, the real take-home pay of the average family man with a wife and two children has risen by over a third, compared with less than 1 per cent. under Labour. The Gracious Speech builds on that success,

[Mr. Conal Gregory]

ensuring a stable, non-inflationary recovery, a form of success which allows the individual to take some responsibility. That should be heartily welcomed.

8.2 pm

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): The hon. Member for York (Mr. Gregory) began by referring to membership of the ERM and attributed to our joining a number of beneficial results, which he cited. I shall comment on our experience in the ERM, an aspect of our economic situation which has not received the degree of attention it deserves. I shall also refer to certain developments in the economy in the period since we joined the ERM and make certain deductions from them.

The hon. Gentleman referred to what he called our current account deficit having been effectively eliminated during the last two years. As he knows, the figures show that for this year we shall have a deficit on current account of £6·5 billion, that for next year we have a forecast deficit of £9·5 billion, that in 1990 we had a deficit of £14 billion and that in 1989 we had a deficit of £20 billion.

In other words, in a four-year period we have loaded ourselves with debt on external account, in our current account transactions, of no less than £50 billion. That is, for the most part, short-term money because it has been attracted in to cover those monumental trade deficits. In no period of British history—under Labour, Liberal or Conservative rule—have we fallen so grievously into deficit in our overseas current account and trading account. It gives me no pleasure to recite those facts because they are extremely serious, not only for the present but for the future.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding) *rose*——

Mr. Shore: No, I will not give way.

The problem is not reflected simply in that appalling accumulated trade current account deficit.

The hon. Member for York went on to cite the falls in MLR or interest rates since we joined the ERM. He rightly said that from 15 per cent. in October 1990 it has now fallen to the considerably lower level of 10·5 per cent. But he omitted to set alongside that another highly relevant figure, which is that, when we had an MLR of 15 per cent., we had an inflation rate of 10·9 or, for ease of reference, 11 per cent., whereas today we have an MLR of 10·5 per cent. and an inflation rate of just over 4 per cent.

It is the difference between the rate of inflation and interest rates that gives the real effect of interest rates. The gap between the rate of inflation and interest rates of just over a year ago, when we joined the exchange rate mechanism, was a 4 per cent., as it were, real interest rate charge on borrowers. Today, 13 months later, the gap is 6·5 per cent. That is the real burden of interest rates on borrowers. In other words, far from the pressure of high interest rates easing, they have increased their squeeze, not only on domestic but on business borrowers, too. That has been a most unwelcome development.

We must take account of the fact that since October 1990, when we joined the ERM, our unemployment rate has risen by 50 per cent. Month after month there has been an appalling sequence of figures, from 1·6 million in October 1990 to 2·4 million today, and it will undoubtedly rise further.

I am not attributing the whole of the recession of the last 18 months or so simply to our membership of the ERM. But I am saying deliberately that it has accentuated and deepened the recession. Our membership of the ERM denies us one of the most important instruments of policy, and that is control over our exchange rate and interest rate policy by which we could have hoped to ease the recovery of our industry, growth rate and so on.

I believed at the time, and I still believe, that we joined at the wrong rate in October 1990, at DM2.95 to the pound, and that we joined, in a sense, against inadequate criteria for membership. The missing criterion in the series of criteria which the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) laid down in Madrid was basically about inflation. Our inflation rate had to narrow to the rates in the Community before we could join, and she added some other criteria. The most important missing element was that we should have taken account of our trade and payments current account.

If we had deferred joining the exchange rate mechanism until we had reached an approximate balance in our current account, we would have been much better served, and a much better judgment about the rate would have emerged. A fixed rate in the ERM which is apparently consistent only with an unemployment level of 2·5 million —roughly the current level—a period of nil growth in GDP and falling investment is hardly the rate at which we should have joined.

Let us suppose that, when we joined the ERM in October 1990, the rate had been perfect. What could we say about that rate as the months and years go by? We are very much concerned with our relative progress against the dominant German economy and currency inside the ERM. If we take 1989—not a bad year—as the base of 100, industrial development in Germany hit 110 in that year. It is certain to reach over 120 this year, and the IMF forecast for year three is 126·9. In other words, in three years the Germans will have increased their industrial investment by just on 30 per cent. By the same IMF calculations, the British figures are modestly down from 100 in 1989 to 99·3 in 1990, 87·4 in 1991 and the forecast for 1992 is 85·6. Therefore, the Germans will have increased industrial investment by 30 per cent. in three years, but we will have suffered a decline of 15 per cent.

What would the effect of that be, particularly if it were to continue for some time? Our competitiveness will be deleteriously affected by the relative performance of the two nations in terms of industrial investment, which is one of the crucial elements for efficiency and competitiveness.

Mr. Quentin Davies: I have been listening with great interest to the figures for investment in this country and Germany. Does not the right hon. Gentleman realise that the pattern that he is describing is a reflection of the fact that Germany and Britain are at different stages in the economic cycle? Had he chosen the three years previous to 1989, he would have found that a reverse picture emerged, in which we had a much faster rate of growth and investment than Germany.

Mr. Shore: I chose those three years not to give a distorted impression but because they are the three years since we joined the exchange rate mechanism. I could not take 1990 as the base because that was the year in which

we joined. Regardless of the different stages of the cycle, those are the facts that will have crucial effects on our competitiveness and costs.

At the heart of the argument about fixed exchange rates is the fact that different parts of an economic area or different countries in the trading world progress at different levels and achieve different levels of efficiency and competitiveness. If one country locks itself in for a period with another economy that is more efficient, as the German economy is and is continuing to be, it is bound to suffer closure of firms in its own domain, the growth of unemployment and, ultimately, the migration of labour to areas of new investment and higher competitiveness.

I fear that we shall find ourselves in that position. That is the argument against permanently fixed interest rates. The experience that I have related can be replicated all over the world. Nobody in their right senses thinks that the Americans should permanently fix the exchange rate of the dollar against the yen. Any such proposal would be greeted with hilarity. Japan's economic efficiency, based upon a huge industrial base and decades of high investment, is going ahead much faster than that of the United States. United States industry under those conditions would be progressively eliminated by the pressures of competition from the yen. The Americans are sensible enough to keep their currency in their own hands and adjust the dollar against the yen and any other currency.

I would have thought that we should be thinking hard about the experience of the past year and of how we are to deal with the problem in the time ahead. I believe that it would be excellent for not only Britain but probably most European countries if the German mark revalued and we all gained a certain benefit from that. I do not think that that will happen and we must take action if we conclude that it is necessary to do so. I fear that no action is being contemplated for the period ahead. We are imprisoned within the ERM at the present rate and within the first stage of EMU and the commitment to make a fixed exchange rate a permanent feature. We are facing the prospect of a single currency where there is no chance of any change in the rate of exchange. That is the major part of the treaty on economic and monetary union, and it has serious consequences for us.

I regret that we have not heard more from either Front Bench spokesman about the serious problems that will have to be faced in the next few weeks leading up to Maastricht on 7 December. Yesterday, I drew the Chancellor's attention to clause 109(b) in the draft treaty and the related protocol dealing with what is called "Excessive Government Deficits". The relevant articles describe what excessive budget deficits are. A budget deficit that is more than 3 per cent. of GDP will not be tolerated.

Not only that, but the Commission is giving itself power to take penal action against any offending country. Article 10 of the relevant protocol lists the measures that are being proposed. For example, an offending member should be made ineligible for European investment bank borrowing. An offending member should be required—this is interesting—to make a non-interest-bearing deposit of an appropriate size with the European bank in the same way as the Bank of England used to call up deposits from the commercial banks when we thought that that was a good way of correcting over-generous activities. The Commission will impose fines of an appropriate size and suspend new commitments by the structural funds, including the regional fund, until the

"excessive deficit has, in the view of the Council, been corrected."

I am sure that I carry the House with me in asking whether we are really going to subject ourselves—this country, this Parliament and this people—to instructions and rules as though we were a rebellious, irresponsible council? Are we really to say that we are not fit to govern ourselves and that these disciplines must be imposed on us? My right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) referred to the International Monetary Fund, which came to Britain to get agreement and stayed away after only a few weeks. This proposal imports the European Commission, with all its bureaucracy and authority, into our country permanently. It will be sitting at the Cabinet table dictating to the Chancellor what he should do.

What is the Budget judgment other than the fiscal stance or the extent of the public sector borrowing requirement? I pointed out to the Chancellor yesterday that next year's borrowing requirement will certainly be 3 per cent. of GDP, and I am pretty certain that it will be higher. It may even hit 3·5 per cent. or 4 per cent. That is no sin. The country is in a state of deep gloom and depression and needs stimulus. Anyone who has the slightest knowledge of how economies move and to what extent they go into cyclical periods of slump and boom knows perfectly well that to regulate the economy effectively and make it serve human and national purposes, there must be the power to deal not only with booms and to slow them down but with slumps and to lift people and industry.

That is only one of the constraints. The other is the establishment of a central bank. The Bank of England will become a branch of the European central bank, no longer capable of deciding interest rate policy or exchange rate policy. We shall even pool our reserves. Under the rules that are being prepared, and under the treaty provisions, we will not exist as an economic entity. Some people say, "Perhaps we could bring the European bank under collective ministerial control." My right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli and the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) properly referred to such rather vain hopes. We know that it is difficult for the Treasury sufficiently to control the Bank of England, but it will be much more difficult to control as one of 12 finance Ministers in an ECOFIN council. How absurd it is.

In addition, the European central bank is forbidden to take instructions from any organisation. The Community or the national states sign a pledge that they will not seek to instruct, to govern or to erode the independence of the European central bank. What does that leave? They can talk to each other and express opinions, but that is not good enough. That is the danger in merely these two provisions.

I have one or two points to make—these matters are of much importance not only to every hon. Member but to the country—not only to the Government but to my own Front Bench. Labour produced a document called "Labour in Europe" on 31 October. It clearly was meant to be more accommodating to Europe and to its development than the Labour party has been in the past. It seems to labour under certain misapprehensions about what is in store. It says:

[Mr. Shore]

> "The establishment of a monetary union would not require a uniform economic policy throughout the whole Community. The Commission has conceded that there should be no binding rules dictating the fiscal position of member states."

Those binding rules are contained in the treaty, yet the authors of the document have misled themselves into believing that there would be no binding rules.

The document refers to the importance of ECOFIN and how it will be a necessary and important political counterpart to Eurofed. It says that it is heartening to see that Labour's proposals have been taken up by the French Government and belatedly by the British Government. Is that part of the Government's proposals? I am not aware of any French pressure to subordinate the European federal bank to the ECOFIN Committee. If that is true, it has failed to emerge in the draft treaty that is due to be signed in four weeks' time at Maastricht.

I take it as inconceivable for any British Government to accept such draconian, alien authority over such intimate and important matters governing our national affairs. I take it to be doubly inconceivable that any Labour Government, who believe most strongly in intervening in the economy and using powers of economic management, would find it other than terrible and tremendously difficult to accept any such restraints. I am sure that the document was prepared before the draft treaty appeared, and I very much hope that I shall receive a reassurance from both Front-Bench spokesmen before the end of the debate.

8.26 pm

Mr. Kenneth Warren (Hastings and Rye): It is an honour to follow the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore). I may not agree with many parts of his speech, but it was in the finest traditions of the House. The Conservative party is lucky that he is not displaying his intellect on Labour's Front Bench. The Labour party needs him badly, even if we do not agree with him. I hope to be able to deal with some of his comments because, as Chairman of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, I share his grave concern about the future of manufacturing and trade in this country. My business interests are declared, but, contrary to some popular media suppositions, I am not connected with the Lonrho organisation.

The Gracious Speech offers a vision of the future that Conservative Members, and I believe the country, will welcome. Inflation is coming down; trade is going up and confidence is apparent. As Chairman of the Select Committee, I find that many people offer me their views and I am delighted to be able to report to the House that in the past several months those views have become not only more positive but aggressive in terms of the opportunity that Britain has to develop its trade and industry.

I should like to deal with three matters in the Gracious Speech, which I thoroughly support, where we can develop our ability to be more efficient, more constructive and more capable in the world of trade and industry. The first is where a company and the Government have a constructor-customer relationship, such as in the information technology industry, where annually the Government purchase £4 billion-worth of goods and services, half of which goes to the Ministry of Defence. Obviously, the Government's purchasing power is very important.

Secondly, the Government are a catalyst on which the efficiency of enterprise depends. Although I welcome yesterday's announcement in the autumn statement about increased investment in transport, greater consideration should be given to the value of efficient transport and to the efficiency of enterprises in general. Thirdly, the Government and enterprise are sponsors of economic development, as in research.

Whatever the political to-ing and fro-ing on manufacturing industry, we must remember that we have been suffering from a problem which has developed throughout the 20th century. At the beginning of the century, this country enjoyed 33 per cent. of world trade, but the level is down to 5 per cent.—the good news is that it is growing again. The Germans started at 22 per cent. and are now at about 12 per cent.; the Japanese started at 2 per cent. and are now at 15 per cent.; and the Americans started at 12 per cent. and are now still at 12 per cent. Most countries have managed to keep up their share. Unfortunately, we have suffered decreases. It is interesting that, in the post-second world war era, the main falls occurred at precisely those times when the Labour Governments devalued.

In looking at the Gracious Speech and the autumn statement, I welcome the increased receipts for the Department of Trade and Industry from the launch aid levy on airbus deliveries—the airbus is a magnificent aircraft, selling worldwide. I am pleased that the innovation budget will be increased from £100 million to £120 million, and that brings me to my second point about the relationship of the Government and those who supply them.

The top technologies in the United Kingdom could be listed as pharmaceuticals, chemicals and aerospace, and in those respects this country has an enormous, unchallenged capability in the world. There is some stiff competition, but no one doubts our capability. The tragedy lies in the second-order technologies—white goods, cars and so on. We have lost markets to companies that have shipped their goods across the world to take advantage of what, at one time, were our well-preserved domestic markets.

There is no doubt that, well led, the British worker and British management are unchallenged. They are not just blips on a screen—major achievements have been recorded. There is British Steel at Llanwern and Port Talbot. There is Nissan at Sunderland. There is also my old company, GEC Avionics at Rochester, which I left many years ago and which has managed to achieve far more without me than it did when I was there. We have many capabilities which are well worth acknowledging and we should not talk ourselves down when thinking about what we can do.

I should like to offer the House two maxims: good suppliers listen to their customers, and good customers listen to their suppliers. I hope that the Government will always take account of the problems that have beset us during this century and are still with us. We have had a declining share of the world market. Throughout the period of our membership of the European Community, imports have steadily grown in relation to exports. We must now consider the reasons.

The past 15 years are important in terms of the growth of industrial power in the world. That power is

increasingly shifting towards the western Pacific rim. Jobs in manufacturing industry in the United Kingdom have steadily been lost and we now have only about two thirds the number 15 years ago. The Japanese have retained about the same level of employment in manufacturing industry. Japan and other countries such as Germany—which has retained its manufacturing capability—have managed to achieve a substantial positive balance of payments.

I am in favour of doing all that we can in the service industries. We in this country are successful, particularly in terms of financial services in the City, in ensuring that we capture and hold world markets. We must consider why our manufacturing capability appears to be dropping away, bearing in mind the quality of the management and workers, whom I have cited as examples. Manufacturing does not deserve that decline.

I should like to direct the House to one approach which was suggested to me. I seek information all over the place in industry. This approach comes from a group which I know well, the Society of British Aerospace Companies. I worked in that industry for many years. I asked the society what its relationship with the Government was like. It is particularly important for an industry involved in leading-edge technology to understand what should be, what can be and what is the relationship with its largest single customer, the Government.

The group expressed some concerns which I wish to pass on to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and his colleagues in the Treasury, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Defence as a customer. The group has already put those concerns to the Government, but they are worth retelling. The people involved are not looking for handouts or subsidies; they keep on saying that they want a dialogue—a dialogue of benefit to them and to the Government. The Government are both customer and, in the case of the civil aircraft industry—I referred earlier to the airbus—sponsor. They want a dialogue with the Government to find out what they can do to be even more successful and to work to the customer's advantage.

During the summer, there was a defence review. Ministers assured the trade association through the Defence Industries Council that industrialists could discuss matters relating to the economic, technological and defence implications of possible changes to the defence equipment programme. Unfortunately, that did not happen, which is sad. Some 200,000 people are employed by that business and probably another 200,000 depend on it.

We should not just say that we will do something. We should ensure that there is a dialogue so that those who want to sell know what they can do. While we are all enjoying the decline in defence requirements, it is particularly important for the highly skilled and highly qualified scientists and engineers to say how they would be better employed as we take advantage of the changes in "Options for Change".

Aerospace employs 10 per cent. of the national manufacturing work force. It has a turnover of £12·5 billion. In the past year, more than £8 billion of goods was exported—in other words, two thirds of the industry's capability. As in France, Russia and the United States, we have an industry that is self-sustaining. The Department of Trade and Industry should listen closely to industry representatives, and I hope that the Department will pass their views on to the Treasury.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is in St. Petersburg today. I hope that he can also go to the Strand and Stanhope Gate, if a little alliteration may be allowed. British Aerospace and GEC are two examples. They would like to have a closer dialogue with the Government, and I hope to have the opportunity to talk about that matter with my right hon. Friend when he returns.

I said that I wished to refer also to the interface of business with government. It is not just a matter of the number of Ministries. I hope that, when I have my chance to stand down at the end of this Parliament, the Conservative party manifesto will call for the removal of all sorts of Ministries, such as the Department of Energy, that it will take training out of the Department of Employment and that it will get rid of the industry component of the Department of Trade and Industry and let trade stand on its own.

There are many jobs that do not need to be done in the Government nowadays. However, there is much more work to be done by the Government on the quality of communications, and that was touched on in the statement yesterday. I welcome the investment in railways, but there are so many people on the roads, at least when I am there. I should like a more innovative approach between the Ministry of Transport and other Departments to discover what the Government can do to facilitate transportation. It is not as if the roads are not there. One has only to look around Westminster to see masses of bus lanes, most of which are empty at all times. Perhaps a traffic authority for London would be welcome.

Let us consider an area to the east of Westminster. Today, I went on a tour of docklands. One would think that that area was designed as if no one understood that the motor car had been invented. There is a need for co-ordination among Departments—the Treasury and the Departments of the Environment, of Trade and Industry and of Transport—of an order that has not yet been achieved.

Another area in which the Government are a catalyst is the Export Credits Guarantee Department. I hoped that the Treasury would understand the necessity for British companies to be able to export successfully to the new markets of eastern Europe, including the Union of Soviet Sovereign States and Mongolia which said, "We have got rid of the communists, but you seem to have forgotten us. We have China on our border." Those places do not have the cover necessary for us to be able to export to them, but there are some major opportunities there. The Germans and the French know that.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is very demoralising and demotivating for industrialists if they feel that their Government are not prepared to back them in, for example, export credits at least to the extent to which their competitors in the other major western countries are being backed by their Governments?

Mr. Warren: I endorse my hon. Friend's remark. We are in a very competitive world, and where the Government are a catalyst, they must play the part that only Government can. I am not an interventionist, but there is no question but that there will be a problem with

[Mr. Warren]

ECGD and Iraq. I am certain that terrible losses will suddenly be revealed in trading with that country. However, the ECGD with its best endeavours believed that it should back companies that regarded Iraq as a good country to which to sell. I should not blame ECGD or the Government if major losses were announced suddenly. The point is that it was done, and the Government must support industry without qualification.

Another issue to consider is research, in which the Government are a sponsor in part if not in whole—certainly not in whole. Yesterday, the Chancellor announced a 3 per cent. increase in the research budget, which I welcome. However, it is worth mentioning the problem we face with the research base to ensure that industry—with the Government as catalyst through the ECGD and through the companies that I described earlier—achieves success during the next five to 15 years.

We have approximately the same population as Germany. The population of Japan is approximately double that of ours or Germany's and that of the United States is approximately double that of Japan. Let us consider the amount spent on research and development and acknowledge the fact that development usually accounts for 90 per cent. of all that is spent on research and development. There are some interesting figures which are worth retaining.

In the United Kingdom, we spend £212 a year per capita on research and development; the Germans spend £381, the Japanese £370 and the Americans £390. If we subtract from that the military component, the net amount spent on research and development in this country is £170 a year. In Germany the figure is £363, in Japan £368 and in the United States £379. In other words, we spend only 50 per cent. of the per capita spending of our major competitors.

If we add up the figures and take account of the volume of their populations, we discover that Germany is spending four times as much as we spend, Japan eight times as much and the United States 16 times as much. Of course, one cannot cover everything in one's research, but if we compare ourselves with, for instance, Germany, we realise that we must make greater efforts.

I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends at the Treasury will consider what incentives they can generate in collaboration with trade and industry to encourage the further investment in research which we lack at the moment. We know that the research payback over 10 years is about three times that required from Japan, but the problem can be solved and I should like the next Government to tackle it. I have no doubt that a Conservative Government will be in office after the next election. I say that in apolitical terms, as I have heard the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) today—it is inadequate for what is required for trade and industry.

The Government must understand that they are the largest single customer and they must therefore consider the way in which they purchase goods and services to make themselves a quality customer. What endears suppliers to Marks and Spencer and to Boeing and makes people queue up to sell to them is that they know that they are selling to quality customers and will be better off for that. That aim can be achieved. It would not be intervention but an acknowledgement of the Government as a catalyst and an acknowledgement of the fact that there are things that only the Government can do.

I support the proposals in the Queen's Speech, and I believe that the amendment is as ridiculous as one would expect.

8.46 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson (Coventry, North-West): It is always interesting to follow the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Warren). It is a pity that he will not continue to offer his services in Select Committee or in the Chamber. I feel that it must be something to do with his frustration with the Government over the past 10, 11 or 12 years, because his speech is in marked contradistinction to everything that they have said for most of that period. The Government have been singularly out of tune with the feelings and aspirations of manufacturing industry, which, as he says, wants not handouts but dialogue. It would perhaps go further and say that it wants above all an even playing field. We cannot allow the continuing exposure of our industry to unfair competitive practices which, as he knows from his experience as Chairman of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, is very much par for the course in much of the industrial in-fighting.

The debate takes place against the background of the second deepest recession that the country has endured since the second world war. It is the second recession engendered by this Government. There has been immense social and industrial damage. Let us consider the social aspect. There have been 85,000 repossessions and 45,000 businesses have gone to the wall. Those of us who are close to our constituencies know what that means to the individuals with whom we deal at our surgeries and to our other contacts in industry. I shall not follow other hon. Members who have discussed the personal and social difficulties.

In the west midlands, we remain rooted in our conviction and commitment to the manufacturing sector. I emphasise the fact that, when we talk about manufacturing, it is not to denigrate the importance of the service industries such as tourism or banking. Indeed, Coventry city council—I have the honour to represent that area—has done an enormous amount to diversify and spread the manufacturing base with great success. I am sure that even my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies), who made a remarkable critique of the service sector and who tended by comparison rightly to emphasise the relatively greater importance of manufacturing, did not seek to downgrade the importance of the service sector. The most remarkable single achievement by this Government has been the creation of a recession on an unprecedented scale in both the servicing and manufacturing industries.

Our greatest charge against the Government is their malign neglect of manufacturing over the years. There has been no strategy to harness national resources along the lines suggested by the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye. There has been no attempt to have a dialogue with industry, or to use constructively the Government's purchasing power and interface with industry. All that is beyond them. We do not want them to do things that are almost intentionally designed to hurt the manufacturing sector. The hon. Member for Hastings and Rye referred to the attack, on the Export Credits Guarantee Department.

That was a Treasury-inspired attack which hurt one of the organisations that was still helping our exporters. Why does there have to be such an unnecessary, wanton attack upon a highly expert, professional and efficient organisation?

We know that the United Kingdom car industry is 22 per cent. down. I declare an interest in the Jaguar car company, which is located in my constituency. I am also the chairman of a company that is heavily involved in manufacturing. What a time to persevere with a 10 per cent. car tax. What a time to mount another attack on the benefits of having a company car. The attack has been mounted at a time when the industry is at rock bottom and when one of our prestige companies, privatised only a few years ago, is reeling under the collapse of its market in the United States. What a time to take on that industry and try to destroy it. It is a well-known statistic—I am sorry to have to mention it—that Jaguar sold only 64 vehicles in July of this year. Silly things like that inevitably lead to damaging consequences, from which Coventry and other industrial areas are still suffering.

If time permitted, I should have read from the excellent report that has been sent to all hon. Members by the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders. It points out that one of the highest levels of car tax in the world is levied on the British consumer. No wonder that car manufacturers were 22 per cent. down at home and that those which survive are suffering from enormous cash flow difficulties and have had to make many people redundant.

Another example is the privatisation of British Airways. I refer to the interface between Rolls-Royce and British Airways. Would any other country have allowed a whole new generation of large, 90,000-plus thrust turbine engines to be placed with a United States company? I cannot believe that any other country would have allowed that to happen. The Government washed their hands of it and said that it was no concern of theirs. The consequences for Rolls-Royce will be dire—they may even turn out to be terminal.

At one time, we had a market in machine tools, but there has been a 50 per cent. drop in orders and the industry is in dire straits. Again, almost indifferent, malign and neglectful policies are at work. Why abolish 100 per cent. capital allowances? They have good effects. They provide money much more quickly, therefore easing cash flow and profitability problems and the financial deficit of the corporate sector from which manufacturing industry is suffering. If the money comes back more quickly, there is every incentive to invest. We are still living with the consequences of the Government's abolition of 100 per cent. capital allowances.

The west midlands welcomes overseas investment. The Labour Government laid many of the foundations upon which successful investment here by the Japanese has been built. However, Japanese investment can never be a substitute for our own domestically owned manufacturing companies. We do not have control over research and development, or manufacturing technology, or product development. At the end of the day, we do not have control. We welcome Japanese investment. I have to declare an interest, in that I am trying to promote a joint venture in the United Kingdom with a Japanese company. We want that to happen, but that can be no substitute for having our own nationally owned industries.

This Government have managed to engineer the second deepest recession in the post-war period. The first was between 1981 and 1983. If one took a view of that performance would as a manager, the Government's managerial performance have to be condemned as a dismal failure. The consequences should be dismissal. That is the sure and certain fate that awaits the Government whenever they have the courage to put their case to the electorate.

8.55 pm

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): I welcome the reference in the Gracious Speech to the fact that the Government intend to privatise some of the railway services. I look forward to the publication of the White Paper. The autumn statement reveals that the Government are determined to ensure that investment in rail and roads takes place. I am happy about both. We need a balanced investment programme for our transport infrastructure. However, road development has not been given sufficient priority. There should be adequate investment in our roads programme. Manufacturers in the west midlands and elsewhere in the country are increasingly adopting lean manufacturing techniques which require the arrival of goods as they are needed on the production line. No longer are there large amounts of stock from which to draw. If the product is not there at the right time, production stops. Investment must continue, if not accelerate, in our roads system. I shall look closely at the Department of Transport and make sure that investment in the roads goes ahead.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Sir H. Miller) has been vociferous in previous debates in his defence of the motor car industry. I pay tribute to him for his work. He has become the chief executive of the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders. He will make an outstanding leader of the organisation and bring to it the benefit of his political knowledge, as well as an ability to speak on behalf of the industry.

The car industry has been mentioned by several speakers, but no hon. Member has referred to it in complimentary terms. The industry has performed outstandingly well over the past few years and has stepped up its exports. Without such a performance, the Chancellor's statement yesterday about exports having improved dramatically over the past few years would not have been possible. The industry has been able to expand its production tremendously because it is more productive and more competitive than ever before, and we are gaining the advantage of inward investment and the introduction to this country of Japanese manufacturing techniques. That advantage lies not only in the Japanese car factories setting up here, but in the transfer of manufacturing techniques to other United Kingdom car manufacturing companies—Rover is an outstanding example.

The kind of manufacturing techniques that the Japanese adopt are no secret. In some respects, we have refined them further. It is a vital part of our investment programme that Japanese manufacturing companies come to the United Kingdom. We have seen the continuing development of the Nissan plant in the north-east, and rising up on the borders between the west midlands and the east midlands is the massive Toyota factory near Derby. There is also the development of Honda's manufacturing facility at Swindon. By the year 2000, those three Japanese companies will produce nearly 1 million vehicles between them.

[Mr. Roger King]

I give my hon. Friend the Minister of State a word of warning. One of the problems of manufacturing industry is not the need for greater acceptability in the export market, but a decline in domestic demand. That decline, which has gone on far too long, is attributable partly to the recent economic position of the country, which is now progressing quite satisfactorily, and partly to the high taxation on the British car. There is the special car tax and VAT, now amounting to 27·3 per cent., which is higher than in any other European country except one, and twice as high as the German level. It is significant that German car manufacturers produce almost 3 million cars a year. Because of their dynamic home market, they can produce cars for the world market, too.

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister—and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, when he prepares his Budget in March, or whenever—to ensure that the tax burden on the British car industry is reduced. When the companies dependent on inward investment—Nissan, Toyota and Honda—become established and their manufacturing plants are up and running, it will not profit us much if United Kingdom plants are in difficulty because of the lack of demand in the home market. We have to get the two activities in phase. I am looking for some reductions in tax in the next Budget. That will be vital for the progress of the British car industry, especially in the west midlands.

Alas, the truck industry is in a bad position at the moment—again, possibly because of the effects of the recession in British industry and in the rest of Europe. The problems are common and the truck manufacturing position is the worst since 1954. As the economy picks up, that is bound to improve.

Some significant threats hang over the British car industry. We have heard rumours that petrol tax may be increased to persuade both business people and ordinary users to choose more fuel-efficient cars. I give one warning about that, especially in the light of what was said by the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson) about Jaguar. If petrol prices go up, there will be an even more reduced market for the cars made by Rolls-Royce, Jaguar, Aston Martin and other specialist car manufacturers.

We must be careful about embracing extra taxes on fuel. They may have a significant and disastrous knock-on effect, to the disadvantage of large sections of the British car industry. By all means let us use the 10 per cent. special car tax. Let us reduce taxation, not increase it. If we wanted to encourage customers to buy more fuel-efficient cars, we could reduce that tax or abolish it altogether for such cars. There is a great opportunity there.

The United Kingdom motor industry is our biggest manufacturing industry, and it is still in good health, but it needs help in the United Kingdom market. The retail sector is feeling the effects of a prolonged recession. Unless we re-establish demand and start building it up, we are likely to jeopardise the tremendous growth in exports that we have achieved.

9.3 pm

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): Some things never change. Exactly a year ago, I was the last Back-Bench speaker in the six-day debate on the Queen's Speech, and I was followed by my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham). I spoke at 9.6 pm. This year I have done a little better, in that I am speaking at 9.3 pm.

I am often told that, as the youngest Opposition Beck-Bench Member, I should know my place, so I have decided to keep my words of wisdom until the very end. When my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland speaks, he will be able to sum up most ably.

I reviewed my speech of last year, which is always dangerous because one finds oneself wanting to repeat so much of what one said the previous year. So much should have changed and so much has not changed. A year ago, we were in the middle of a Conservative party leadership election, and I predicted that, no matter whether the present Secretary of State for the Environment or the present Prime Minister won it, the result would be the same—the devastation of our basic industries would continue over the ensuing 12 months. That is precisely what has happened.

I want to speak briefly about the footwear and textile industries, because I believe that the measure of the success —or lack of it—of our economy is reflected in the way in which those two vital industries are run. Representing a Leicester constituency, I know just how important those two industries are to Leicester, Leicestershire and the east midlands. The east midlands accounts for almost 30 per cent. of all the textile jobs and about 40 per cent. of all the footwear jobs in this country.

The hon. Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) and I have spoken about these two industries in many debates. The hon. Gentleman is chairman of the all-party textile committee. He knows very well what has happened over the past months and years, because he and I constantly have to react at local level to the devastating cuts in jobs in those industries. I was present to hear the hon. Gentleman's speech, and I must say that I agree with his view that there should be immediate cuts in the level of interest that industry pays on the money that it borrows from the banks. Those in footwear and textiles believe that only in that way can they cling to what is left of their industries.

Since 1979, footwear and textile employment nationally has fallen by some 46 per cent. That represents the loss of 203,000 employees—15,000 per year, nearly 1,500 per month, 75 per working day or around 10 every hour. By the time the debate on the Gracious Speech is over, still more jobs will have been lost in those two basic industries.

My plea today is that the Government should look favourably on the industries because a favourable climate and favourable conditions are necessary to generate business for the kind of enterprise of which they are made up. The manufacturers' plea is that they simply cannot cope with the large number of imports that are coming into Britain.

I recently obtained a list of aid given by the Turkish Government to the Turkish textile industry. A maximum of 40 to 50 per cent. is available in grant aid, depending on the geographical location. In respect of customs duty or VAT, exemptions are granted for the importation of fixed assets where those assets are used in the textile industry. In terms of investment incentives, up to 100 per cent. of corporate tax relief is available in the year of investment, and 40 per cent. thereafter. In terms of subsidised finance, 11-year loans are normally granted at subsidised interest

rates and with four-year periods of grace. That is the kind of support that other countries give these two very important industries.

In Leicester and the east midlands, the industries do not want special treatment. They realise that they are private companies that need to compete, but they want to be able to compete fairly, and the way in which the Government have managed—or mismanaged—the economy has meant that they have suffered especially severely.

The knock-on effect is devastating. The closure of factories such as Corahs and Kemptons, in my constituency and in the constituency of the hon. Member for Harborough, have left whole families devastated. The history of the city of Leicester—and, indeed, the history of Nottingham and other east midlands cities—is enmeshed in the history of the footwear and textile industries. If the present trend, and the present rate of job loss, continue, in a decade and a half, there will be no footwear and textile industries left in Leicester. That is our serious message for the Government and the Leader of the House.

I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland is eager to give us a summary of what has happened over the past six days, but I wish, none the less, to make a short plea about the banking system. It would be strange, after all, if I did not mention the Bank of Credit and Commerce International. The closure of the bank on 2 December and its liquidation will result in billions of pounds of lost export orders and will have the knock-on effect of causing more job losses and affecting a large number of depositors.

There are 40,000 BCCI depositors in this country. Some of them are sterling depositors, but the majority are non-sterling depositors. Nine hundred members of staff have lost their jobs over the past four months.

The depositors protection association has produced a Bill today, and it has sent copies to several hon. Members. Indeed, I understand that a copy has been sent to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. If the Government adopt that Bill as part of their legislative programme, that will benefit our economy.

In a modest way, that Bill would amend the Banking Act 1987 to raise the amount of money to be given to depositors when the deposit protection fund is triggered. The current limit of 75 per cent. of £20,000 is not sufficient. The Bill suggests that the figure should be raised to 75 per cent. of £75,000. The Bill's other main thrust is to ensure that non-sterling deposits are covered. That would be a direct benefit to the reputation to the City of London, because we have been very worried about the number of overseas investors who have threatened to withdraw their money from Britain because of the mean protection provided under the deposit protection legislation.

As I said, some things never change. I have spoken for a minute longer than I spoke last year. My one comfort is that next year I will be speaking not from the Opposition Back Benches, but from the Government Back Benches. Instead of making the last but one speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland will be the Leader of the House and he will make the final speech. By this time next year, we will have a Labour Government.

9.11 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): In my brief political life, I have experienced few things more unedifying than the sight and sound over the past few weeks of Labour Members hoping desperately that, despite everything, somehow the recovery of the economy can be postponed, and scratching around frantically trying to find a nugget of bad news about the British economy. That will do them little good. When the general election comes, the recovery in the economy will be palpable and incontrovertible and the British electorate, as before, will take a view of the Government's record as a whole over the past 12 or 13 years. As has been recognised internationally, that record has been remarkable by international standards.

The British people will also look for policies that give them confidence in the future. There are some striking contrasts between our policies and those of the Labour party in economic and other areas. For example, the Labour party remains as it has been throughout its history —the party of high and higher taxation. We are committed over time to a reduction in the tax burden on the economy.

With regard to industrial relations, the Labour party appears to have learnt so little from its unhappy experiences of the 1970s. Labour is once again committed to reversing several crucial aspects of our trade union reforms, including the banning of secondary picketing.

We have already examined the minimum wage on many occasions in the House. There can be few policies so utterly perverse as the minimum wage. It is certain to bring substantial economic damage to the country, and it will not benefit those whom it is designed to help because since those people are, by definition, on the lowest incomes, they are beneficiaries of family credit and that would simply be reduced pound for pound in line with the minimum wage.

Above all, one great contrast between ourselves and the Labour party concerns inflation. That contrast has been made clear this evening. The Labour party never even mentions inflation. That is the most revealing point of all. Once again today, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor made an absolutely explicit commitment to achieve and to maintain price stability. My right hon. Friend, in his first speech as Prime Minister, made it absolutely clear that the central priority was to defeat inflation.

We never hear about inflation from the Opposition. All we hear about are policies that they have devised without taking account of the risks of inflation which inevitably would ensue if their policies were adopted—that is, their policies of higher borrowing, higher spending, and deliberately increasing the cost of industry, for example through the minimum wage proposals. The British people simply will not fall for that.

Inflation is a terrible scourge. It has a terrible human cost—a cost to those on fixed incomes and to those on private sector pensions which are not index linked. Inflation is a very cruel scourge for those most defenceless sections of the population. It also has a major social cost. Inflation inevitably causes everyone to panic because their real incomes are being eroded with every day, week and month that goes by. In a desperate attempt somehow to defend their real income, people find themselves almost forced into militancy and strife and into competitive strikes and competitive demands for increases in nominal wages to keep up with the terrible inflation that they are suffering. Socially, inflation is an extremely divisive and destructive disease.

Of course, inflation has fundamental economic costs. The fundamental economic costs that are referred to generally in text books concern the fact that inflation erodes the effectiveness of the price mechanism. Beyond that, it fundamentally changes the savings pattern of

[Mr. Quentin Davies]

people in the private and household sector. It means that no longer are people induced to invest in productive assets. They are looking for stores of value that will somehow hold their real value despite inflation. We suddenly find people investing in residential property, real estate of various kinds, gold, works of art and antiques—anything—but not in productive assets. Also, of course, inflation increases uncertainty in the economy.

Labour Front-Bench Members are not enjoying this, because they are rightly embarrassed by what I am saying. They have not even begun to address the dangers of inflation. They realise that that is an Achilles' heel of their policies, which will mean that they will be completely incredible during the general election.

Hon. Members are apparently agreed on the need for investment. We all talk about investment. I say "apparently" because the Opposition's policies would not generate a climate that is favourable to investment. Inflation is highly destructive, because investment depends on relative certainty or on a reduction in uncertainty within which investment decisions are taken. Anything that increases risk reduces the inducement to invest. Inflation creates a climate of uncertainty. It means that anybody who proposes to invest must look for even higher prospective returns to justify the enhanced risk.

The Government have recently taken two vital measures to reduce the risk surrounding investment decisions. The decision to join the exchange rate mechanism has effectively fixed the parity and has reduced the uncertainty of one of the major variables in investment decisions—the exchange rate. Anything that produces the danger of a revival of the hyperinflation that we saw under previous Labour Governments would, as automatically as night follows day, lead people not to invest who might otherwise do so. Hyperinflation would undermine the confidence of industry upon which this country's prosperity ultimately depends.

Nothing has been more revealing throughout the debate than the fact that the Opposition have not said anything to give the slightest sign that they have any understanding of the dangers of inflation. That lesson will be learned by those outside the House who listen to our debates and it will be taken into account when they come to take their important electoral decision next year.

9.20 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): It is my duty to review the past six days of debate, which is a considerable challenge, but it is nice to begin with a point of agreement between the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) and myself. He was right—we did not enjoy his speech.

It is conventional to begin by referring to the speeches of the mover and seconder of the Loyal Address, and I do so with some pleasure. The right hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker) has, on any test, enjoyed an outstanding parliamentary career, which may well continue in another place after the general election. His speech amused and engaged the House. His recent role in the Cabinet of the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) must have seemed rather like walking with great care over the fine porcelain for which the city of Worcester is famous. I suspect that occasionally the right hon. Gentleman deliberately cracked a few pieces just to remind the right hon. Lady that he was around.

The hon. Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken) has always been an independent-minded Conservative. His speech again demonstrated his consistent commitment to the views that he holds. I thought, however, that as an old Etonian he was a somewhat unlikely herald of the classless society.

I should also like to pay my own tribute to those Members who are no longer with us. Alick Buchanan-Smith and I were neighbours in London. Early most mornings we would bump into each other when he was on his way for his regular morning swim, and I shall miss him. Alick was a most courageous and admirable man, and we shall all miss him here.

I also salute the courage and commitment of George Buckley throughout his life as a socialist who was taken from his family and from us much too soon.

No one, least of all you, Madam Deputy Speaker, could fail to miss the pugnacious Richard Holt. We always knew when he was in the Chamber, but I believe that even the sometimes irascible Richard would not have condoned the contemptible tactics of gratuitous abuse, innuendo and vilification that are being deployed against Ashok Kumar in the Langbaurgh by-election by both Conservatives and Liberals alike. It demeaned the Leader of the House to launch into such personal, abusive and unsubstantiated attacks on a Labour candidate. The Conservatives' losing campaigns have taken a very nasty turn, with undertones of racism that have no place in any decent political party. I believe, however, that Ashok Kumar will make history tonight and that his election victory will be to the great credit of the electors of Langbaurgh.

This is the 13th consecutive Gracious Speech from a Conservative Government. It is longer than most of its predecessors and more shallow. It is the first Gracious Speech from the Prime Minister and, in all honesty, it cannot be described as a blueprint for the classless society; nor is it a pathway for the more effective advancement of women. It completely fails to match the Prime Minister's fine words.

Of course, that should not surprise us, because the candour of the Secretary of State for Energy was disarming when he said recently on "Panorama" that the only difference between the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) and the right hon. Member for Finchley was one of style, not substance—there has been a change in style, yes, but a change in substance, no. After almost one year in office, the Prime Minister is failing even his own tests. He has no mandate. He has twice run away from his premeditated attempts to plan opportunities to secure one.

The real issue for Britain is not what is included in the Gracious Speech or what is left out. The real issue is that a Gracious Speech was made at all when the whole country really wanted and expected a general election. The real issue is the need for a new programme and a new agenda for Britain from a Government with the authority of a fresh mandate from the people.

Mr. Winnick: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Dr. Cunningham: I am sorry, but I cannot give way. I have already given up 10 minutes of my time in the debate and it is incumbent on me to move on.

The Government are a deadbeat Government whose authority has been undermined by every recent test of public opinion, in local elections and in parliamentary elections. The Prime Minister and his party have failed to win a single one of the eight by-elections since the last Gracious Speech in November last year, and they will lose three more tonight.

Nothing betrayed the lack of courage in the Government more than the manner in which the electors learned that they were to be denied a choice of Government today at the ballot box. The news was sneaked out by telephone calls to sycophantic editors by the Secretary of State for Energy. Apparently, even that task could not be trusted to the chairman of the Conservative party.

The Gracious Speech attempts to wipe the slate clean of the record of the past 12 years. Ministers and their Back Benchers pretend that all that has gone before, everything that they got wrong, everything that they supported and everything that they drove through this House can be obliterated by a change of Prime Minister. They will fail in that attempt at deception. Even though the Tory party made history last year as the first group of politicians to make a monkey of the organ grinder, it simply will not get away with it.

So apparently we are to be treated to an orgy of de-Thatcherisation. Or are we? Poll tax, the right hon. Lady's flagship, certainly is a rotting hulk—that is true. Then and at other times Opposition Members said some pretty hard things about the right hon. Lady when she was Prime Minister. But they are not half as hard as the things that Tory Back Benchers are saying about her now.

The present Prime Minister's U-turn on poll tax is interesting. He was an unswerving supporter of poll tax in every vote in the House, including when he opposed the so-called Mates amendment on banding. He said of poll tax:

"I believe the new system will prove enduring and a vast improvement on the status quo."

He said that at the Association of District Councils conference in 1988. He described the poll tax as

"a very much fairer and more acceptable system"

in a letter to one of his constituents in April 1990.

But later, when the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) was running for the leadership of the Tory party his tone was different. He said:

"I'll tell you about poll tax. We were bounced into it quickly because there was such a fuss about the rates in Scotland and we were bounced without thinking because of all the political fuss."

That is what he told the *Daily Mail* in November last year during the leadership election. He was also candid with the BBC "News at One" that same month. He said:

"One of the reasons we got into difficulties with the community charge was being bounced into decisions before they were fully thought through and before we knew precisely how it would affect people and what it meant."

That was the Prime Minister of our country talking about how, as a Cabinet Minister, he allowed himself to be bounced into decisions. Honest John? That is what he said.

The Government guillotined poll tax in and they guillotined it out. Now they expect us and the country to accept that they intend to guillotine in the next Tory tax as well and to make the same mistakes all over again. In 12 years they have made local government finance a nightmare for taxpayers, for service providers, for voluntary organisations and for councillors—even their own councillors.

The Tories epitomised Santayana's definition of fanatics:

"Those who redouble their efforts even when they have forgotten their aim."

No doubt those hon. Members who rushed into the Lobby to rush in the poll tax, those who proclaimed it around Britain with ringing declarations of undying support—*[Interruption.]*—and the right hon. Member for Croydon, South (Sir W. Clark), who is protesting from a sedentary position, was one of the leaders—are preparing to rush once more, uninformed, unprepared and underhand into the Lobby for its confused, capricious replacement. Their constituents will not forget their records.

The plain truth is that the windy rhetoric of the Tories on such issues cannot disguise their lack of any coherent philosophy for local government. Their proposals are devoid of sound principles and of any intellectual foundation. The poll tax fiasco expresses the weakness and the incompetence of the Tory Cabinet. They supported it to a man—and they are all men.

The Asylum Bill displays the sinister cynicism of the Government on issues of race and ethnic origin. No one wants the entry of bogus asylum seekers into Britain and the fraudulent applicant must clearly be rejected, but the genuine applicant fleeing persecution has historically been offered protection by our country and the Government's proposals contain the real danger that that will no longer be the case.

It is the height of hypocrisy for the Gracious Speech to state that the aim of legislation is simply to enable

"applications for asylum in the United Kingdom to be dealt with quickly and effectively."

The game is given away by the tabloid newspapers, which are such sycophantic supporters of the Government and deliberately choose to confuse asylum with immigration. If that is the Government's intention, why do they not take up the offer from the General Council of the Bar to enter into discussions on devising a speedy and just system of appeals?

The Government are engaging in scaremongering of the most squalid nature simply because a general election is approaching.

Throughout the past 12 years, Conservative Government have regularly pledged to the House and the country solutions to problems. In six of their 12 Queen's Speeches, they said that they would provide an efficient economy—they have failed. On six occasions they said that they would solve the problem of unemployment—it is worse than ever before. In six of their Queen's Speeches they said that it was their intention to improve the quality of our children's education—it is in decline. They said that they would improve the national health service on six occasions and they have finally admitted that they have been underfunding it. They said that they would tackle crime more effectively in eight of the past 12 years—crime is at all-time record levels after 12 years of the incompetent failure of the Conservative party. In 12 out of 12 years they have given firm commitments to their party for the

Their failures in each of those areas have been abysmal and are far too numerous to elaborate upon in this debate, but I shall examine one or two of them.

This year, for the seventh time, the Government tell us that they want to improve the quality of our children's education—that is our children, because their children do

[Dr. Cunningham]

not go into the state system. I choose my words with care. They do not send their children to the schools that they have been meddling with all these years.

Why do the Government persist in the policy of spending millions of pounds of our money—taxpayers' money—on their discredited city technology colleges when our schools suffer from a grave lack of resources? They are spending 50 times more on each child in the CTC than they do on each child in a school in Cumbria in my constituency. How can they defend that? They have allowed Cumbria to spend only £150 per pupil, while CTCs have received £7,450 per pupil from the taxpayer. That is a sign of the Tory party's priorities.

Is it that Cumbria's children lack talent or initiative? Of course not. Pupils at Wyndham school in Egremont in my constituency have won awards for science and technology. One group of young women has been given a national award for the design of an incubator unit for use in the third world. The truth is that state schools throughout the country, not just in Cumbria, are full of talented, able children who are being denied opportunities because of the Government's policies.

One small rural primary school in Lamplugh in my constituency has won several national awards and other school children could win more, given the opportunity. Cumbria is facing millions of pounds worth of cuts in its education spending as a direct result of the Government's policies, as are education authorities the length and breadth of the country. It is a scandalous waste of talent.

Education is not the only example of the Government's neglect. In the 12 months since the last Queen's Speech, unemployment has risen by 780,000-plus—a 50 per cent. rise. The Government, doubtless feeling that the increase, in the words of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, is "a price well worth paying", could not even bring themselves to mention unemployment in the text of one of the longest Queen's Speeches we have seen in recent times. There was not a mention of the plight of the unemployed.

The pattern of the Queen's Speeches over 12 years on unemployment is instructive. In the early 1980s, during the first recession, the Government expressed "concern" at rising unemployment and pledged to tackle it. In the past four years, they have had to fall back on saying that they will increase employment. This year, they obviously feel that there is nothing credible that remains for them to say on their record of rising unemployment. I fear that they are right.

On the eve of 1992, this year of all years, the Queen's Speech should have had at its heart measures to reduce the unemployment which now afflicts every region of the country and every sector of employment.

What is even more worrying is the acute rise in youth unemployment. Almost 300,000 more young people have become unemployed since this recession began. This Queen's Speech offers nothing for the young jobless in my constituency in Cumbria or in the country as a whole. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that young people will not forget what the Government have done to them, their job opportunities and their career prospects.

Britain's credibility in Europe is, not surprisingly, again in question. Far from being at the heart of Europe, Britain is once again being left behind—the Bruges group on one side and the Chichester group on the other, pulling the Prime Minister first this way and then that. The Foreign Secretary dances to one tune one day and to another the next, while our country's best interests are pushed aside. As the crucial Maastricht conference approaches, neither at home nor abroad is there a clear, consistent view of where the Tory Government stand. Last year at this time on Europe the Tory party was the prisoner of its Prime Minister. This year its Prime Minister is a prisoner of his own party.

The Gracious Speech is dominated by attempts to clear up the Tory economic incompetence and the manic ideology of the past 12 years. It has been contradicted on public expenditure within a week by yesterday's political opportunism in the autumn statement. On the question of financing public expenditure, why is it that, in the past 24 hours, on three occasions the Chancellor of the Exchequer and on three occasions the Leader of the House have been asked to spell out the Government's plans on VAT and on six occasions they have not had the courage to answer once either my right hon. and learned Friend the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer or my right hon. Friend the leader of the Labour party?

All that is the work of a Prime Minister who, after a year in office is—to use one of his favourite cricketing metaphors—a nightwatchman. He is a caretaker who will not last. He says that he wants women in his Cabinet—but not yet. He says that he wants Britain at the heart of Europe—but not yet. He says that he wants to abolish poll tax—but not yet. He says that he wants to reform the DTI and put the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) in charge—but not yet. He says that he wants a mandate of his own—[HON. MEMBERS: "But not yet."] As a cricketing friend said to me:

"I wouldn't have him in my team—he has a terrible propensity to no balls".

Under the right hon. Gentleman, the Tory party's bogus claims are on auto-destruct. House sales have become repossessions and business starts have become insolvencies. The state intervenes in every school, hospital and town hall.

Britain needs a new hope for the 1990s and a new agenda that will give people opportunities. They will never achieve those advances and opportunities with a tired and discredited Tory party in power. We look forward to the next Gracious Speech, because we shall write it.

9.41 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): I join the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) in paying tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker) and my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken), who proposed and seconded the Loyal Address. I also join him in paying tribute to Alick Buchanan-Smith who was a personal friend of mine, as he was of so many, and who was an outstanding parliamentarian and Minister, and to the courage of George Buckley. We were all sorry to hear of the death of Richard Holt, who made a big mark in this House and put Langbaurgh on the map.

I reject absolutely any charges of racism on the part of anyone in the Tory party in the Langbaurgh campaign. We have been drawing attention to the defects of the Labour party campaign, and I shall give just one example. The Labour candidate, quite fairly and reasonably, bought shares in British Telecom. The Leader of the Opposition

defended his freedom to do so. The point that we were making in drawing attention to it was that, if the Labour party had been in power, he would not have had the freedom to buy shares in BT. That is a perfectly fair point to make.

I begin, as I did last time, with brief but important references to one of the matters that comes within my sphere of responsibility—parliamentary reform. The Government are committed to sustaining the momentum of parliamentary reform. We place the emphasis on practical reforms that deliver real improvements in the management of the House, conditions for Members and working practices. This Session will see the new House management committees introduced, and, following the report by Sir Robin Ibbs, in operation for the first time.

We are now at phase one of the new parliamentary buildings—the first stage of a long-overdue improvement in accommodation facilities for Members. Much more needs to be done, but I shall always endeavour to turn a sympathetic ear to changes that will enable us to serve our constituents more effectively.

The pace of reforms to working practices is also hotting up. The Government's emphasis is on practical measures, on changes that will work to improve the hours that we sit and the effectiveness of parliamentary procedure. I expect to be able to report to the House soon the results of the review of the first year of the new European Standing Committees after the Select Committee on Procedure has reported. However, it is already clear that they are a real success, with enhanced scrutiny, better debate and, perhaps most noticeable, a reduction in the number of late-night debates on the Floor of the House. We have had seven in 1991, compared with 27 in 1990 and 37 in 1989.

The Transport and Works Bill will be a major step forward in the reform of antiquated, obscure private Bill procedures and should reduce by about half the number of private Bills that come before the House, while improving procedures in the area that deal with them.

The Select Committee on the Hours of Sitting, chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling), is carrying forward its work with vigour and enthusiasm. [HON. MEMBERS: "Slow down."] I have a great deal to say. I gave evidence to that Committee this week, and we all await conclusions with interest. I still believe that reforms in working practices and hours of sitting are essential to improve our ability to serve our constituents and our effectiveness as a legislature. I promise the House a full opportunity to debate the report from the Committee. I also promise that the Government will look seriously at all proposals for sensible reform.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West) *rose*——

Mr. MacGregor: Like the hon. Member for Copeland, I have reduced my time considerably, so I will not give way.

I wish at the outset to concentrate on three astonishing features of the debate, the first being the speech of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). The right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) got it absolutely right. The right hon. Member for Lagan Valley said that he was not clear whether the right hon. and learned Gentleman had finished or was still giving way, and my right hon. Friend referred to what looked like only the first half of his speech.

It was clear that the right hon. and learned Gentleman had astonishingly little to say, and nothing at all to say about Labour policies. Indeed, he failed totally to answer the two questions that were asked of him, and I know why. He does not want to be probed on questions of public expenditure relating to the Labour party and its tax proposals. That has been a big feature of today's debate, so I want to take the matter a bit further.

Mr. Morgan *rose*——

Mr. MacGregor: No, I will not give way. *[Interruption.]* I will deal with VAT. It was not necessary to spell it out, because the existing public expenditure plans are based on existing tax rates, with the allowances and excise duties indexed in the normal way. That is spelled out clearly.

Mr. Morgan *rose*——

Mr. MacGregor: I am not giving way.

I understand why the right hon. and learned Gentleman could not wait to resume his seat—in case he was asked again about expenditure. So let us try again. We know that the Labour party is committed to an increase in child benefit and pensions, covered by its eight new or increased taxes, a point that has featured in the debate.

We have heard throughout the past year from one Labour Member after another about how their areas of spending have a high priority. The Leader of the Opposition said:

"Top place will go to the health services."

The hon. Member for Copeland promises:

"Education is our first priority."

We had none of those commitments from the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East, although he said that education and training would be key priorities.

In one policy document, the Labour party says:

"A hugely increased programme encouraging energy conservation and efficiency is given priority."

In another, Labour says:

"First priority will be substantial extra investment in London on extra buses, tubes and trains."

In yet another, Labour says:

"Returning water to the public sector is a priority."

That would not be cheap. For the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), thousands of millions of extra pounds spent on housing would be an immediate solution to the homeless problem. He has also said that the Labour party was already committed to

"the rapid development of regional development agencies."

The hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clywd) said:

"Reaching the United Nation's aid target is a top priority."

I have left out the biggest spender of the lot, the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), who, every time he gets to his feet in the House, commits the Labour party to further increased spending on the social services.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): Nothing of the kind.

Mr. MacGregor: It is all very well for the hon. Gentleman to say that. He should read what his hon. Friend has said. The Leader of the Opposition said the other day, talking about education:

[Mr. MacGregor]

"We will continue with the scale of commitment at least at the level of 1979. That means, year on year, sustaining the commitment instead of letting it be eroded."

We know that that would cost an extra £2·6 billion. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East immediately tried to suppress that, and that is indicative of the battle that is going on in the Labour party—*[Interruption.]* It was said by the Leader of the Opposition himself.

Mr. Morgan *rose*——

Mr. MacGregor: I will not give way.

That is why we have costed the Labour party programme in the document which I have with me. It amounts to an extra £35 billion. They are all spending pledges given by Labour Members. They are all listed, and not one of them has been denied.

Nor can the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East claim that it would come from growth, because growth is already assumed in our plans. He knows that it would be a real-terms increase on top of inflation. That is why, on the costing basis, we are right to say that it represents another 10p in the pound on basic income tax. *[Interruption.]* I want to hear from the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East, because the Opposition must now come clean.

Which is it—massive increases in normal basic income tax, or does the Labour party intend to reject all the spending plans with which it has conned the electorate by saying that it will engage in them? It is a massive con trick —*[Interruption.]* Or will Labour go back to very large Government borrowing, on the scale that occurred in one year under the last Labour Government, of 9·5 per cent. of GDP and a PSBR of £55 billion?

Yesterday, we heard another commitment from the Labour party. We heard that it does not intend to cap any local authority. That was a clear commitment. So, in addition to the high increases in taxation that the Labour party would impose if it was ever given a chance, the community charge payer, or the council tax payer, would be ripped apart by high-spending Labour authorities, because there would be no capping. The Labour party has failed to answer those questions. Clearly their measures would be hugely inflationary.

Another astonishing feature of the debate was pointed out by my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies). None of the speeches of Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen has mentioned the importance of achieving, as we have done, and sustaining, as we are determined to do, a low rate of inflation. I am not surprised. Labour's record in office and its current policies would be hugely inflationary.

On Europe, the Leader of the Opposition gave a long answer during the Queen's Speech debate on 31 October. It was not as long as his previous answer on economic and monetary union, but it was close. In that answer, he said absolutely nothing until my right hon. Friend the Chancellor pinned him down and asked what positive extra policies the Labour party would commit itself to. He said:

"When I say that the Government are not positive, that is because they have sought no undertakings on regional policy, growth policy or employment policy."—[*Official Report*, 31 October 1991; Vol. 198, c. 22.]

By talking about those three areas, the right hon. Gentleman clearly underlines the fact that the Labour party has nothing to say about economic and monetary union.

Surprisingly, the Labour party document on Europe says:

"The completion of the single market contains the potential for great opportunities."

However, in November 1986, the Leader of the Opposition said that the single market would be

"a political failure of such magnitude that it may well endanger the future development and cohesion of the Community."

That shows his understanding of European matters. He was wrong then, he is wrong now, and he will be wrong in the future.

The only clearly distinctive point that the Opposition have made about convergence is:

"Labour's supply-side policies are the policies necessary for real convergence."

It was the Labour party's supply-side policies, including its industrial relations policies—all of which we had to reverse —which did such damage in the 1970s. Our supply-side policies achieved the growth of the 1980s.

On employment, the Labour party would sign up for a massive extension of Community competence and majority voting in the name of the social charter. Those ill thought out policies would add massively to the burden on employers and reduce profitability and employment.

On growth, the Labour party ignores the evidence of independent forecasters that, on top of the substantial growth rates that we have achieved in the 1980s, our growth rate will be just as good as the G7 average and faster than Germany's in the second half of next year. That is not just our forecast; it is the IMF's forecast.

The third element of European policy that the Leader of the Opposition accused us of ignoring was regional policy. As one of my hon. Friends pointed out today, it is typical that, when finally pushed into a corner and forced to be specific, the Leader of the Opposition picked for unqualified Labour party support the one area of European Community policy that would cost this country. An increase in regional aid would benefit other countries far more than us and would drive up our net contribution to the budget. In other words, we would be paying for it. That is why, although the Labour party is changing its stance on Europe and is still deeply divided, it still has nothing constructive to say about the future of economic and monetary union.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East talked about our record. He used some statistics about what has been happening to jobs and businesses recently. I remind the House and the country that, over our 12 years of office, every day 800 more households have become home owners, nearly 100 extra new businesses have been established—they are all net increases—and nearly 200 new jobs have been created. Our policies will extend that fine record throughout the 1990s.

The shadow Chancellor criticised the investment performance of British industry. Again, he was wrong. Despite the recession, which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor made clear is coming to an end, our national wealth is 23 per cent. up on 1979, and business investment is up 27 per cent. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said, there was a massive increase in business investment in the three years up to 1989. Currently, business investment accounts for a higher proportion of GDP than at any time

in the 1970s and early 1980s. Business investment remains high, and the latest CBI survey reported a sharp improvement in manufacturers' investment intentions.

United Kingdom manufacturing output is 25 per cent. higher than it was 10 years ago. United Kingdom manufactured exports have been increasing faster than world trade. After decades of decline, the United Kingdom's share of manufactured exports of developed nations has increased from 7·5 per cent. to almost 9 per cent. in the past five years. Those are the facts about the state of manufacturing industry, and industrial disputes are at the lowest for half a century. To answer the shadow Chancellor, this summer, the director general of the CBI said:

"Virtually everything associated with our manufacturing base is better than it was in the era of Government interference, lost orders, strikes and roaring inflation."

No prizes for guessing when that was. It was when the industrial policies of the Labour party were being pursued, to our damage, in the 1970s.

Government spending of more than £2·6 billion in 1992-93 on enterprise and vocational education is two and a half times more in real terms than in 1978-79. Companies are spending record sums of some £20 billion on training per year, and the CBI survey shows an increase in the year ahead, with more than 80 per cent. of manufacturers expecting to spend as much or more on training in the next 12 months. That is what the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East means by cuts.

Almost 1 million people will be helped back to work in the coming year by employment and training programmes. We need to take no lectures from Labour Members. I remind them that we are spending two and a half times as much on training and enterprise as they did. When they left office, they were training 6,000 young people. This year, we shall train more than 250,000. If the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East were concerned about employment and training, he would be prepared to condemn the TUC boycott of the employment action, youth training and TEC programmes. He has been asked before: will he now do so?

It is no wonder that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East does not want to hear the facts about Government spending on science and technology. The autumn statement shows that spending on science and technology in 1992-93 will be almost £6 billion. That is substantial investment in science and technology.

I shall take no lessons from the right hon. and learned Gentleman on education, because the Government's record has been extremely good. In the past 12 years, there has been a record increase in spending per pupil—up 42 per cent. in schools. His comparisons with the city technology colleges did not bear water. More young people are staying on after 16 than ever before. More and more are getting good grades in GCSE and A-levels. Above all, our record on the numbers entering higher education, universities and polytechnics is outstandingly good—one out of eight of the relevant age group in 1979, one out of four now. Not only are numbers increasing every year but most students qualify in universities and polytechnics, whereas in other countries that have similar numbers entering higher education there is a much higher wastage rate.

The results of our education reforms and improvements in the 1980s are being shown by the way in which our young people are leaving higher education with qualifications. One in four is very much better than before.

The Opposition cannot add up. They make promises that they have no way of sustaining. They have no commitment to the control of inflation. Their approach to European matters involves policies that are not at all in the interests of British industry. The Government's record is outstandingly good. The Queen's Speech will carry it forward and, when the time comes, I am certain that the electorate will choose our policies.

Question put, That the amendment be made:

The House divided: Ayes 193, Noes 323.

Division No. 2] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carr, Michael
Cartwright, John
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Cohen, Harry
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cunningham, Dr John
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Edwards, Huw
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Ingram, Adam
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Killoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McGrady, Eddie
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon

McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Mascher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Marlyn
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ken Eastham and
Mr. Jack Thompson.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'th's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David

Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment proposed, pursuant to Standing Order No. 32 (Calling of amendments at end of debate), at the end of the Question to add:

'but humbly regret that the Gracious Speech failed to present any coherent policy to secure for the people of the United Kingdom the full benefits of the economic, monetary and political union of the European Community and furthermore fails to contain any constructive proposal to combat environmental pollution; regret the inadequacy of the educational reforms proposed in the Gracious Speech to provide for higher standards and wider opportunity in the educational system; further regret the inclusion in the Speech of a measure to replace the unjust poll tax with a regressive and administratively cumbersome council tax rather than a more equitable local income tax; and finally regret the absence of any commitment to comprehensive reform of the institutions of government including Parliaments for Scotland and Wales, a Bill of rights and, in particular, in the last Gracious Speech before the general election any proposal to reform the electoral system for local, Westminster and European elections despite the deficiencies in the current system, which distorts the wishes of the people and produces divisive governments supported by only a minority of the electorate.'—*[Mr. Beith.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 19, Noes 320.

Division No. 3] **[10.14 pm**

AYES

Alton, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Beith, A. J.
Bellotti, David
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carr, Michael
Cartwright, John
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fearn, Ronald
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Kennedy, Charles
Livsey, Richard
Maclennan, Robert
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Salmond, Alex
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. James Wallace and
Mr. Archy Kirkwood.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'ts)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Cryer, Bob
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*

Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

To be presented by Privy Councillors or Members of Her Majesty's Household.

Mrs. Wise: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will be aware of the special report from the Select Committee on Health which I believe will be automatically referred to the Privileges Committee but which, at the moment, is the property of this House. I am sure that the House, with its customary generosity, would be prepared to listen to a personal statement from the hon. Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) if he cares to explain how he came to keep quiet about his possession at a crucial time of a confidential Committee paper. I would like——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let me make the position absolutely clear to the House. Following a decision of the House in 1986, whenever a Select Committee makes a special report to the effect that its work has been substantially interfered with as a result of premature disclosure of its proceedings, that report automatically stands referred, as the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) has said, to the Privileges Committee. The special report from the Select Committee on Health is now therefore in the hands of the Privileges Committee, and it cannot be discussed.

Mrs. Wise: Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. No points of order arise from that. That is a ruling.

Mrs. Wise: With respect, Mr. Speaker, and on a point of order. I was not asking for a debate and I want to make that quite clear. I am asking——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We cannot discuss it, because the matter is in the hands of the Privileges Committee. We must not prejudice in any way what that Committee is going to do about this matter. Depending on the Privileges Committee's decision, there may well be a debate, and that will be the moment to discuss it.

Thames Flood Alleviation Scheme

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

10.29 pm

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield) *rose*——

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are now on the Adjournment debate. I cannot take any points of order on the previous matter. I have ruled upon it.

Mr. Smith: I am grateful to have the opportunity to raise the subject of the Maidenhead, Windsor and Eton flood alleviation scheme. I am particularly pleased to see present my hon. Friend the Member for Windsor and Maidenhead (Sir A. Glyn), who obviously has a major interest in this matter.

The National Rivers Authority has applied for planning permission to build a seven-mile flood alleviation channel to the east of the River Thames. The channel would start just upstream from Bolter's Lock at Maidenhead. It would run through Taplow, crossing the main A4 road between Slough and Maidenhead and the main London to Bristol railway line, through Dorney, crossing the M4 motorway to Eaton Wick. It would run to the north of Eton Wick and the south of Chalvey along the south side of the M4, crossing the main A355 Slough to Windsor road. It would rejoin the River Thames some distance downstream from Eton and Windsor.

According to the planning application, which is dated January 1991, the estimated overall cost of the scheme is £51 million. I understand that that estimate has now risen to £58 million. I am sure that you will agree, Mr. Speaker, that, by any yardstick, that is a very large amount of taxpayers' money. The NRA should be required to justify that expenditure in a public forum where its arguments can be fully considered and its proponents cross examined. I have great faith in locally-elected planning committees, but I do not believe that they are in a position to scrutinise the NRA's proposals in the comprehensive way that that proposed expenditure clearly warrants. That is why I am today requesting the Secretary of State to call in that planning application so that there can be a full public inquiry at which all the issues can be properly considered.

According to the NRA, the net present value of the damage that would be caused by flooding, and hence the benefit accruing, has been calculated using a number of variables, and generally lies between £41 million and £69 million. A comparison of the benefit with the cost produces an average benefit-cost ratio of 1·2:1. That figure is recognised as satisfactory by the NRA and is within the limits required by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The ratio is produced by comparing the implementation costs of £45 million with the average benefit figure of £55 million.

A public inquiry would be able to examine those figures in detail. Questions could be asked about the failure of the NRA to include in its cost estimate the sum of £6 million of taxpayers' money that it has already spent promoting the scheme, or it could consider any of the indirect costs arising from the construction of the channel. Neither cost element has been included in the estimate. The NRA simply says that it is not the practice in the industry to assign to any scheme the costs of economic disruption during its construction. There will, however, be substantial costs of that kind. All the affected roads which are already very busy at peak times are to be diverted. It is inconceivable that those diversions will not cause traffic delays.

Then there are the environmental costs. According to the director of planning services of South Buckinghamshire district council, the environmental impact could be severe. He has expressed extreme concern about the nuisance which would be caused during the construction of the bridges to take the channel under the A4, the M4 and the London to Bristol railway line. By the NRA's own admission, noise levels around those areas would be in excess of 75 dB(A).

Although the NRA has not included indirect costs whether economic or environmental, it has included indirect benefits in its estimate of the total benefits of the scheme. That apparent lack of symmetry could also be challenged at a public inquiry. Questions could be asked about the so-called Maidenhead factor, which relates to the apparently higher level of affluence of the population that is likely to be affected by a flood than elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

The Maidenhead factor was exemplified by claims that were made after the flood in February 1990. At one property, an indoor swimming pool collapsed because its floor level was below the flood level. The cost was £12,000. At another property, the ground floor swimming pool and a jacuzzi were badly damaged. The cost was £14,000. The residential damages have been multipled by a suitable factor in recognition of the so-called Maidenhead factor. The question for a public inquiry is whether that is a sensible way of calculating the direct benefit.

Indirect benefit includes matters such as the loss of trading profit incurred by businesses in the area and the effects of traffic disruption and diversions. The cost of traffic delays on the M4 and major roads has been estimated at £1·3 million. More controversially, the NRA claims that the channel will be an environmental asset and will have value in terms of recreation and amenity. A value of £3 million has been used for that purpose. The latest figures presented to the regional flood defence committee on 26 July show a total scheme cost of £58 million and a total net present value of benefits of £56 million, producing a benefit-cost ratio of 0·97. However, the first benefits from the scheme are not attainable for sometime after the start of expenditure. When this phasing is taken into consideration, the benefit-cost ratio falls further to 0·85.

The National Rivers Authority is, in theory, accountable to Parliament through the Secretary of State for the Environment, but the financial accountability for a scheme such as this falls elsewhere. First, there is the Ministry of Agriculture. If the scheme is to qualify for grant aid, the benefit-cost assessment must show that the present value of all the benefits derived from the scheme exceed the present value of all the costs. This procedure is fine as far as it goes, but it precludes the consideration of alternative schemes which may be more cost-effective and cannot, by definition, provide a public forum in which the cost and benefit figures can be challenged.

Secondly, there is the regional flood defence committee, whose members will be expected to come up with the lion's share of the cash. That committee has already rubber-stamped the scheme but, to be fair, it is in no position to challenge it. Buckinghamshire county council has to stump up 3·8 per cent. of the cash, but jointly

[Mr. Smith]

appoints a representative to the committee with Bedfordshire and Essex. So Buckinghamshire is in no position to challenge the mighty NRA. Who is? That is the question.

I know that the National Audit Office has been carrying out a value-for-money study of NRA coast protection schemes. In that connection, it has employed independent consultants to assess the NRA's work, but there has been no independent assessment of this scheme. The NAO did, however, look at it at my request. It concluded:

"The scheme will probably be marginal on the basis of tangible costs and benefits"

and

"Intangible benefits will be critical to the justification of the scheme."

The NAO also said:

"The assessment of intangibles is an inexact science and we are sure the Ministry will look closely at these aspects."

Mr. Peter Bowles was navigation inspector in charge of No. 3 district—Marlow bridge to Staines bridge—from March 1960 to November 1984. He says that there is an alternative to the flood relief scheme, and that is to improve the drainage capacity of the Thames itself by removing obstructions and restrictions to flow which tend to increase river levels, especially when the watercourse is bank full and the weirs fully open.

Then there is a channel called the "York stream", which runs through Maidenhead. I have some pictures of it here, which I want to show to my hon. Friend. He will see that there is no flow. The York stream is either stagnant or it has dried up completely. Why? If the obstructions and restrictions to flow had been removed and if the York stream had been flowing, I doubt whether any part of Maidenhead would have been flooded in 1990. Yet it is on that flood and the damage to swimming pools and jacuzzis caused by it that the NRA relies so heavily to demonstrate the existence of a so-called Maidenhead factor.

All these—and many more—are questions for a public inquiry. The planning sub-committee of Buckinghamshire county council, which meets on Monday to consider the scheme, must inevitably confine itself to the planning application before it, and the planning issues arising from it. I should, however, make it clear that the matters to which I have referred are more than sufficient on their own to justify outright rejection. That is also the view of the Dorney and Taplow parish councils and the South Buckinghamshire district council.

The district council objects to the proposed channel because it involves development in the green belt and within a local landscape area. It would affect the character of the green belt. Its construction would be likely to result in excessive noise emissions, vibrations and generation of dust to the detriment of amenity, and the winning and working of minerals in this location would be contrary to the Buckinghamshire replacement minerals local plan.

The Dorney and Taplow parish councils naturally share those concerns. In addition, the Dorney council agrees with me that the fundamental question is whether the channel is needed. The council observes that the estimated total cost, including preliminary expenses, has now risen to in excess of £63 million, and that that does not include the costs of disruption during the construction period. The council has also noted the lack of water in the York stream in Maidenhead and questions the adequacy of flow in the flood relief channel. On the NRA's own admission, there will be an inadequate flow in one in three years, and no flow at all in one in 10.

The Taplow council has expressed particular concern about the disruption of the A4 Slough to Maidenhead road that construction of the channel will cause. It points out that, while the planning application lays great emphasis on the disruptive effects of a flood, it attaches less importance to the disruptive effects of building a new river. The parishes of Taplow, Dorney and Burnham, which will also be affected, form a green lung between the suburban sprawl of Slough and Maidenhead. This is fragile landscape to which the threat is one of continuous urban development between the two towns.

On Monday the scheme will be considered by the planning sub-committee of Buckinghamshire county council. A panel appointed to consider the scheme will recommend to that committee that the planning application should be referred to the Secretary of State. According to the panel, a key piece of information sought is the need for the project. The panel is minded to agree that the application is for a project of immense scale and impact and should be determined only after a far-reaching public inquiry.

The panel could support such a project contrary to the county structure plan and the south Buckinghamshire local plan only if satisfied on three counts: first, that the need is abundantly clear; secondly, that the way of tackling the flooding problem as set out in the application is undoubtedly the best of all possible alternatives; and thirdly, that a wide variety of outstanding issues are each resolved in the best possible way. These would include access, environmental disturbance and noise, water levels and assured flow for water sweetening and so on.

In summary, this is a massive infrastructure project on which it is proposed to spend £58 million of taxpayers' money. While there is clearly a potential flooding problem which needs to be addressed, the case for this relief channel has not been made. It is doubtful whether the claimed benefits justify the substantial costs. These are matters which can be determined only by a public inquiry and I hope, therefore, that the Secretary of State will agree to call the planning application in.

10.43 pm

Sir Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead): I agree that all the facts which my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) has said are contained in the 1991 paper are true. However, he and I differ in a fundamental way. In 1947, 1954, 1959, 1974 and 1990—particularly in 1947—the flooding in Maidenhead was extensive. We had to have waders and tractors to go through the streets. The damage done was considerable. We must look for a scheme that will ensure that that does not happen again.

I agree with my hon. Friend that, if the Berkshire and Buckinghamshire county councils disagreed, the Minister could call the application in if he wished. If the councils did not disagree, he could call it in anyway.

I agree with my hon. Friend to this extent—a public inquiry may be necessary. It is a large sum of money and it is especially favourable to Maidenhead and not to his constituents, I will give him that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield has already enlarged upon the facts in the fine document which

was produced in 1991 and I can only assume that they are correct. The crux of the matter is, how do we prevent a 1947 or 1990 flood occurring again? It is a question of which side of the river you take—the Maidenhead or the Buckinghamshire side. On the Maidenhead side, it would mean considerable expense and demolition of properties—it would be much more expensive. Again I agree with my hon. Friend, if that money is to be expended it might be a good thing if there were a public inquiry.

I humbly suggest that the two counties should get together. If they cannot agree, there will have to be a public inquiry. If they agree and the Minister thinks that matters should be re-examined, I think that he has the power—correct me if I am wrong—to call them in.

I suggest that we proceed along those lines and look for the most economic way to alleviate my constituents' problems while not doing too much damage to my hon. Friend's constituents. Unfortunately, Maidenhead has suffered greater damage than Buckinghamshire, and obviously we take the matter much more seriously. If we can proceed along a sensible line and if Buckinghamshire and Berkshire county councils lock their heads together and produce a worthwhile scheme, that is fine. If they cannot agree it will have to go to a public inquiry. In any case it is always up to the Minister.

As my hon. Friend says, the scheme is expensive. It costs £59 million—it is not tuppence—but I think that it is worthwhile. If the Minister does not consider it worth while, all he has to do is call it in and either have a public inquiry or decide for himself whether it is a good scheme. A public inquiry might be more beneficial because, as my hon. Friend said, it would bring out the details of the scheme.

We have suffered grave and terrible damage. I can remember going about in waders, with tractors trying to get houses dry. I can remember the damage to furniture and carpets, which was immense in 1974. In 1947, it was even worse. It will happen again, whatever anybody says. It happens roughly every ten years.

Are we entitled to spend such a sum of money or not? The right thing is for the two counties to get together and to make a joint decision and, if necessary, to have a public inquiry or to leave it to the Minister to call the scheme in if he is not satisfied. I realise that there are several faults in it, which affect my hon. Friend, but on balance it is a good scheme and should be adopted.

10.49 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) for allowing me to intervene briefly in this debate.

I am a vice-president of the River Thames Society, which is the administrative society for the whole river. Such a scheme would not only affect the constituents of the hon. Member for Beaconsfield and the hon. Member for Windsor and Maidenhead (Sir A. Glyn). If the planning application is persisted with, I support the plea for calling it in, for the reasons given by the hon. Member for Beaconsfield.

I also declare another non-commercial interest as one of the members of the Thames Traditional Boat Society, which is concerned with the maintenance, preservation and use of the traditional hand-propelled craft of the Thames—dinghies, skiffs, canoes and punts.

Both hon. Gentlemen explained the balance of public consideration to be taken into account. Two other matters weigh in the direction of a public inquiry. The scheme is one for an imaginatively landscaped, artificial but natural-looking, additional channel to parallel the Thames. That brings in the matter of recreational use—angling or, perhaps, boating. The present scheme excludes boats propelled by oar, pole and paddle. There is the matter of future planning and the effect on structural plans for the area. Most important, although hitherto unmentioned, are the possible effects of flooding or otherwise downstream of the flood relief area. If water is moved more quickly from one area, what are the effects downstream?

Those are wide-ranging and sometimes technical matters. Even if the two counties agree, this should be a matter for a call-in. Therefore, I am pleased to support this plea.

10.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tim Yeo): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), who is always an eloquent champion of his constituents' interests. He is also a noted expert on financial matters, and tonight he has given the House a clear explanation of complex proposals. I have no doubt that his opinion will carry great weight.

We have also heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Windsor and Maidenhead (Sir A. Glyn), who has unparalleled knowledge of the history of the area and the occasions when floods have affected it. I am grateful, too, for the comments of the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing).

The Maidenhead, Windsor and Eton areas have been subject to flooding from the River Thames for generations. The floods of 1947 were the worst on record, when 2,000 homes were flooded. Since then, considerable development has taken place, and a similar flood today would affect no fewer than 5,500 houses.

The scheme proposed by the National Rivers Authority is designed to prevent flooding caused by a repeat of the 1947 event. A flood on that scale is probable once every 56 years. If it happened again today, 5,500 properties would be affected, of which 260 are in Buckinghamshire, in the parishes of Dorney and Taplow. There are also about 180 properties in the flood plain in Buckinghamshire, and others in Berkshire with either floor levels above the flood level or even on dry land islands that would be completely surrounded by flood water. It is also likely that power and water supplies would be disrupted. A repeat of the 1947 flood across a wide area on the River Thames would cause chaos to those properties and to all communications. Roads in and out of Buckinghamshire would be flooded and telephone lines severely disrupted.

The National Rivers Authority has been preparing proposals to deal with this for six years. The solution involves the construction of a flood relief channel seven miles in length between Taplow and Eton on the border between Buckinghamshire and Berkshire. The NRA is paying particular attention to the environmental aspects. It has made an environment assessment, and its proposals are designed to enhance the environmental interest of the area.

[Mr. Tim Yeo]

The width of the channel to be provided would normally be 30 m, but in places would exceed 100 m. The construction of that channel will require the excavation of a very large quantity of sand and gravel. It will take about four years to complete, and is expected to coincide closely with the widening of the M4 and M25 motorways. It is clear that there will be considerable disruption locally during construction.

The planning applications were initially made to the three district councils directly affected. Because of the scale of the proposals, and because they would result in the excavation of large quantities of gravel, it has been agreed that the application would be dealt with by the two county councils. They are supported by a very detailed environmental assessment.

In preparing the scheme, the NRA consulted extensively with the local authorities and other bodies, local residents and landowners. About 25 requests for a public inquiry have been received, and Buckinghamshire county council has received about 200 letters objecting to it. Consultations on the scheme have been carried out by Berkshire county council. South Buckinghamshire district council has objected on a number of grounds. The proposals for constructing the channel have also been found to conflict with proposals being prepared for widening the M4. Discussions are taking place among the Department of Transport, the NRA and the two county councils to reconcile the two proposals. In the meantime, the two county councils have deferred consideration of the proposals, and the Department of Transport has lodged a formal objection to the National Rivers Authority's compulsory purchase order.

The compulsory purchase order falls to MAFF to confirm under section 151 of the Water Act 1989. There have been 43 objections to the compulsory purchase order and although a number have been resolved, a substantial number are still outstanding. If the NRA cannot resolve them, it will be for MAFF to hold an inquiry under section 13 of the Acquisition of Land Act 1981. However, any final decision on holding an inquiry for the compulsory purchase order can be made only if planning consent for the scheme is given. This is initially a matter for the two county councils. At present, they are not in accord over whether the proposals are a departure from the development plan, and I understand that Buckinghamshire expects to refer the application to the Secretary of State.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield pointed out, the scheme is a major one, expected to cost about £60 million and to take four years to construct. The options for it are limited by the geography of the Thames valley, where the flood risk occurs, and existing development. Most of the problem being addressed is in Berkshire, but a large part of the solution is proposed in Buckinghamshire, in my hon. Friend's constituency. There would undoubtedly be major disruption for people living in that area during the construction period. My hon. Friend is right to raise those issues and to seek to be satisfied that the proposals are properly examined and fully justified.

It is open to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to call in these applications for his own decision. He has not yet come to a conclusion on that. My hon. Friend will appreciate that, as the proposals could come before my right hon. Friend either through the exercise of that power or, should the county councils refuse the application the National Rivers Authority, it would not be appropriate to comment on the merits of the proposals.

In coming to a conclusion on whether these proposals should be called in for his determination, my right hon. Friend will consider the proposals in terms of whether they raise issues of national or regional significance or give rise to substantial controversy. He will need to decide whether the planning issues raised by the proposals are of a sufficient scale to warrant the cost and delays which a public inquiry would entail.

The county councils are concerned with whether the proposals are consistent with their structure plans, which provide the framework for development in the area. They must also take into account any other material considerations. A very large amount of gravel would be excavated to form the channel. They need to be assured that the options for flood relief have been fully explored and that this is the most effective means and produces the minimum amount of damage to the environment.

It is not the task of the county councils to assess the cost benefit of the scheme in detail. The National Rivers Authority is accountable to my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in respect of its flood relief functions. The costs and benefits of the scheme are being looked at closely by the regional flood defence committee and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. My hon. Friend will know that the National Audit Office has in its programme for the current financial year an examination of flood and coast protection programmes. There can be no more thorough scrutiny than that of the National Audit Office, save of course that of the Public Accounts Committee, of which my hon. Friend is a distinguished member.

I understand that 15 per cent. of the cost of the scheme may be eligible for grant by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The remainder would be found by the NRA. The cost of the flood defence activity of the Thames region of the NRA is funded by a levy on the county councils and London boroughs in the whole of that region. The cost of flood defence in the current financial year works out at just over £5 per community charge payer in the Thames region. Out of a total levy income of £43 million for flood defence, the levy on Buckinghamshire comes to £1·67 million—about 4 per cent. of the total. Buckinghamshire would be expected to contribute a similar proportion to the relevant costs of the scheme.

The benefits would accrue to everyone who would suffer the effects of flooding. There are those whose properties would be directly affected, others who might be isolated by the floods, and others who could be affected indirectly through disruption to transport and communications.

Most of the benefits would go to people and properties in Berkshire. The local residents of Buckinghamshire would suffer disruption from construction for about four years. I appreciate the point of view of those who argue that the development in Berkshire, which has exacerbated the scale of the problem, should not have been allowed. It is open to the local planning authorities to include in their development plans such policies as they consider appropriate. I understand that both county structure plans

and the local plans for Slough borough council, the royal borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and South Bucks district all contain policies that restrict or presume against development in areas liable to flooding.

These are very large proposals, addressing a difficult problem. The issues that they raise are complex, and procedurally they affect the responsibilities of a large number of bodies, both in Government and outside it. I assure my hon. Friend that we are looking carefully at how best to take this forward. It could be that the best way forward, taking into account all the interests, including those of the residents, would be a joint public inquiry. We need to be satisfied that the cost and delays that would be involved in such a course are justified both to resolve this matter and to provide the assurance that all the issues have been fully examined.

We expect to come to a conclusion on that in the next few weeks. In the interim, as an earnest of the importance that we attach to this matter, my Department has today issued article 14 directions to prevent the county councils from granting permission for the applications for the time being. I will let my hon. Friend know the decision when we have made it.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Eleven o'clock

House of Commons

Friday 8 November 1991

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITION

Gipsies (Avon)

9.34 am

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): On a cold dark night a few weeks ago 1,100 constituents from Hengrove, Stockwood, Whitchurch, Easton, Eastville and Brislington turned out for a public meeting. They signed a petition to Parliament to curb the incompetence and political malice of Avon county council.

The petition is about gipsies. It calls on the Government to amend the Caravan Sites Act 1968 and section 39 of the Public Order Act 1986 in such a way that the Caravan Sites Act

"places a duty upon the local authority to publish a list of all sites under consideration for permanent, temporary, emergency or other provision"—

something that Avon council is not doing—

"hold public consultation on each of the sites"—

again, something that the council does not do—

"hold all council meetings and its committees and subcommittee meetings convened to discuss action under the act in public so that councillors can be accountable for their views and their votes"—

again, something that Avon county council refuses to do; and it

"states that no site be placed close to people's homes".

It asks

"that the running costs of the site be paid for by the users and is not a financial burden on the local residents."

It asks that relief be afforded

"to local residents whose property may be adversely affected by the imposition of such a site."

It asks that councils should not act in such a way

"as to attract travellers to their area"—

something that Avon county council is doing at the moment.

The petition also states that

"Section 39 of the Public Order Act be amended so that those adjacent to the land as well as the landowner are given protection under this section of the act."

Finally, and very importantly, it asks that the Government abolish

"Avon County Council . . . at the first available opportunity and Bristol returned to a single tier authority."

The petition, from 1,100 residents in the areas concerned, has my full and hearty endorsement.

To lie upon the Table.

BILL PRESENTED

COMPETITION AND SERVICE (UTILITIES)

Mr. Secretary Lilley, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Heseltine, Mr. Secretary Wakeham, Mr. Secretary Brooke, Mr. Secretary Hunt, Mr. Secretary Lang, Mr. John Redwood and Mr. Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to make provision with respect to standards of performance and service to customers in relation to the telecommunications, gas supply, electricity supply, water supply and sewerage service industries; to make provision with respect to complaints by, and disputes with, customers in those industries; to make provision with respect to the powers of the regulators of those industries and with respect to related matters; to make provision with respect to the payment of deposits by customers of certain telecommunications operators; to make further provision for facilitating effective competition in certain of those industries; to make provision with respect to mergers of water or sewerage undertakers; to make provision with respect to compliance orders against public gas suppliers; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Monday next and to be printed. [Bill 8.]

The Environment

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. John M. Taylor.]*

9.37 am

The Minister for the Environment and Countryside (Mr. David Trippier): I am very pleased to have another opportunity to set out to the House the Government's environmental record.

Our last major debate on the environment took place on 12 July. That we are again debating environmental policy reflects the priority that we as a Government, this House and the nation as a whole attach to this most central of issues. I very much hope that, unlike last time, the Opposition will have the grace to allow the Government to respond to the points made in the debate.

This debate is centred on the White Paper anniversary report, published on the exact anniversary day of the original White Paper launch—25 September. The anniversary report is acknowledged as a tremendous achievement. It is as unique in its way as was the original White Paper.

The original White Paper was the first comprehensive policy statement on the environment by any British Government. The anniversary report is the first time that a British Government have subjected their own implementation of its policies to such public scrutiny.

I hope that right hon. and hon. Members who wish to participate in this debate will have now had an opportunity to read the anniversary report in detail. Those who have read it must agree that it is an exercise in open government. Every one of the original White Paper commitments is accounted for, every action taken to date is described, and the plans for every aspect of concern are set out. Every commitment is attributed to a specific department. The targets that we have set ourselves are clearly summarised; so, too, is the substantial additional expenditure that we have given to the environment over the past year.

In all, of the 350 commitments in the original White Paper, more than 200 have already been fulfilled in this first year alone and significant progress has been made with the remainder. Well over 400 individual environmental measures have been taken over the past 12 months to deliver our commitments, ranging from telephone helplines for those concerned about air quality to major international agreements on new standards for cars and water. There are 400 commitments to take forward in the next year—from proposals for new standards for indoor air quality to work on the major international agreements which we hope will be signed at the earth summit in Brazil in June 1992.

Accountability and openness are not the only unique features of the report. Over the past year, the Government have put in place unparalleled mechanisms to keep the environment at the heart of policy making. Every Department now has a Minister charged with environmental responsibilities—no Government have ever taken such a cross-departmental approach to an issue. We have published guidance which every Department must use in assessing the environmental impact of its policies and programmes. Again, that is a first. We have given advice to Departments on drawing up environmental housekeeping strategies for themselves—another first which every Department must complete by the end of 1992. We have made public the existence of two standing committees of Ministers, one chaired by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and one by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister—again an unprecedented step.

One of the Government's White Paper commitments was to establish a dialogue with the business community on environmental issues. The Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Trade and Industry appointed the Advisory Committee on Business and the Environment in May. Since then the 25 business men and women on the committee have been working to an ambitious programme. Earlier this week, they published their first report containing 35 action recommendations, principally on global warming and recycling. Of those recommendations, about half are addressed to the Government; the other half are addressed to industry itself. They call for the setting of tough targets for improving energy efficiency and recycling materials, as well as other specific action.

It is a measure of how seriously the Government take the committee's work that we have responded to its recommendations within a month of their being submitted to us. Apart from those recommendations relating to fiscal measures, which are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, we have set targets for action on every one of the recommendations—and we shall report again on progress in six months.

What the members of the committee have shown is that, when it comes to the environment, Britain's business community is able to provide clear, vigorous and effective leadership. That is a vital component of the nation's action on the environment, because only business can actually deliver environmental improvements.

When we published the original White Paper more than a year ago, the overall reaction was, "Good ideas, let's wait to see how they are delivered." If I may be allowed a topical rugby metaphor, we had, so to speak lined up the ball for a conversion. The question was, would we convert it?

My answer is an emphatic yes. The House does not have to take my word for it, because the action taken to deliver our commitments is there for all to see in the report.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The evidence is not there in the Bolsover area. The Minister will know that, contrary to the Government's views about linking business with the environment—we all agree that coal can successfully be converted to coke—for some reason the Coalite works in Bolsover seems to be polluting the whole environment. Certainly that is the suggestion now that the incinerator is to be replaced at the end of November. We have farms with dioxin-contaminated milk which must be transferred to the west midlands, where it is not being destroyed at the proper temperature, so dioxin is being spread in the west midlands. We now have evidence of a cluster of breast cancers in and around Bolsover—50 per cent. more than in other parts of north Derbyshire. The River Doe Lea is much more polluted than all other rivers in the area. It is high time that the Minister went to see Anglo-United and told it to get its act together and stop polluting the environment.

Mr. Trippier: I sympathise with what the hon. Gentleman has said. I am not going to suggest to him or to the House that I am not prepared to pay such a visit. As the hon. Gentleman knows very well, the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, my hon. Friend the Member

for Banbury (Mr. Baldry), dealt with that very point at Question Time on Wednesday. Of course what is going on in the Bolsover area is a matter of great concern to the hon. Gentleman, as it is to me and to the whole House. An investigation is being carried out at the moment, not only by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution but by the National Rivers Authority. The most comforting assurance that I can give the hon. Gentleman, which I am sure that he will welcome, is that the results of the study will be made public.

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): I am glad that HMIP is now becoming involved in Bolsover. However, the British people must be asking where it has been all these years. Dioxin is already in the environment. It is in the people, it is causing breast cancer, it is in the milk of cows, and it is in the rivers at 1,000 times background levels. Where has HMIP been all these years to allow dioxin to escape into the environment?

Mr. Trippier: The hon. Gentleman is on to a weak point. I should remind him and the House that the Government set up Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution, for which we got no credit whatsoever from Her Majesty's Opposition. The hon. Gentleman heard me say on numerous occasions when the Environmental Protection Bill was being considered in Committee that it was under strength. It is no longer under strength. I shall make an announcement later, indicating how I hope to increase the inspectorate.

Of course, we have not done everthing in just a year, nor have we taken things forward in every aspect as much as we would have wished. But our readiness to act is clear, and our willingness to deliver is illustrated by our early success with our half of the original commitments. We have made many new commitments. We are not sitting back in self-congratulation and the pace will not be slackened.

Yet no sooner is the ball winging towards the uprights than we find that the goal posts are being moved. This year, I am being told that the test was not whether we could deliver our unprecedented number of detailed commitments, as I had thought, but whether we would do a lot more than we said we would do just a year ago.

I and my right hon. Friend would be the first to admit that the White Paper process is the beginning of a long road. We said that it was a first step, not the last word. But I think that everyone concerned needs to realise that this is not a process without cost, nor one that can magically happen overnight.

I believe that there is a balance to be struck between environmental enhancement and economic development. I believe that this Government have got that balance right. To make sure that we keep that balance, we have created new forums to discuss environmental issues with business, with local government and with the voluntary sector, because the environment needs every one of us to work together.

There are Opposition Members who take some perverse delight in running down Britain's environmental record and who are all too often to be found, both at home and abroad, adding their voices to those who accuse Britain of being the dirty man of Europe. Being deliberately deceitful about the Government's policies has become something of a habit for the Labour party. It is just another deceit. However, that is not an accusation that I could level at the Leader of the Opposition, as he has not found time to say anything at all about the environment—true or false.

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): Bearing in mind that Labour Members have made many promises without costing them, will my hon. Friend tell us whether they have made promises about the environment in which they claim to be interested? If so, have they costed them, or is it something else that they say that they may do in future if economic growth comes their way?

Mr. Trippier: That is a good point on which I can give my hon. Friend not only a specific example, but an assurance. Let us have the assurance first. If the Opposition do not cost their proposals, we do. The renationalisation of the water industry would cost £3·8 billion—and that is to say absolutely nothing of the £28 billion programme which is currently in place and which will run for the rest of the decade. As I shall illustrate later, that cost could not be met, and I do not think that Labour would do it.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Do not actions speak louder than words? Does the Minister recall the vandalism of the former Secretary of State for the Environment, his right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley), who, at the very time that the White Paper was issued, turned down the inspectors' recommendation for a tunnel under Oxleas wood? Does not that presage terrible problems for the Thames corridor plans of the present Secretary of State for the Environment? I refer to the decision in respect of roads and the environment and to the prospective legislation that will put railways into the same category, especially in relation to the channel link. Surely that threatens the environment, and surely the Government's proposals for removing the power of the House to make the final decision on railways means that the Government are not to be trusted with the environment. That is proved by their actions.

Mr. Trippier: I understand and have previously heard the views that the hon. Gentleman has just expressed. As he knows, as that matter is quasi-judicial, under planning law it has been left to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. The hon. Gentleman was wrong about the timetable. The White Paper was launched in September 1990 when the Secretary of State for the Environment was my right hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Patten).

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): Will my hon. Friend confirm that the green belt, which enables us all to have a degree of green and open space and fresh air, has been doubled under this Conservative Government?

Mr. Trippier: I try regularly to remind everyone of that point, and I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for reminding the House of it. That is something of which the Government are enormously proud. It featured hugely in the White Paper and was mentioned again in the anniversary document.

I remind the House that Britain is now taking the environmental lead in Europe. I offer some key examples. Our own system of integrated pollution control, introduced in the Environmental Protection Act 1990, is to be adopted across Europe in the coming years. So that was a first. We have led on proposals for environmental

[Mr. Trippier]

labelling of products, for environmental reporting by companies, for public access to information, and on directives as diverse as the nitrates directive and forthcoming tighter controls over emissions from cars and heavy diesels.

For those who still feel that we are lagging, let me say that Britain is one of only a handful of countries to have set a target for reductions in carbon dioxide. We are now developing a programme of measures to implement this target. The number of countries that have produced full comprehensive environmental strategies like our own can be numbered on the fingers of one hand. In the Montreal protocol which controls ozone-depleting substances, United Nations negotiations on climate change, in biodiversity and on forestry Britain is among the leading nations.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I have no doubt about the Minister's commitment, but I seriously doubt that of the Government. Despite what the hon. Gentleman has said, from which I do not dissent, the fact is that only 15 minutes of the time that the Prime Minister chaired the summit of the Group of Seven countries was spent on the environment. Not one word on the environment passed the Prime Minister's lips when he welcomed the Queen's Speech at the start of this Session. Neither the Chancellor's speech on the Queen's Speech nor his autumn statement, which is meant to be central to Government thinking, contained one word on the environment. The Government's commitment to the environment can have no credibility—I stress that I am talking about the Government, not the Minister—if the Prime Minister and the Chancellor do not think that the environment is important, even if lesser Ministers do.

Mr. Trippier: That is a total fabrication——

Mr. Hughes: It is a fact—there was not a word on the environment.

Mr. Trippier: It is not a case of a word, because the anniversary document contains a tremendous number of words and has the seal of the Prime Minister, who wrote the foreword. The hon. Gentleman must admit that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was the first world leader to commit himself to going to Rio next June for the world summit. We have not yet had similar commitments from all the Heads of Government of the other European member states. Our commitment is real. The fact that my right hon. Friend made an important speech on the environment shortly after becoming Prime Minister is itself significant. In contrast, I have not heard any major speech on the environment, either inside or outside the House, from the Leader of the Opposition.

We have also set the pace in the negotiations for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development next year. As I have said, the Prime Minister was the first to commit himself to attending that conference. We are playing a leading part in the negotiations of the framework conventions on climate change and biodiversity; and we have committed financial assistance and resources to assisting developing countries in preparing for the convention.

In June we held a seminar on biodiversity to prepare the United Kingdom's contribution on biodiversity. In the same month, we hosted an UNCED workshop on biotechnology. We have also funded two studies by Touche Ross on the role of technology transfer in relation to climate change and in biodiversity. Within the United Kingdom we have committed £150,000 to the United Nations Environment Programme—United Kingdom national committee to assist non-governmental organisations in preparing their own contribution to UNCED.

It is vital that UNCED results in practical plans of action that can be implemented through existing institutions. We are determined to avoid the creation of any new bureaucracy. That is why we are supporting an urgent review of UNCED's management and organisation which will assist implementation.

We pride ourselves on keeping to our agreements. In the last European Community report on proceedings taken against European Community countries for infringing environmental directives, Britain's record was ahead of all its industrialised competitors and behind only Luxembourg, Portugal and Denmark, which is something that the Commission forgot to mention when it wrote to us recently—just as it forgot to mention the fact that when it wrote to us about environmental impact assessment, it wrote to 10 other countries at the same time.

We believe that our record stands up to detailed comparison and criticism. We want people to look at the figures, to ask the necessary questions, and to make their own decisions on how we can build a better environment. That is why access to information and accountability must be a central plank of what we are about. The anniversary report is a major part of that process, but it is not the only aspect.

In the summer, we produced the first report of the new drinking water inspectorate. It gives the results drawn from the 3·3 million individual tests made over the year. It is frank about where we need to do better, but it shows that 99 per cent. of those 3·3 million tests met the legislative requirements for water quality. Again, we are the only member state in the whole of Europe which publishes such a report.

A cornerstone of this Government's environmental strategy was water privatisation—a bold and innovative step which has given the new water companies £28 billion over the next 10 years. It is the biggest private investment programme ever in water quality and represents £5,000 for every minute of every day, day in, day out, year in, year out, for the next decade.

That is something the nationalised water boards could never have done. Now Labour says that it would renationalise water at a cost to the public purse of £3·8 billion, with no mention whatever of what would happen to the £28 billion private investment programme. The country could not and would not trust the Labour party. Because of their economic incompetence, the last Labour Government were forced to slash investment in water quality by a third and in sewage treatment by half. The facts speak for themselves. I challenge the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) to say that the Labour party will drop its proposal to renationalise the water industry, just as I hear this morning that it has dropped its proposal to renationalise British Telecom.

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): Before the Minister leaves the subject of the water industry, may I suggest that it would be unusual if we had a debate on the environment in which we did not have to reiterate the figures for

investment by the water industry under the Labour Government compared with that under the present Government. The average figures show that under Labour investment ran at £1,254 million a year whereas under the Conservative Government it was £922 million a year. Even the Minister should know those figures off by heart.

While we are on the matter of trust and the water industry, let us deal with water quality. The Minister mentioned the drinking water inspectorate. I was expecting him to give a little more detail than he did. He has had the report of the inspectorate for some considerable time. He will be aware that it shows some serious incidents of water quality breaches of standard, some serious incidents of pollution, and some problems of supply that have caused illness. Does the Minister intend to use his powers under the Water Act 1989 to prosecute any of the water companies for those breaches?

Mr. Trippier: The drinking water inspectorate, which has the teeth to recommend prosecution, believes that where there are infringements prosecution is necessary and should be undertaken. I shall not hesitate to support the inspectorate.

On the hon. Lady's first point, I shall send her a copy of a graph.

Mr. Skinner: Why?

Mr. Trippier: So that all Members of Parliament can understand it. They will be able to see at a glance the disgraceful record of the last Labour Government. It is a statement of fact, and I am making it, that under the Labour Government investment in water quality was cut by a third and investment in water treatment was cut by a half. The hon. Lady cannot deny it. As the Labour party says, the principal reason for those cuts was that the Labour Government were pushed into them by the International Monetary Fund. That is its excuse. But who got the country in such a mess that the IMF had to move in?

Mrs. Ann Taylor: I wonder whether we would all be saved a great deal of trouble if the Minister did the sums on the same basis that I have done them and used the figures in the Conservative party brief on how to oppose Labour on water privatisation.

Mr. Trippier: I will happily exchange letters with the hon. Lady. To be consistent with our policy on the environment, which is to give public access to environmental information, I will release my letter to the press. I trust that she will release her reply to the press.

Mr. Sayeed: Is it not a fact that today the water inspectorates, including the drinking water inspectorate and the National Rivers Authority, are independent of the water authorities and can therefore demonstrate that they are doing their job more effectively by prosecuting those who get it wrong? Previously they were poacher and gamekeeper and hid the facts from the people.

Mr. Trippier: My hon. Friend is right. The principal part of the Water Act 1989 was the separation of the poacher and gamekeeper within the water authorities. Now we have set up the NRA, which is the toughest regulatory body in the whole of Europe.

The Labour party is greatly embarrassed because it opposed the Water Bill virtually clause by clause.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Trippier: Will the hon. Gentleman allow me to press on a little? I have given way several times. I shall certainly give way to him in a few moments.

Integrated pollution control already requires the compiling of registers of emissions, open to public access. We now aim to take this a stage further by drawing up aggregate registers for processes and types of emission. These will make the figures much more readily accessible to those who wish to study them. I hope to issue a consultation paper on those proposals shortly. Next year we will produce a new statistical report, drawing on guidance from a wide-ranging consultation process. That will place a whole new range of environmental performance in the public domain.

There is no clearer demonstration of the Government's commitment to integrated pollution control than our expansion of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution. In January I announced that the inspectorate had been allocated more than 80 posts to enable it to expand to 313 staff by 1 April 1992. I draw it to the attention of the spokesman for the Liberal party, the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), that after further review I shall today announce a further increase of about 50 staff to raise the inspectorate's 1992-93 complement to more than 360. We hope that that approach will produce greater awareness of the role of the individual in environmental improvement and pave the way for setting ever-higher environmental standards. I am pleased to say that, already, we have responded to the very good report of the Environment Select Committee on indoor air quality by saying in the anniversary report that we would develop indoor air standards for the first time. Similar steps are being pursued elsewhere. The NRA is preparing new statutory water quality objectives. A new expert group will help to establish new air quality standards for nitrous oxide and sulphur dioxide. HMIP is beginning to introduce IPC standards for industrial plant. There are new requirements for standards of cleanliness for our streets and public places.

Accountability and high standards are the Government's watchword for the environment and the watchword of the citizens charter. I remind the House that every major piece of environmental legislation on the statute book has been put there by a Conservative Government. I have every intention of ensuring that that proud record continues.

I listened with interest to what the hon. Member for Dewsbury said to the Labour party conference. She claimed that the Clean Air Act 1956 was introduced by a Labour Government. Absolute rubbish. The Clean Air Act was introduced in 1956 by a Conservative Government. No one on the Opposition Benches seems to be paying attention. Labour Members seem to be studying invisible spots on the Benches. If the hon. Lady is prepared to mislead—I am sure not intentionally——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. I am becoming a little worried about the Minister's vocabulary.

Mr. Trippier: If the hon. Lady perhaps makes a statement which is a stranger to the truth at the Labour party conference, how can we believe what she says on the

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water figures? The exchange of correspondence that will take place might flush out some facts rather than hypotheses.

On Wednesday my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in his autumn statement our public expenditure plans for the next three years. Within those totals there are significant increases for expenditure on the environment, on top of the substantial increases in the past two years. I shall announce next week full details of the amounts available for the various environmental bodies. In environmental protection there will be new resources for the pollution inspectorate; and in waste disposal the new arrangements for operating through the private sector or free-standing companies should give local authorities the scope to bring in up to £50 million of private capital to bring about improved standards in that sector.

There are also significant increases for the programmes of other Departments which affect the environment. The large increases for British Rail and London Transport will lead to major improvements in the quality of public transport and conditions on the roads. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will have new resources greatly to extend the programme of support for environmentally friendly farming.

This Government are 100 per cent. committed to the protection and improvement of our environment. We have established the standards in our legislation. We are committing the resources of the public sector and bringing in the private sector. We are making the public our partners in this enterprise and giving them the information and access to decisions which they need to play their part. I am proud of what the Government have already achieved and I commend that record to the House.

10.8 am

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): The Minister has proved again that he can get excited on occasions such as this. He was somewhat more low key than usual when he started off this morning, perhaps because of the by-election results yesterday, but, true to his form, he managed to wind himself up as the debate went on. I sometimes wish that we could have a constructive debate rather than an exchange of statistics such as we had on the water industry. However, as long as the Minister wants to conduct these arguments in that way, we shall have to co-operate. I look forward to the exchange of letters on the water issue.

I am pleased that we are having another debate on the environment—that is one thing that hon. Members on both sides of the House can agree on. I hope that this will not be the last word or the only debate during this Session, because debates on the environment are always topical, although often for the wrong reasons—because of crises that arise due to the lack of Government action and foresight.

As the Minister said, the previous debate on the environment was on 12 July. Since then there have been many interesting developments affecting environmental problems. There have also been some significant gaps in Government action, especially in recent weeks. I shall review some of those developments and try to block some of the gaps, while making positive suggestions about what the Minister and the Government ought to turn their attention to in the few months left to them.

The Minister spent some considerable time talking about the first anniversary report of "This Common Inheritance"—the report of the Government's record. It would be easy for me to go through that report and point out the areas where there has been a lack of progress. Even the Secretary of State admitted when he launched the anniversary report that there had been problems, especially in many of the Departments. We could talk about water quality or hedgerows; as the Secretary of State admitted, there are many gaps. However, I intend to resist the temptation of simply going through the report and pointing out those gaps.

Mr. Sayeed: Does the hon. Lady welcome the fact that the report was unprecedented? There has never been an environmental audit of that type before. It was unprecedented to set out the targets and a year later set out how we matched up to them. No other Government have done that.

Mrs. Taylor: I was able to agree with the hon. Gentleman's first comment, as the report is, by definition, unprecedented. However, he went on to talk about targets being met and I must disagree, as I do not think that there has been a clear definition of the targets, nor the range that we would have wished and there have been many gaps even on issues that were the subject of legislation as late as the summer, such as hedgerows. We have not witnessed the progress that we had hoped for. The Government's sort of approach is good, and it is good for information to be provided, but it would be a lot better if the information showed that more progress had been made not merely in the Department of the Environment but in other Departments.

Mr. Trippier: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her comments about the report being unprecedented and I appreciate that she was trying to be fair. However I do not think that she would wish to give the impression to the House that there were a lot of gaps. Out of 350 commitments in the White Paper published last September there were only seven gaps and that is not a lot.

Mrs. Taylor: If the gaps that the Minister is referring to are the fact that the Department of Transport is doing nothing and that the Department of Energy has done virtually nothing, those are significant gaps.

I do not want to get into a discussion about whether some of those claimed achievements are trivial. I want to be constructive about the debate and, to a certain extent, to sympathise with the Minister. One of the largest gaps in environmental initiatives in the recent past is the lack of any mention of the environment in the Queen's Speech. Nor was there anything on the environment in the Prime Minister's speech on the Queen's Speech. In contrast, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, not for the first time, mentioned many environmental issues when he spoke during the Queen's Speech debate. I hoped that the Minister would have accepted our sympathy.

We are also disappointed that the autumn statement was not quite as rosy as the Minister was leading us to believe. When the Chancellor produced his autumn statement the figures showed that spending on environmental services is planned to decline during the next few

years from a total of £1,370 million in the current year to £1,290 million next year, £1,280 million the next year and £1,260 million the year after that. That is the picture as the Chancellor presented it.

I was going to sympathise with the Minister, but he was trying to turn those statistics on their head. We are especially disappointed about the absence of legislation on the environment in the Queen's Speech, because we believe that so much could be done.

As there are gaps in the legislative programme I am sure that the Minister is extremely disappointed that more has not been done, for example, legislation that would have had the co-operation of Opposition Members as well as the support of many Conservative Members—legislation on an environment protection agency or on implementing the Common Land Forum proposals. Many people outside the House are extremely disappointed about that. That was a manifesto commitment in 1987 and I was amazed to hear the Minister say on the radio recently that the reason that the Government could not introduce legislation on that issue was because they felt that they could not get it through the House of Lords. That is a remarkable admission. I wonder whether the next Conservative manifesto will be cleared with their Lordships or whether Government Ministers will make decisons for themselves.

Mr. Spearing: On the subject of admissions, the Minister had to admit to the Oxleas wood farrago. Has my hon. Friend noticed that no opportunity has been taken to put the tunnel under the wood, although the opportunity has been taken to change the design of the bridge? Does not that show lack of action?

Also—on a non-party point—should not all environmentalists examine the proposals in the Queen's Speech to give the final word on railway schemes to a Secretary of State of any Government and take it away from a long-stop position of the House? Perhaps that Bill should be scrutinised closely when it is introduced so that the House may at least be given some long-stop opportunity and not be left the victim of Secretaries of State, as has happened in the past.

Mrs. Taylor: My hon. Friend speaks from a position of expertise on both those issues. His arguments about the tunnel and the bridge show that often when Governments reconsider their policy they do so from a narrow standpoint and do not look at the full picture.

I think that the proposed changes in procedure will have to be scrutinised carefully to ensure that proper environmental considerations are safeguarded when decisions are taken on the types of programme that my hon. Friend has mentioned.

One statement that was made in the summer gave us a glimmer of hope that the Government might be coming round to the decision to take the scale of action required to offer proper environmental protection. The Minister and the House will recall that in July the Prime Minister changed Government policy and announced that they would be committed to the introduction of an environmental protection agency. He did a U-turn and that left us with a glimmer of hope that progress would be made. However, since then we have become extremely disappointed because the Minister will recall that, during the previous debate on the environment in the House, on 12 July, I asked him why it was necessary for there to be a further period of consultation about the implementation of the environment protection agency when there was such widespread support both inside and outside the House for progress in that direction. Indeed, I followed that up in a letter to the Secretary of State, offering the co-operation of the Opposition to push legislation through the House quickly if that was what the Government wanted to do.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): Being helpful.

Mrs. Taylor: We were trying to be helpful, as my hon. friend points out. The Minister wrote back on the day that the consultation paper was issued, when the Government had already made up their minds that there would be no progress in legislation this year. That was a great disappointment. We were hoping that progress on an environmental protection agency could be made during this Session of Parliament. I understand the Minister's difficulty and the fact that one of his Cabinet coleagues, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, had territorial ambitions, but it seems strange to Opposition Members that a policy that was endorsed and announced by the Prime Minister could not be implemented and was not mentioned in the Queen's Speech simply because one Cabinet member wanted to divert attention away from his other problems and place a territorial claim on other functions.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): My hon. Friend referred to our concern at the lack of progress in setting up an environmental protection agency. Is not one of the issues of great concern to us the fact that organisations such as the National Rivers Authority that would be incorporated into such an agency have already stated that in some of their actions they may use only persuasion and do not have powers to implement them? The longer that we allow that position to remain and do not given an organisation such as the environmental protection agency the power to deal with problems, the worse they will become and the longer it will take to solve them.

Mrs. Taylor: My hon. Friend, who has long been interested in the issue, is right. It is a fact that the National Rivers Authority has embarked on more prosecutions recently, but both it and Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution have tried to avoid prosecutions and rely on persuasion. I am afraid that such an approach has had limited success so far.

Mr. Trippier: The hon. Lady will recall that she repeated again and again that we had rushed into enacting the Environmental Protection Act 1990 instead of taking it more slowly. From what she has just said, it seems that one cannot win if one is determined to enact correct legislation and so take the matter to full consultation, which I should have thought was laudable. Will she give the House a specific statement on where the Labour party stands on the Government's proposal to take the regulatory function of waste control out of the hands of local authorities and put it under the control of the agency? A clear statement on that would help us enormously.

Mrs. Taylor: The Minister will recall that I mentioned that matter in my previous speech on the subject on 12 July. We believe that the right way to deal with waste is for the regional tier of government—which we want to see established and which we will establish—should be

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responsible for determining the region's strategy on waste. However, we think that it is a regulatory function of the environmental protection executive to monitor all such actions, and the agency will have a policing role. The strategy adopted in relation to waste in any district will be determined by the regional tier of government.

As for the Minister's remarks about not rushing the issue of the environmental protection agency, we did not say that the Environmental Protection Act was rushed, and were happy to see progress on it, although we wanted proper consultation throughout. The Government have been in power for 12 and a half years and were the last people to accept the need for an environmental protection agency. If they had not been the last people to do so, there would have been legislation on the issue a long time ago. I hope that in a few months' time, when roles are reversed and we are in power, we can look forward to co-operation from the then Opposition when we introduce our environmental protection executive with the strong powers that we intend to give it.

The Minister mentioned the Environmental Protection Act and, in particular, integrated pollution control, as a step forward and something on which we should build in future. When we discussed the Environmental Protection Act in Committee, on which both the Minister and I served, we had some positive debates on that aspect because there was general consensus that integrated pollution control was the way forward. Although some of us thought that the Government were not tough enough, we wanted to see progress on the implementation of integrated pollution control. We expressed much concern that there were great pressures on Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution and were worried that the way in which IPC was being introduced would add to those burdens. Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution was then understaffed and overworked and IPC undoubtedly presented new pressures and burdens, even though it was welcome.

The Minister said today that staffing at HMIP would be improved. The figures that he announced today do not actually meet the targets and needs laid down in the National Audit Office report earlier this summer, which outlined the operations of HMIP and problems such as failure to inspect, reluctance to prosecute and the difficulty of meeting targets. That report and the management information system for Ministers report—MINIS 12—showed that time and again HMIP, as presently constituted and supported by the Government, was unable to meet the targets and carry out the work it should. HMIP has had to farm out the production of guidance notes on many processes simply because it was so stretched. Often, companies in the private sector had to write the guidance notes on how the new rules were to be applied in future.

Following the Minister's statement, I am still worried that HMIP will be under too much pressure to carry out all its responsibilities and deliver the level of environmental protection that is obviously required. I am also concerned about what is happening in local authorities which must monitor the processes of integrated pollution control relating to pollution in the atmosphere. When the Environmental Protection Act was introduced, local authorities were not given the resources required for pump priming and setting up the system.

Can the Minister confirm that local authorities are finding that for more than half of the industrial processes for which applications for authorisation should have been made, companies have not bothered to apply, which is serious? If companies have not even bothered to apply for authorisation, they are technically operating illegally. Can the Minister confirm that reports of such occurrences are correct? I should be happy to give way if he wishes to do so now, although he may wish to return to the subject later.

If such incidents have taken place, I wonder why, and what the Government who introduced the legislation intend to do about the problem. Responsibility for the matter must lie with the Government who gave insufficient instructions to industry and allowed inadequate resources to local authorities. I do not know what the Minister expects local authorities to do. Will they have to face the extra work and cost of taking out hundreds of court actions against companies that have not registered and have not applied for the authorisations which form one of the cornerstones of the Government's policies as described by the Minister? Time and again, industry in this country acts outside the law and local authorities are left to make decisions about whether to prosecute, with no support, direction or instruction from the Government. IPC has obviously got off to a shaky start, which is extremely worrying, especially for those of us who thought that it was not tough enough in the first place.

The Minister referred to river quality. We should all be alarmed about a leaked report concerning river quality. The first report of the National Rivers Authority, a survey of river quality, is to be published shortly. Not surprisingly, because of its importance and also because so many people are concerned about river quality, the report has already been leaked. The NRA report states that thousands of miles of rivers in England and Wales are poisoned and that the situation has become worse since 1985. That is causing great concern within the NRA. It is also causing great concern to water users and to all of us who are worried about the environment.

The deterioration in river quality has taken place in almost every region. Water quality has declined in 6,323 km of rivers, canals and estuaries—all this at a time when the country is in recession. The length of rivers grossly polluted has risen. The quality of drinking water supplies in 15 per cent. of all the rivers monitored has deteriorated. The NRA report states that there was a trend towards a small but steady improvement in water quality between 1958 and 1980, but that the trend has not continued since then. That is very serious. It means that this Government have presided over a deterioration in water quality. If the National Rivers Authority is concerned about it, I am surprised that it did not feature in the Minister's speech.

The environmental issue that has attracted most attention in recent weeks is the letter from the European Environment Commissioner, Carlo Ripa di Meana, about the failure of the British Government to ensure British implementation of the European Community directive on environmental impact assessments. The matters involved are significant, but I must admit that even I was taken aback by the amount of attention that the issue received. That was not due to the letter—nor, alas, because of interest in the environment. The letter received so much attention because of the way in which Ministers reacted to it.

I realise that the Minister of State may be in a difficult position. He attends some of the meetings in Brussels; he knows the Commissioner; he discusses these matters with him; he knows that the Commissioner is a reasonable and fair-minded man. I am sure that the Minister of State wishes to dissociate himself from some of the more outlandish remarks of some of his colleagues. At least, I hope that he does, given what he knows to be the truth of the matter.

I wonder whether the Minister can explain why his ministerial colleagues, including the Prime Minister, reacted as they did and why they said what they said. Like the whole country, the Minister of State will be aware that the Prime Minister described the Commissioner's letter as "astonishing". The Prime Minister said that the Government had had no previous notice that a problem existed. The Minister of State knows that that is not so. Therefore, I ask him to use this occasion to set the record straight. I shall gladly give way to him.

Will the Minister of State confirm, first, that the European Commissioner is not trying to dictate planning decisions? He is not telling Britain what to do about specific projects. Will he confirm that the Commissioner is trying to ensure that the European Community directive is applied and that relevant environmental impact assessments are made?

Mr. Trippier: Is the hon. Lady seriously asking me to reply point by point to her speech after I have sat down, or is she asking my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry), the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, to do so when he winds up the debate? My hon. Friend intends to deal with this issue in his speech. Would the hon. Lady find that satisfactory?

Mrs. Taylor: As the Minister of State, rather than his junior colleague, goes to Brussels, it would help if he could confirm these points. If he would like me to give way again so that he can confirm that that is the nature of the letter from the Commissioner, I shall gladly do so. He may, however, prefer me to make all the points and then to deal with them. I repeat that I shall be happy to give way now on my first point if the Minister wishes to clarify that the Commissioner is not dictating planning decisions but asking Britain about the implementation of the European Community directive.

Mr. Trippier: That is correct.

Mrs. Taylor: I am grateful to the Minister. At least we agree on the first point. That being the case, will he confirm that, contrary to the Foreign Secretary's statement, the Commissioner is not "dictating" through which field a road should go?

Mr. Trippier: Correct.

Mrs. Taylor: I am pleased that the Minister of State has contradicted the Foreign Secretary. It shows that he knows more about European legislation than the Foreign Secretary does, which perhaps should not surprise us.

Thirdly, can the Minister help the House by confirming that the Prime Minister was mistaken when he said that the letter was the first time that the Government had heard anything about the problem.

Mr. Skinner: That is an A-level question.

Mr. Trippier: Actually, it is a degree question. The Prime Minister never said any such thing in the first place. The Prime Minister was quite right to react so fast and so forcefully to Commissioner Carlo Ripa di Meana's recent letter. There is a clear convention that communications between the Commission and member states should be confidential. The leaking of the article 169 letter weeks ago and of the separate personal letter to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport were just the last in a succession of leaks on the subject throughout the summer. I am glad to say that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister received a satisfactory reply from Mr. Delors. That should have some impact on the hon. Lady—that Mr. Delors did send a letter which, by any standards, was a letter of apology to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

Mrs. Taylor: The Minister of State found that question harder. He did not answer it. He did not say whether the Government knew that a prosecution was pending.

Mr. Trippier: That is not the point as to why the Prime Minister wrote to Mr. Delors. The hon. Lady knows that very well.

Mrs. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman says that that was not the point of the letter. What the Prime Minister said at the time of the announcement was that the Government had not had any warning that this situation had arisen and that the Government had not known about it whatsoever. It is clear that the Government were well aware, and it ill behoves Ministers to criticise leaks, especially after the resignation today of a member of the Select Committee on Health, the hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Hayes).

Mr. Win Griffiths: Former member.

Mrs. Taylor: Former member of the Select Committee.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Former Member for Harlow.

Mrs. Taylor: Soon. My hon. Friend is anticipating events.

As the Secretary of State for Health's Parliamentary Private Secretary was also involved in the leak, Ministers cannot complain about leaks from other sources.

The Minister has not confirmed that he knew that such a letter would be sent to the Government, but it is clear that one would be, not least because in the environment debate on 12 July the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) and I referred to the likelihood of prosecution.

The Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister should not be surprised by the Commissioner's action, because almost a year ago to the day a senior member of the Conservative party wrote to the Commissioner asking him to intervene and said, "I shall be delighted if he reacts positively." Perhaps some members of the Conservative party do not speak to each other, but Ministers speak of the need for accesss to information so information should be available between one senior Conservative and another.

Mr. Trippier: Who was it?

Mrs. Taylor: The Minister is asking who it was, because he obviously does not know what is going on in the Conservative party. I am happy to refer him to a cutting

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from *The Times* of 16 November last year, which mentioned a Conservative Member of the European Parliament, Peter Price.

Mr. Trippier: I am amazed that Mr. Price would suggest himself to be a senior member of the Conservative party.

Mrs. Taylor: Perhaps the Minister of State belongs to that wing of the Conservative party that sets no weight by Members of the European Parliament. Perhaps he is entering into that debate more than our debate today.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Minister still vice-chairman of the Tory party?

Mrs. Taylor: My hon. Friend asks an interesting question. The Minister was vice-chairman at the time of the last European elections. Therefore, perhaps he should have known where some of his colleagues stood on these issues.

I hope that today's debate will not be the last word on the environment in this Session. The Minister's comments have not reassured us that environmental issues will move further up the Government agenda. He said that it is for business to sort out our environment problems. That is not right. We require a more positive lead from the Government, but it will not come from the Conservative Government and we look forward to sitting on the Government Benches and giving a proper lead.

10.43 am

Mr. Gwilym Jones (Cardiff, North): I am glad to have the opportunity to contribute to this important debate on the environment, which was so ably opened by my hon. Friend the Minister.

Most hon. Members attach the highest importance to their local environment and I wish to draw attention to two problems in my constituency that deserve resolution. The first is perhaps not the most obvious, as it involves not an industrial process but one of the four excellent hospitals in my constituency. We are well served by our four hospitals and the finest must be the University hospital of Wales, which, as its name implies, is not only a large and important national health service hospital but a teaching hospital, part of the University of Wales. As such, its medical facilities are highly valued by its neighbours and by people from further afield.

Sadly, the hospital has been a significant cause of environmental problems and pollution, especially for my constituents who live immediately alongside it. The most obvious is the consequence of traffic growth. Since it was opened about 20 years ago, health care has continued to grow and to be more successful every year, but traffic has grown even faster. As a consequence, the residential roads adjacent to the hospital have had to suffer an intolerable burden—one far worse than they might have reasonably expected.

Until the early 1980s, the only access to the hospital was by King George V drive from the east or by Rhydhelig avenue from the west. Fortunately, some 10 years ago new access to the hospital was opened via Eastern avenue, a major dual carriageway running alongside it. Although that provides access, it does not provide egress from the hospital and has not contributed significantly to reducing the steadily increasing burden of traffic that continues to use the residential roads around the hospital.

In turn, we have had significant problems of overspill parking as the number of cars seeking to use the hospital has spread beyond the hospital site into surrounding roads. Some years ago, that necessitated the imposition of a residents' parking zone. Somewhat surprisingly, and for reasons that have never been well understood by residents, it was withdrawn by South Glamorgan council, which claimed that it was not justified and was under-used. I am glad to say that, because of the excellent hard work of councillor Tony John, who represents the area, there will be a new parking zone.

Mr. Win Griffiths: What about Rhydhelig avenue?

Mr. Jones: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to intervene, I am happy to give way. Otherwise I shall ignore his sedentary comments.

Mr. Griffiths: What is the hon. Gentleman's view on access and parking on Rhydhelig avenue, St. Augustine's avenue and St. Alban's avenue?

Mr. Jones: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman asked that question because I suspect that he has considerable sympathy for the problems that my local councillors and I are fighting to deal with. Perhaps he would join me in urging South Glamorgan council, the highway authority, to show more concern for local residents. I thank the hon. Gentleman for that.

Traffic and parking are not the only environmental problems that are consequences of the University hospital of Wales. Perhaps far more worrying is the spewing out of pollution from the chimney of its incinerator. Local residents living in the wards of Heath and Gabalfa have become increasingly apprehensive about what is coming out of the chimney and what the pollution is. They know that they have been polluted, but they do not know what the pollution is. As much as anything, it has become a fear of the unknown. Certainly there have been visible incidents of pollution, and complaints to the hospital have flowed almost as quickly as the smoke coming out of the chimney. As a result of the pollution and the problems of traffic and parking, the hospital has lost considerable good will among the people who live immediately around it. It has lost that good will not because of its medical facilities but because it has not been a good neighbour to those who live nearby. Local councillors felt forced to adopt a policy of opposing any further expansion of the use of the site of the University hospital of Wales until there were at least some positive proposals to deal with the various problems that the hospital had occasioned.

I applaud the work of local councillors, including the senior member, councillor Clive Milsom; councillor Granville Tatham, who is very experienced; and our newest colleague, Dr. Peter Donnelly, who practises at the University hospital of Wales. I must also mention councillor Watkiss, who died just before the local election in May this year. He lived in King George V drive and took a keen interest in the problems of the University hospital of Wales. He was a former lord mayor of Cardiff, acting chairman of the Association of District Councils, and the leading light of local government in Wales.

As my hon. Friend the Minister said, we have all become increasingly concerned about our local environment, and that concern certainly extends to such problems as the hospital incinerator at the University hospital of Wales. We recognise that we need higher standards and more openness about the operation of facilities such as hospital incinerators. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Minister because the Government have led the way in making the necessary environmental protection improvements.

The new environmental protection legislation will bring hospital incinerators under the higher standards which are necessary. In addition, the pollution emitted by such chimneys will be monitored and the results recorded with, in this case, the environmental health department of Cardiff city council. That information should be held on a register that is open to public inspection. In that way, the neighbours of the University hospital of Wales would at last know exactly what was going on.

South Glamorgan health authority has responded to the new requirements, installing a new incinerator at the University hospital of Wales. The health authority tells me that it has spent almost £2 million on putting in that new incinerator and almost £5 million on the boiler house. I have some pleasure in knowing that the health authority has responded to the new higher standards set by the Government because it should mean an improved environment for those of my constituents who live in Heath and Gabalfa.

The health authority has sought to maximise its investment in the new incinerator and the boiler house. It submitted a planning application to Cardiff city council, whereby practically all the refuse from all the hospitals in South Glamorgan could be incinerated at the University hospital of Wales. I can understand that a health authority would want to make the maximum possible use of any new investment, and on that count the incinerator is no different from any other investment. However, I do not welcome the authority's choice of the University hospital of Wales to maximise the incinerator operation. I do not understand why the health authority would choose that as the site for centralised incineration.

The population around the University hospital of Wales is the most densely situated in South Glamorgan. Waste from other hospitals must be trucked in, involving several large lorries coming in every hour of every day to keep the incinerator fed. Why should the health authority choose the busiest area in Cardiff for that centralised operation? I would not want to wish this problem on any other hospital in South Glamorgan. I do not want to say, "Not in my back yard" and wish it on someone else. But I wonder whether there are other hospitals with far fewer neighbours that might have provided a much better site for this operation.

As might be expected, the proposal about increased incineration at the University hospital of Wales immediately raised great fears among my constituents and their local representatives, the councillors. They were concerned about not only the increased volume of refuse which was to be incinerated and what that would mean to the local environment but the pollution which might result from some hospital waste—for example, material with traces of radioactivity.

The health authority made a commonsense response, suggesting that no health authority would want to pollute any hospital and certainly not the University hospital of Wales. The concern about the environment of the hospital extends to concern about those living around the hospital. But, by now, residents in Heath and Gabalfa are not swallowing that answer easily, in the same way as they are not swallowing easily the emissions from the chimney of the University hospital of Wales.

Local councillors have felt it necessary—I have supported them—to continue their policy of oppositon to any intensification of use of the site of the University hospital of Wales. Recently, we had the opportunity to meet representatives of South Glamorgan health authority. The health authority made a good response and immediately admitted what we have been claiming for a long time—that the hospital has not been a good neighbour to those who live alongside it.

The health authority recognised that the hospital had been a source of major traffic problems and overspill parking and promised us that, in response to those problems, it would provide new access to Eastern avenue, which would provide the egress that the existing route does not provide, and new multi-storey car parking to increase parking within the hospital site. The health authority said that it hoped that those measures would be in place within about two years.

I very much welcome those moves and the positive attitude behind them. In the meantime, my constituents are afraid that they may suffer even greater problems. While the multi-storey car park is built, existing parking might be displaced, further inconveniencing the residents of King George V drive, Rhydhelig avenue and other roads around the University hospital of Wales which are named after saints.

We persuaded the health authority to withdraw its planning application providing for the incineration of all the extra refuse from all the other hospitals at the University hospital of Wales and, before it submits another planning application, at least to consult all the residents. The health authority has written to every immediate neighbour of the hospital inviting them to a public meeting next week in the hospital at which they promise to respond to every concern and to try to answer every question that is raised by neighbours. Those are steps forward in trying to improve our local environment in Cardiff, North. The problem of increased use of the incinerator must still be resolved—that must be a matter for Cardiff city council in making a decision about the planning application and for the new, far tougher standards of environmental protection which will be monitored by the environmental health department. At last, the health authority is showing the right approach.

Any belief that we were going forward on all fronts and confidence that we were making progress was, however, rudely disrupted a week ago. South Glamorgan council suddenly revived a proposal to establish a medi-centre on the site of the University hospital of Wales. That medi-centre will not be part of the NHS but will be purely commercial in operation. It will involve a development of 20,000 sq ft. There is a certain irony. If anyone other than a Labour-controlled council had come forward with this commercial operation for the campus of a national health service hospital, the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) and other Labour Members would be jumping up and down and shouting, "Privatisation". This Labour council not only is applying for planning permission but intends to determine that application. It is not the

[Mr. Jones]

planning authority—planning is usually the role of Cardiff city council. I understand that South Glamorgan county council will even be involved in the development.

Mr. Win Griffiths: During the passing of the Planning and Compensation Bill, Labour Members tabled an amendment to stop local authorities giving themselves planning permission in the circumstances which the hon. Gentleman described, but we were not successful in getting that amendment through. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should talk to Ministers about that point.

Mr. Jones: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. Perhaps we have common cause in the whole-hearted will that exists in Wales for a move towards single-tier authorities in order to avoid the confusion of one council giving itself planning permission that might be in contravention of another council.

South Glamorgan council will be judge and jury and, perhaps, beneficiary of the commercial operation at the University hospital of Wales. We are threatened with a fait accompli, and it is feared that there will be little or no consultation with local residents about the latest intensification of the site of that hospital. Of course, South Glamorgan council is the highway authority. The planning application for increased incineration, which has now been withdrawn, would have entailed 20 heavy lorries a day going in and out of the hospital, so South Glamorgan council recommended that that application be turned down. A commercial development of 20,000 sq ft on the hospital site must surely entail many more vehicle movements than 20 a day, so it would be hypocritical if South Glamorgan council reversed its earlier judgment merely to give itself planning permission for a commercial development with which it is involved.

I felt that we had reached a stage at which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales needed to be involved—as far as he could be—in the matter. On Monday I led a delegation of local councillors to see him. We told him of the environmental problems caused by the University hospital of Wales. Although he doubted whether he could call in the latest planning application for a medi-centre, he promised that he would consider calling it in if it involved national matters, but local matters fall solely to the two local councils. However, he recognised the problems and instructed his officials at the Welsh Office to do what they could when South Glamorgan health authority made its proposals for new car parking and for access to Eastern avenue. He advised that the medi-centre should be part of the consultation process, and we look forward to its being on the agenda at next week's public meeting so that those who live around the hospital may have their say on that issue as on the incinerator. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his concern about the problems.

My constituents have endured too much. The environment around the University hospital of Wales which they might reasonably have expected has been ravaged. I believe that the proposal for the medi-centre is the final straw. Such proposals should not over-intensify the use of sites such as the University hospital of Wales where there is precious little room and too many adverse consequences for those who live alongside. Instead, there are the exciting plans for the redevelopment of south Cardiff. Such proposals should be encouraged there. I still believe that the much expanded incineration should not go ahead at the University hospital of Wales. However, I am conscious that many steps have been made in that direction and that much investment has already been made. Any increase in incineration should at least be delayed for two years when the health authority hopes that the extra multi-storey car parking and new access to Eastern avenue will be in place so that there will be the least further environmental disturbance to my constituents. Even so, my constituents want the most stringent tests carried out under environmental protection legislation. My constituents in Heath and Gabalfa deserve the best guarantee that we can look forward to a better —not worse—environment because of the new incinerator at the University hospital of Wales.

I urge the two local councils—Cardiff city and South Glamorgan councils—to have as their prime consideration a regard for my constituents who live alongside the hospital. There should be no fait accompli or hypocrisy. Similarly, I look forward to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales taking any action that he can take on these important environmental problems.

Finally, I refer, briefly, to a no less important matter that my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, East (Mr. Sayeed) mentioned this morning. He said that the number of green belts in England had doubled under a Conservative Government. We have no green belts in Wales, as the same legislation does not apply there, although that is being reviewed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales. He has some sympathy with many of us who have campaigned for a statutory green belt policy. I look forward to the result of his review, which I hope will come soon.

Wales needs the protection of green belts and my constituency is an obvious candidate for such protection. My constituency extends from the central part of Cardiff to the mountain rim that forms the northern boundary of the capital city of Wales. There is little room for development in my constituency and any possible developments should be encouraged to go to or should be exclusively in south Cardiff. The M4 motorway should be regarded as the absolute limit of further development. There should be no developments north of the M4 as they would despoil the mountain edge of Cardiff which should be protected by a green belt. There are open green spaces south of the motorway between Lisvane and St. Mellons, but there is now a threat of development there. I should like to see that area protected by green belt legislation.

There should be a form of planning purity. All too often I hear of cases in which a developer proposes a form of planning gain in return for obtaining planning permission. That has been mentioned with regard to interchanges with the M4 in my constituency. However, the two matters should be entirely separate. A developer may apply for planning permission to the planning authority, but that application should be judged and determined solely on its merits. If the developer wants subsequently to pay for his own interchange with the motorway, that should be an entirely separate matter which should in no way influence the giving of the planning permission.

On the matters that I have brought to the House's attention, and in general, I support the stance outlined by my hon. Friend the Minister for the need to maintain and improve our environment.

10.56 am

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones), because he has mentioned issues to which I intend to refer, including the burning of hospital waste. I agree with all that he said—the same problems exist in my constituency and I am sure that many hon. Members will join me in supporting the action for which he has called.

This has been—and, I am sure, will continue to be—an interesting debate. It is an important one, because every aspect of the environment in which we live is of interest to us as individuals and is certainly of interest to the people whom we seek to represent. The issues involved in a healthy environment grow year by year. I represent a constituency very near Westminster and I bring to the House many groups of youngsters from schools. They are full of enthusiasm and questions, and the environment—our environment and the world environment—is top of the list of their questions. That is good for the country, as, I hope, is the legislation.

I welcome the increase in European Community legislation. I am a member of Parliament's delegation to the Council of Europe. The Minister for the Environment and Countryside is no longer here—I make no criticism of him for that—but I listened to his opening remarks, and I know that he will speak to colleagues in Brussels. I have never seen him at the Council of Europe and I serve on the social, health and family affairs committee, which he has never attended. Perhaps a colleague will convey my remarks to him. The Council of Europe and the social, health and family affairs committee comprise delegates from many countries and of various political persuasions. If the Minister attended and attempted to make the type of speech that he made here he would be laughed at.

The Council of Europe covers a much wider area with a much greater population than that covered by the European Economic Community. Many of the countries in central and eastern Europe now enjoy guest status in the Council. Sadly, under the old systems in those countries, protection of the environment did not figure highly. It is evident from the work in our committees that the environment is now of great importance to those countries. However, it is also evident that much greater co-operation is required between western European countries, which for a long time have been concerned about the environment, and the countries of eastern and central Europe. We need an exchange of ideas and those countries need help to improve and protect the environment.

The Minister of State did not touch on that. What is the Government's policy about helping emerging democracies in central and eastern Europe on this crucial issue? As my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) said, the environment knows no frontiers. The nuclear accident at Chernobyl affected this country even though we are hundreds of miles from the reactor. Pollution in rivers travels long distances. Therefore, we cannot say that the environment elsewhere does not concern us.

I am concerned about the Government's attitude to many things European, and certainly to the whole area of environmental protection. My hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury challenged the Minister to say where he stood on the criticism by the Environment Commissioner, Carlo Ripa di Meana. The current edition of the *European Parliament—EP News* contains a major article headed "Environment Commissioner defends action". The article states that the Commissioner

"came before the House to defend his action of insisting on proper respect for EC environmental impact assessment legislation. He rejected the charge that he had acted with bias against the UK. This he described as 'offensive and unjust'.

Adding that he would not allow himself to be intimidated, he pointed out"—

as did my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury—

"that legal proceedings were pending against ten of the twelve EC countries for failure to respect EC rules on the assessment of large-scale works."

The European Environment Commissioner is not singling out the British, even though the Minister and other senior Ministers seek to attack this honourable Commissioner.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): One of the proposals affected is the road through Oxleas Wood. The major constitutional issues are whether British law complies with the directive and whether the transitional arrangements are adequate. May I plead with the Commissioner to reply to letters? I have not had a reply to a series of letters that I have sent, nor has the prospective Labour candidate in my constituency. Better communication might clear up some of the problems.

Mr. Cox: I have a great deal of sympathy for the hon. Gentleman, because I am sure that all hon. Members are annoyed when they do not receive replies to letters. If he wishes me to try to speed up replies, I shall certainly do so. The hon. Gentleman has been a Minister and is conversant with the systems that operate here. He has a local European Member of Parliament and I am sure that he is aware of ways by which he can speed up replies.

I can cite many examples of Government attacks on EC reports of the Government's actions. Some time ago, there were reports about pollution on British beaches. The Government complained about the cost and said that it was not a matter for them or that matters were not that bad. They also complained about unfairness, but there was no willingness to look at the charges or to have proper consultation with local authorities to see how they and the Government could work together to improve the general standards of our beaches.

Lord Stanley Clinton-Davis is a former European Commissioner and for many years he was in the House. I have read his highly critical speeches in the other place about the difficulties that he repeatedly encountered when trying to pursue European legislation and the obstruction that emanated from senior Ministers. A current example, the social charter, gives a clear indication of the Government's continuing hostility to anything European. The charter covers not only salaries, a minimum wage and maternity benefit but deals with many issues. The minutes of the Council of Europe, which were published in October, refer to the fourth environmental action programme of the European Economic Community and the Council of Europe. Under the heading "Protecting the Environment, the Worker and the Public", the minutes state:

"The Single European Act and the Fourth Environmental Action Programme make clear that the environment is an integral part of the Community's economic, social, industrial, agricultural and other policies. The Action Programme declares the Commissioner's intention of making maximum use of contributions made by the Foundation whose work programmes have already included issues such as hazardous wastes, contaminated land, and voluntary initiatives in the environment."

[Mr. Cox]

That shows that, despite what we are told by Conservatives, the social charter is not solely about salaries and general working conditions on the shop floor but also plays a major role in the environment. The document also states that the charter intends to broaden work on the urban environment, industry, local communities and general safety at work. It refers to urban decline and work on rural and coastal areas.

The social charter has an enormous role to play and we should concern ourselves with that, because it is relevant to us all, wherever we live and whatever part of the country we represent. Perhaps the Minister will tell us how much of that programme, which the EC and the Council of Europe support, is supported by the Government. We are full members of both bodies.

When I attend meetings in Paris or Strasbourg at which such issues arise, I find it frustrating to hear the continuing opposition from Conservative Members, especially in the Council of Europe. It would be interesting to hear just how much of the programme that I have outlined the Government support, those aspects of it that they do not, and why.

I represent an inner-city area of London. As we all know, not only in London but in many of our big cities, there are areas of great depression—neglected areas where there are thousands of people out of work—and those areas have existed for a long time. We have had troubles in various parts of the country in recent months, and I realise that there may be many reasons for that, but I am convinced that one of them is the depressing effect that such areas have on those who live in them. When one asks people what they think of their area and why they do not show more interest in it, their response is likely to be, "Why bother? What concern is it of ours? Who shows any interest in us?" The environment is crucial in this respect, and that is why the Council of Europe and its social, health and family affairs committee show continuing interest and involvement in these matters.

I have expressed the view held by the whole of the committee, which represents countries with Governments of various political colours and is made up of members belonging to various political parties. There is complete agreement on the commitment of the Council of Europe to dealing with the issue, and I repeat that it would be interesting to hear just where the Government stand.

I agree with the hon. Member for Cardiff, North that, although we must be involved in protecting the environment nationally and internationally, in the end, it is a local issue, crucial to those whom we represent. I shall refer briefly to one of the matters touched on by the hon. Gentleman, although I shall not speak on it for as long as I had intended, because the hon. Gentleman made wide-ranging reference to it himself, I congratulate him on that. The burning of hospital waste is certainly relevant in my area because, for years St. George's hospital, Tooting has been burning enormous quantities of such waste—often for days on end. The soot deposits from its chimneys fall in the residential area in which it is sited, settling on washing, paintwork and parked cars and on the plants in people's gardens—all of which suffer. I am sure that the House can imagine the feelings of someone who hangs out the washing one sunny morning only to find, on going to collect it three or four hours later, that it is full of holes caused by the soot deposits coming out of the hospital chimney. People have brought their cars to my advice surgery to show me burnt paintwork caused by soot deposits. No doubt the hon. Member for Cardiff, North shares a problem that I have, which is that, unfortunately, it is the most difficult thing imaginable to try to get any recompense in respect of property damaged in this way. An elderly constituent of mine came to me and said, "I have had my car for 12 years; it is my life. I have always looked after it because I know that I cannot afford another one." The chap in question went to his car one day and found burn marks all over the bodywork. When he came to see me, I said that I would write to the chairlady of the health authority, who replied that she was very sorry that this had happened but asked whether the gentleman could prove that the burn marks had been caused by the deposit from the hospital chimney. Most of our constituents—and possibly we ourselves—would be likely to respond, "Where else would it have come from?" Perhaps the hon. Member for Cardiff, North agrees with me that, although one knows what the problem is and the damage that it is causing, it is very difficult to get anything done about it.

I wrote to the Secretary of State for the Environment and was told that it was really a matter for the chief environmental officer of the local authority, but when I took the matter up with the local environmental officer, his response—and it is to his credit that he responded—was, "Well, it may be bad, but it is not really so bad that I must take any action." When one passes such messages back to one's constituents, they say, "Who will do something to stop this nuisance, which is causing enormous problems not only to me but to the whole area?" Sadly, in these cases, one gets nowhere. I agree with the hon. Member for Cardiff, North that we must consider the question of responsibility and tighten up the legislation.

A nuisance is also caused by the siting of petrol stations in residential areas. A planning application has been made for the building of a petrol station in the midst of a residential area in my constituency. Hon. Members may say that petrol stations are to be found in residential areas everywhere in the country and I do not dispute that, but in the area in question there is no shortage of petrol stations and the local people say that they do not want another one damaging their environment and that there is no need for it. The parents of youngsters who go to play at the two local nurseries are very worried about the effects that the petrol station will have on their children. People are also worried about the general effect of the new station on their community. But what happens when one tries to get it stopped? We are told that there are procedures—and I accept the need for them—but when the matter goes to the local council's planning department, it is argued that there are strong grounds for allowing the application. When one asks what they are, one is told, "Oh, well, the petrol company wants to build it." One can only ask, "But what about the local community, which does not want it?" I know that the Minister may not be in a position to respond in detail to the comments made on this subject by the hon. Member for Cardiff, North and me, but I hope that he will take them on board and I ask him to write to us on these important local issues.

I hope that the remarks of those who speak in this debate—critical or otherwise—will be acted upon, because the environment is crucial to all those whom we seek to represent.

11.27 am

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): No one can possibly be against a cleaner environment and the conservation of rare and irreplaceable species such as elephants, whales and orchids. Similarly, no one can possibly be against the concept of better quality air and drinking water. Nevertheless, it is very important that, before we start legislating on the scale that the Opposition advocate, we make very sure that we are doing so on a sound factual basis.

I should like to point out to the House just how ignorant we are about many of the matters on which we legislate. We legislate because we are put under great pressure by a new group of what I call eco-terrorists, who seek to press their opinions on politicians. Many of them are ex-socialists and their green wellies have red linings. They want more rules and regulations and more Government interference. They put all environmental problems down to the wicked industrialists, notwithstanding the fact that much of the pollution comes from eastern Europe. Presumably, it is the wicked socialists who are responsible for that, but we never hear them mentioned.

The motor car is now the big demon of the left because, supposedly, it pollutes our atmosphere, but the fact is that it is the most treasured possession of many people—including working people—because it allows them to get around independently. That does not seem to enter into the reckoning, however, and the socialists want use of the motor car to be controlled. Before we start slapping all sorts of controls and restrictions on cars, we ought to find out a little more about the effect that they are really having on the environment.

I want this morning to consider the effect of some of those issues on our planet and particularly on our atmosphere, and I begin by considering the ozone layer. We have been told that it develops holes which allow radiation through and that causes all sorts of curious and devastating effects. The big villain substances are the chlorofluorocarbon gases—or CFCs, for short. Those substances are basic to many industrial processes.

People have argued that hairsprays, hamburger packaging and refrigerator gases are causing holes in the ozone layer. However, we do not compare the effect of those things with natural elements in the environment. Mount St. Augustine is one of the great volcanoes on earth. In 1976 it exploded and gave out 290 billion kg of hydrochloric acid into the upper atmosphere and into the ozone layer. That was the equivalent of 570 times the world's industrial production of CFC gases. That must have a profound effect on the ozone layer.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Gorman: I will give way later.

Observations about the ozone layer are being made in MacMurdo sound in the Antarctic which is just 15 miles upwind from another great volcano called Mount Erebus. That volcano erupts constantly. For the past 100 years it has ejected more than 1,000 tonnes of chlorine into the atmosphere every day. Compared to those massive events, the quantity of CFCs produced by industrial complexes is absolutely negligible. It is potty and ridiculous to suggest that stopping people spraying their armpits with deodorants will have an effect on issues of that scale.

People who make such assertions do so not so much on a scientific basis, but because they have another axe to grind. They want to condemn industrial output. I am not saying that we should allow industry to pollute, and I entirely support the Government's claim that the polluter should pay. For example, it is possible to monitor pollution from incinerator chimneys in hospitals and in that regard I sympathise with the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) and the problems that he has in his constituency.

There should be codes of practice and we should prosecute people who carelessly ignore the interests of their surroundings. I am in favour of that, but that is different from setting up international agencies whose legislation and ideas may have devastating effects on industries in western countries while leaving eastern countries to carry on processes over which the rest of us have no control. We should discover the facts before we peddle such half-baked and unscientific ideas.

The greenhouse effect is something else that is supposedly happening on our planet. The theory is that carbon dioxide and other related gases accumulate in the atmosphere, raise the temperature, melt the icecaps and flood countries. We are going to boil or drown: that is the basic, crude, but nevertheless simplistic theory upon which we are supposed to legislate.

We are extremely ignorant about climatology in our atmosphere. We know little about the effect of clouds on our climate. If the theory is correct, when the sun shines, the heat builds up, the water evaporates and more clouds form, what happens to those clouds? Clouds act as a blanket above the earth. They deflect the sun's heat. We never hear about that.

What about plants? When I was a 10-year-old school girl, I knew enough biology to know that plants gobble up carbon dioxide in the way that dogs gobble up bones. They love it: the more they get, the more they grow. In fact, more carbon dioxide means more forests, more grass and more green plants. I do not think that there are 50 people in this place who know enough biology to appreciate that. If the theory was correct, plants would welcome a build-up of carbon dioxide because most plants photosynthesise at less than 50 per cent. of their full capacity, and I can say that as a practising biologist for the past 25 years.

People like Sir Crispin Tickell, who, I believe, was once our ambassador in New York, join in with the eco-madness and advice us that unless we do something to control carbon emissions from motorcars the earth will heat up, the icecaps will melt and Florida and, I dare say, Parliament will be submerged. However, melting ice does not occupy very much more space that the ice floes. The only extra bit is the little bit that sticks out above the water. The effect that that would have in raising ocean levels is absolutely minute. If we melt a block of ice, it does not take up more space. I hope that all hon. Members understand that, I sometimes feel that I am talking to one of my classes for 10-year-olds when I give them lessons on very elementary and basic science.

However, that aspect of the greenhouse theory is another piece of mumbo-jumbo. Some organisations in this country now have a vested interest in frightening the wits out of us. They are worriers and meddlers. Organisations such as Friends of the Earth do some good work, but in many ways they go right over the top in trying to persuade the Government to introduce legislation. People like Mr. Porritt make a great profession out of being eco-champions of our country. He talks a load of rot as well. Then there are mega-millionaires like Sir James

[Mrs. Gorman]

Goldsmith. He has also become part of the eco-terrorist movement and is going to devote his great fortune to saving us from our sins. I wish that he had stuck with baked beans. Incidentally, baked beans also produce a great deal of carbon dioxide gas, as do cows. There was a theory that the increase in the number of cattle kept in civilised societies was contributing to the greenhouse effect. That was put forward as a scientific point of view. So much for the evidence on which a great deal of that theory is based.

My message to the Government is that before they pursue or are pushed or goaded into introducing yet more regulations, which would have to be draconian to have effect, they should seriously consider the matter. It is estimated that, if we did away with every car in the western hemisphere, we would prevent temperature increases by less than 1 deg C. We can all work that one out. It is alleged that there has been a 100 per cent. increase in CO_2 over the past 100 years. However, many of the measurements 100 years ago were extremely susceptible to error. The actual increase has been from three parts in 1 million to four parts in 1 million. That is hardly Armageddon. Even if those predictions are correct, the amounts involved are minute, yet we are often asked to introduce regulations on cars and industry based on that kind of evidence.

Mr. Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): From her biological experience, would my hon. Friend tell the House something about the effects on human physiology of having to breathe in exhaust fumes?

Mrs. Gorman: My hon. Friend has made a valid point. I have told him that I believe that we should apply codes of practice to pollution. I do not like the smell. I hate crossing the road at the corner of Parliament street and being deluged by very unpleasant smells. I entirely support my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson). However, that is different from the attacks that the eco-terrorists make on the car industry in wanting to restrict the number of cars. By all means let us have clean cars, but do not let us pretend that the car is responsible for the greenhouse effect and global warming. Let us get our facts and science right. Let us go to people who know some good, real science. Let us invest in the quality of science that can be produced for us by the Royal Society and by other organisations so that we legislate on the basis of good scientific information.

The people who are now pushing the idea of global warming and the greenhouse effect are the same people who, 10 years ago, were telling us that we were moving into an ice age. They are exactly the same pseudo-scientists. They are very active in America, although, thank goodness, a rearguard action is now being fought there and politicians such as President Bush are now thinking twice about pursuing some of the more extreme environmental legislation.

If we did away with every industrial process, the effects on our climate would be practically nil, because the effects on our climate are entirely due to our proximity to the sun, the movement of our planet in its orbit and the fact that it wobbles about a bit, which causes other periodic changes in our climate. Gigantic outbursts of energy from the sun —sun spots—affect what happens here on the earth. They create holes in our atmosphere from time to time, and that in turn affects the transmission of electronic signals. All those things are facts. Bearing in mind the little bit of the earth which is actually occupied by people—less than 10 per cent. of the earth's surface—the mega effects in which the eco-terrorists believe are a contradiction of any kind of common sense.

I ask the Government not to be stampeded or terrified into legislating in an atmosphere of ignorance. Most of the people who try to push those fashionable theories are about as accurate as a horoscope or "Old Moore's Almanack" in predicting what our planet will be like. I will join any of my colleagues who want to make our streets more pleasant and clean and who want to stop dirty old chimneys or dirty old industries dumping their rubbish in the environment without a proper costing of what they are doing to the rest of us. All hon. Members would support that. However, we must not be driven into draconian legislation that would have a devastating effect on our industries, because, at the end of the day, every time we push a factory out of existence because it has been polluting the atmosphere we destroy people's jobs.

We must not let this matter develop into a campaign against the motor car. The motor car provides the greatest pleasure that many people have. Even the hon. Member for Tooting would find that his constituent did not want to do away with his motor car. We must do as the Government say—make the polluter pay and keep an eye on things. Best of all, we must have good scientific information on which to work. We must not allow the Porritts and the Goldsmiths of this world to dictate the rest of the legislation that we design on this subject.

11.43 am

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) I understand that she was a biology teacher. I suggest that she sticks to biology and does not mention chemistry or physics or talk about the ozone layer and chlorofluorocarbons, because there were profound scientific errors in what she said, but then that is the standard of science after 10 years of Conservative Government.

I am pleased that we have this debate on the environment so soon after the previous one on 12 July. I was pleased then that it was our first full-scale environment debate during this Parliament. It is a pity that we could not wait another couple of weeks before holding this debate, because, before the end of this month, the National Rivers Authority will publish the results of the water quality survey which it carried out during 1990. That will be a significant report because it is a cumulative index of water pollution. It gives an idea of what has been achieved in river quality in the past five to 10 years.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) pointed out in her excellent speech, that report, which has been leaked, will show that 6,323 km of our rivers have deteriorated since the previous survey in 1985 and that 4,631 km have improved—11 per cent. have improved and 15 per cent. have become worse. The balance is negative—a 4 per cent. net deterioration in the quality of our rivers.

From 1958 to 1980, successive surveys showed that we were improving the quality of our rivers. However, the new survey will demonstrate that there has been a net deterioration of 6 per cent. during the past decade. That

shows the measure of care of the environment under this Government. That is the real measure, not the Minister's windy rhetoric. Our rivers are not getting better. They improved for more than 20 years, but they are now getting worse.

The report blames intensive agriculture, slurry, effluent, droughts—there have been two years of drought, especially in eastern Britain—acid rain, run-off from contaminated land and, the biggest culprit, reduced Government expenditure on sewage treatment in the run-up to water privatisation. The Government call water privatisation the solution to our problems, but it is the cause of our problems. Privatisation and cuts in expenditure on sewage treatment have led to the deterioration of our rivers. I hope that that report will get the publicity that it deserves. I challenge the Government to offer a three-hour debate on that report.

The National Rivers Authority is our independent watchdog. We supported its creation and we are very glad of its relative success. It is doing very good work. I am delighted to note that the number of prosecutions last year increased from 334 to 908. Every privatised water authority was prosecuted, but the fines were quite trivial. The fines that were imposed on the 10 water companies total £49,000. Quite honestly, last year's pay rise for Elfed Jones, the chairman of Welsh Water, would have paid all the fines that were inflicted on the water authorities. In 1988, the last year for which we have figures, there were 26,926 incidents of water pollution. We must ask ourselves and the NRA why only one in 30 of those incidents led to prosecution. Why does it not enforce the law much more regularly?

In the past few months, Greenpeace has successfully prosecuted Albright and Wilson for pollution in Whitehaven. It intends to take legal action against the NRA for default of its legal responsibilities and to call for a judicial review, particularly of why there were so few prosecutions when there are so many incidents of pollution, and why British consents to industrial companies are so lax compared with those in the United States and Germany. Why do we not adopt the same high environmental standards as those countries?

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) referred earlier to the problems in and around the Coalite plant in Bolsover where dioxin contamination has been found in the river, in farm animals and in cows' milk. We now hear that there is cluster of breast cancers around Bolsover. At environment questions on Wednesday my hon. Friend was told that HMIP is now investigating that matter and taking some action. I am glad that the Coalite plant, which is undoubtedly the prime suspect, if not the cause of the problems, will be closed down at the end of this month and overhauled. However, why has HMIP taken so long to identify that problem? Dioxins are now so abundant in that environment that it is too late to solve the problem.

Let us consider HMIP's record over the years. Last year I worked on the report produced by the Select Committee on the Environment on the ReChem plant in Pontypool, where polychlorinated biphenyls are incinerated, especially imported PCBs which are much more profitable. The monitoring of that plant by HMIP has been pathetic and feeble. Hardly any samples have been taken. It has simply been a case of drawing up a code of practice and entering into discussions, negotiations, encouragement and exhortation as a means of trying to encourage the plant to adopt good practice.

Mrs. Gorman: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will tell us how he suggests that we deal with industrial waste. All societies produce it, so we must have sensible plans for dealing with it. What are his plans if we are not to incinerate such waste safely?

Mr. Williams: There must generally be far greater emphasis on waste minimisation, which does not happen at all at the moment in British industry. Because it is cheap to throw things away and to pump waste into the air or water, that is what industry does and that is exactly what would continue to happen in the undisciplined, anything goes, free market society that the hon. Lady advocated earlier.

Waste minimisation is proving highly successful in Germany, on the continent generally, and in the United States. Between three quarters and 90 per cent. of industrial waste is unnecessary. Incineration is not the right way to treat PCBs or other highly toxic organic solvents which produce dioxins. There are other methods of dealing with PCBs and contaminated organic solvents, such as by hydrogenation or heating them with lime. I should prefer PCBs to be stored above ground until the alternative methods of dealing with them prove economic and viable.

The low level of air pollution monitoring in this country is a scandal. Water pollution is monitored by the National Rivers Authority. Solid waste dumping is subject to some regulations; perhaps they are not strong enough, but there is reasonable enforcement of them. However, there is hardly any legislation on air pollution and virtually no enforcement. The total number of air pollution prosecutions by HMIP since 1987 is nine—that is two a year. That can be contrasted with the 900 prosecutions brought last year by the NRA. When it comes to air pollution, it is open house for the polluter.

Mrs. Gorman: It is kind of the hon. Gentleman to give way again. One of the nice things about Friday mornings is that hon. Members are so good about letting their colleagues get in on the act. What about the clean air legislation? When I was a little girl, we went to school in winter in thick smog—in choking ghastliness. The air in this country has been improved enormously, so why do people keep saying that things are getting worse? They are getting better.

Mr. Williams: There is no question about the success of the Clean Air Act 1956 and I pay tribute to the Conservative Government for introducing it. The problem now is not one of soot and carbon monoxide, which the Clean Air Act was designed to solve, but of sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxide and carbon dioxide. Unfortunately, the Clean Air Act does nothing to solve the problem of acid rain. Sulphur is present in all coal, oil and gas which, on burning, produce sulphur dioxide and acid rain. We have known for a century that all fossil fuels produce acidic fumes, but in the past 20 years we have come to realise that acid rain is a serious problem. The British Government, however, were the last Government in Europe to realise that. It was only in 1987 that the former Prime Minister suddenly woke up to acid rain on a flight to Norway where she was due to meet Mrs.

[Mr. Williams]

Brundtland. Although I am glad of that late realisation, the sad fact is that when the Government leave office some time next year, not one of our power stations will have been cleaned up. Let us compare the position here with what happens in Germany, Holland and many other European countries. Virtually every fossil fuel power station in Germany has flue gas desulphurisation, but not a single power station in this country is fitted with such equipment.

I represent Carmarthen in west Wales. The neighbouring constituency to the west is Pembroke, which contains a 2,000 MW oil power station. Unfortunately, because of the price of oil, since it was built 20 years ago that power station has operated at only one third of its capacity. There is currently a proposal to convert it to burning orimulsion, which is a new fuel that is derived from Venezuelan tar sands. That is a type of surface bitumen which is cheap to extract and which can be transported from Venezuela to Britain and be used as a cheap fuel. I should be delighted if it were possible to burn orimulsion cleanly, because the Venezuelan deposit contains as much oil as the middle east reserves.

However, the problem is that orimulsion contains about 2·7 per cent. sulphur, which is a high proportion —twice that of British coal and much higher than the sulphur content of fuel oils. National Power has submitted a planning application to use orimulsion in that power station which it would then run at full capacity—at either 1,000 or 1,500 MW. That would churn out a massive amount of sulphur dioxide.

It is a sign of the climate created by the Government that that planning application has been submitted without any thought being given to the installation of flue gas desulphurisation. There is no question but that if that plant was located in Germany, Holland or any other western European country, the owner—the power generator—would fit flue gas desulphurisation. If that application goes ahead, the Pembroke power station will become the largest sulphur dioxide emitter in Britain, emitting 200,000 tonnes of sulphur dioxide per year in its fumes. As I have said, the power station is located in Pembroke which has prevailing south-westerly winds. My constituency neighbours it and, in turn, is abutted by mid-Wales. Then we have the rest of Britain. That must be the worst possible location for any high acid rain polluter.

Earlier this year scientists at the Department of the Environment produced a report that was critical of the Government's acid rain record.

It said that in the privatisation programme

"the Government should have insisted on power stations in the west being fitted to cut acid rain which sweeps across Britain with the prevailing wind."

That is the feeling within the Department of the Environment.

I ask the Minister to contact her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution to make it clear that when it considers the planning application it must insist that the project has flue gas desulphurisation. I should be happy if that were the case. In my constituency we have problems of acid rain in the Towy valley and the head waters of the Towy. Sinbrianyw Llyn Brianne reservoir at the head of the valley has to be limed regularly to counter the problems of acid rain. Will the Minister comment on the view of the Department of the Environment on the oil emulsion project? Does he agree that the power station should have flue gas desulphurisation cleaning equipment?

I have talked about rivers and air pollution and I now wish to deal with solid waste. I welcomed many of the measures in the Environmental Protection Bill introduced two years ago. I welcomed the measures on the disposal of domestic waste, and to some extent, industrial waste. However, the importation of toxic waste presents serious problems. We now import 10 times as much toxic waste as we did in 1980. One such waste is incinerator fly ash. We accept that incinerators produce dioxins, heavy metals and several other pollutants. In many countries fly ash is classified as a special or toxic waste. In Britain it is not. There is a trade in its import. The waste is dumped in landfill sites in Britain. That is not good enough. That trade should be stopped. All toxic wastes should be disposed of in their countries of origin. It is for Germany, Switzerland and other countries to develop their own facilities for the disposal of wastes.

Back in July the Opposition welcomed the Government's apparent decision to set up an environmental protection agency. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury explained, we had hoped to co-operate with the Government in this Session of Parliament to establish such an agency. But the measure is not in the Queen's Speech because of squabbling between the Department of the Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. It is important that when the agency is set up it takes over the whole of the National Rivers Authority. The NRA must not be dismembered. It is a good, impressive environmental watchdog and we need it to have sharper and sharper teeth. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food should not take over any of the NRA's responsibilities, especially given the record of MAFF and its lack of concern on any environmental issue.

We want an environmental protection agency based on the NRA and incorporating HMIP. There should be much stronger measures on air pollution monitoring and control. The agency should also have responsibility for waste disposal and the type of work done by the countryside councils. All those matters should come under one powerful umbrella organisation which is independent of the Government. Clearly the Government do not have sufficient commitment to go ahead with that. We await a general election next year after which we shall have a Government who are properly committed to the environment and that environmental protection agency —so much so that we shall have our own Minister for environmental protection.

12.3 pm

Mr. Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams). He speaks with great knowledge and expertise on environmental matters, so it is all the more pity that he does not always get things right. He spoke about the National Rivers Authority's report. I have here a copy of the *Water Bulletin* of 1 November. It is the journal of the water industry. Under the heading "Rivers report is leaked", it says:

"The long-awaited five-yearly river quality report due to be published by the NRA later in November has been leaked in an incomplete form to Friends of the Earth. . . This week, however, water companies had only seen incomplete copies of the draft report. . . This is the second occasion in a week when important and confidential information related to the water

industry has been leaked. A few days before, a letter from EC Commissioner Carlo Ripa di Meana about drinking water was leaked to the Labour Party".

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that he quoted from an incomplete draft of the report.

Another article in the magazine is entitled:

"WSA attacks Labour leak 'travesty'".

It says:

"Claims by Labour's environment spokeswoman Ann Taylor that an EC letter showed the Government had given water companies 'licences to pollute' were described as a 'travesty' by the Water Services Association last week.

WSA Secretary Mike Carney said of Ann Taylor's statement, issued under the headline 'New initiative by Ripa di Meana (EC Commissioner) adds to embarrassment for John Major' . . .

'These so-called "pollution licences" are statutory undertakings given to Government by each of the companies. They commit the companies to investment in work to be completed by specified dates to correct the few remaining exceedences of EC requirements.

It is clear that Mrs. Taylor does not understand the statutory arrangements for water companies and is grossly ignorant of the facts about water quality in her own country'."

Mrs. Ann Taylor: Will the hon. Gentleman clarify his position? Does he believe that the Government have the power to grant a domestic derogation which was, after all, the subject of the letter from the Commissioner? He will not find the answer in the article to which he referred. However, the Commissioner has written on the basis that the British Government have once again failed to abide by EC regulations and have tried to grant domestic derogations on more than 4,000 cases. That is the point. Will he comment on that technicality?

Mr. Summerson: I can best reply to that point by quoting the WSA which goes on to say in that article:

"'Britain is in breach of the pesticide parameter in a few cases, . . . But there is no health risk and work is being undertaken to comply. Until then what does the Commissioner want us to do—turn off the supply to all the people affected? The directive does not say what we should do.'"

Does the hon. Lady also advocate turning off the water supply to people before the work is done? It is clear that there is no risk to health.

Mrs. Taylor: I want to make a constructive suggestion which I hope will receive the hon. Gentleman's support. One of our problems when we are discussing water quality is that many people in Britain do not know whether their supply of water reaches EC standards. Would the hon. Gentleman join me in calling on the Government, perhaps in the Competition and Service (Utilities) Bill, published today as part of the citizens charter, to introduce amendments to legislation so that when individual consumers receive their water bill they also receive information at the bottom about whether the water supply reaches EC standards?

Mr. Summerson: It is clear that already no water is supplied to customers which is not of the required quality. I have also told the hon. Lady that work is being carried out to ensure that water satisfies the various requirements. I do not see that there is any difficulty.

I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) is not in the Chamber to hear my remarks, because I want to mention some more examples of Euro nonsense. Of course I shall relate them to the subject under debate.

Standardisation is a theme that has become the bureaucrat's hobby horse—Commissioners can talk of little else. For instance, Mr. Antonio Cardoso, the EC Energy Commissioner, claimed at a recent conference in Copenhagen:

"Citizens of Europe cannot accept rail gauges which are not uniform . . . Citizens of Europe cannot accept that even simple actions like the use of an electric razor can become impossible by lack of use of normalization of domestic power sockets . . . Citizens of Europe cannot accept different dialling codes, different speed limits, different currency units, even different external policy, security and defence concepts."

I should like the House to ponder briefly the effects that attempting to impose standard rail gauges would have on the environment of this country.

A lot has been said about water in the debate. Last year, I introduced the Water Requirements (Planning) Bill under which all those who sought to put up new buildings would have to give notice of the building and its water requirements to the local water supply company.

The use of water has become excessive. The National Rivers Authority has developed extensive safeguards to ensure that new water abstractions cause minimal impact on river ecology, but the problem arises with existing abstractions.

With the passing of the Water Act 1989, provision was made for all existing abstractions for domestic and most agricultural purposes to be granted a licence of entitlement. That has had and will continue to have devastating effects on ground water abstraction. The great advantage of taking ground water is that it tends to be pure and needs minimum treatment. However, as people install more washing machines and dishwashing machines, and as they get more cars and want to wash them more frequently, they use more water.

Most people have no idea where water comes from and simply do not realise that rivers are drying up in this country because of excessive ground water abstraction. Most people do not realise that one third of domestic water consumption is used for flushing lavatories. We will have to introduce metering in people's homes, and I believe that in times of drought when water is short there should be a higher tariff to make people aware that it is in short supply. At the moment there is no mechanism for bringing home to people that water is in short supply, that rivers, streams, springs and wells are drying up and levels of ground water in many areas are falling unacceptably.

The answer lies in building more reservoirs to store high winter flows. There would probably be a public outcry at that until people realised that less than one quarter of 1 per cent. of the surface area of England is covered by still water, and that percentage is even lower in the south east where there is the worst problem.

Many of our rivers are sick and no one knows why. Famous rivers such as the Test and the Avon are suffering. The number of fish caught in those rivers falls year by year. What is going on? The answer lies in agricultural practice. Much sediment goes into rivers which did not go into them before. Pesticides, fertilisers, silage liquor—which gets spilt from time to time—and slurry are being put on the land and they all have an effect on rivers, especially when one bears in mind until recently the Test flowed through water meadows, reed beds and wet woodlands. Intensive arable agriculture has only recently taken place in the Test valley.

I advocate riparian buffer zones—strips of woodland, a minimum of 10 m and perhaps up to 100 m wide, running

[Mr. Summerson]

back from the banks of the river. They would absorb much of the detritus of agricultural practice—the pesticides, slurry, fertilisers and all the effects of ploughing and cultivation. Perhaps they could be set up as environmentally sensitive areas or even as water protection zones under section 3 of the Water Act 1989.

With the advent of set-aside, there is great potential for riparian buffer zones. After all, we are told that apparently more than 6 million acres of farmland will be surplus to requirements by the turn of the century, so there must be huge potential for such schemes. A strip 50 m wide on each side of a river would take about 40 acres per mile. So 1 per cent. of 6 million acres would protect about 1,500 miles of stream. I recommend that my hon. Friends on the Front Bench consider that idea.

As regards my constituency, I must mention the channel tunnel link which is to come through Stratford to King's Cross. I welcome the fact that the link will come through Stratford, which is quite close to my constituency. It will help to rejuvenate an area which is badly in need of investment. However, I give this warning. Those people who may cast a greedy eye over Walthamstow marshes, to build new railway lines to take some of the traffic through north-east London to the midlands, the north and Scotland, had better think again. The people of Walthamstow value Walthamstow marshes highly. They are a site of special scientific interest; they are extremely ancient and are full of the most interesting species of plant and bird life, including owls and foxes. I have seen a tern fishing in one of the little streams that runs through there. The marshes are an open lung in an otherwise heavily built-up area and must remain undisturbed.

While on the subject of railways, may I draw to my hon. Friend's attention the Barking to Gospel Oak line, which is a byword for inefficiency and uselessness. We all know that railways are environmentally sound and friendly. If that line could be made to work efficiently, it would help the environment greatly by taking a lot of traffic off the roads.

The day will come when future generations will look back with incredulity on our willingness to share our cities with the internal combustion engine. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay that the car is a great asset, but surely there must be different ways to propel it. I look forward to the day when in our towns and cities there will be electrically powered cars which are quiet, pollution-free and efficient. The generation of power for the motor car will be moved back to power stations and so the pollution generated when generating that power can be dealt with in one place, at the power station. The Environmental Protection Act 1990—a fine Act—contains two aspects relating to noise and litter pollution. Many of my constituents and those of other Members suffer from noise generated by selfish people and their activities. The Act contains strong measures to enable local authorities and local people to stop noise. I urge people to take note of those provisions and to use them wherever possible. If they were to do so, their own quality of life would be greatly enhanced.

12.20 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I hope that Environment Ministers will listen to three of the issues mentioned by the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson). I agree with his comments on water, and our abuse and excessive use of it.

I also share the hon. Gentleman's view that we have become a nation, and a world, increasingly in hock to the motor vehicle in a way that substantially undermines our quality of life. And we are increasingly blighted by noise. As I do not want to make a great contribution on that subject, I shall ask Ministers to consider merely one noise issue, that from vehicles. I understand that the Environmental Protection Act does not cover noise emission from moving vehicles. It deals with noise from moving vessels and from buildings, but not noise from vehicles, which is the cause of much complaint.

The hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) made a new sort of green contribution today; she was dressed in a new sort of green outfit, which should have warned us about what was coming. I think that her attack on eco-terrorists and pseudo-scientists will be answered line by line and verse by verse in due course by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment. The hon. Lady has a capacity for speaking in lay people's language, but she does not always understand the implications of some of the ideas that she propounds. Although volcanoes may contribute enormously to the destruction of our atmosphere, it seems that there is not much that we can do about preventing that, whereas we can do a little to protect the atmosphere from destruction by industry and transport. Although there is a native logic in some of what the hon. Lady says, we should not be beguiled by the first-year secondary school biology lesson she sought to give us this morning.

Today is the first day after the week's debate on the Queen's Speech. The subject of the environment was not thought sufficiently important to be debated——

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tony Baldry): That is a matter for the Opposition.

Mr. Hughes: I am just about to deal with the Minister's sedentary intervention, which is correct.

The environment was not thought sufficiently important to be included in the debate on the Queen's Speech. That was the Labour party's fault because it chooses the subjects for debate, and it chose to exclude the environment.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: The subject was not contained in the Queen's Speech.

Mr. Hughes: It is not enough to say that the subject was not contained in the Queen's Speech. I have already criticised the Government on the matter; the Queen's Speech contained just one sentence referring to next year's Brazil conference. There was nothing on the subject in the Prime Minister's speech and not a word from the Chancellor in the autumn statement or in the speech that he gave in the last day's debate on the Queen's Speech yesterday. The Secretary of State for the Environment chose not to speak about the environment at all.

We must ensure that the record is straight. We have had one week's debate on the priorities for this new political

year; the Government chose not to put the environment as a priority in the Queen's Speech and the Labour party chose not to put it as a priority in the subsequent debate.

Mrs. Ann Taylor *rose*——

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Lady is desperate to make her defence, and I shall let her do so now.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, although I am not desperate to make the defence. The hon. Gentleman is merely saying, "A plague on both your houses"—the normal Liberal line. I was expecting slightly more constructive comments about the environment. The hon. Gentleman must acknowledge that the fact that the environment did not feature in the Queen's Speech except for one reference to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development which we spent considerable time debating on 12 July—must be a reasonable reason for the subject being squeezed out of the debates. In addition, we knew that today's debate was taking place.

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Lady's case will rest on its merits. The Labour party could have chosen to debate the environment. The fact that it is being debated today was a matter for negotiation between the Tory and Labour spokesmen through the usual channels. There was a carve-up and neither of the two largest parties thought fit to put environment in the first week's programme of the Session. People may draw their own conclusions about that.

Mr. Morgan: The environment debate is two days later than the other debate.

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) seeks to make light of the subject. However, everybody protests all the time about how important the issue is and the hon. Gentleman knows prefectly well that the Labour party could have chosen to make it a priority.

Mr. Gerald Bowden (Dulwich): I am not making a party political point, but we should note the number of Members in the Chamber today. On an issue of such dramatic importance, it is disgraceful that the attendance should be so light.

Mr. Morgan: There is a higher proportion of Liberals than of other parties here, even though there is only one of them.

Mr. Hughes: So unfair is the system that by being here myself I am ensuring that my party has a high percentage attendance. When the revolution comes, and we have a decent system, there will be many more of us.

The obvious omission from the Queen's Speech was the environmental protection agency which was derailed by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. There were lesser omissions such as the legislation on hedgerows —a cause to which the Parliamentary Under-Secretary is personally committed, but which was not included in the Queen's Speech—and legislation on common land, which has sadly slipped down the Government's agenda from its position three years ago, for no very obvious reason. Another obvious failure in the political rather than legislative programme was the failure to commit any significant new resources to environmental matters—that point was conceded by the Secretary of State for the Environment in his press release, the announcements and the simple figures. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary is nodding negatively——

Mr. Baldry: I shall deal with the matter.

Mr. Hughes: The Minister says that he will deal with it, but if we look at Government expenditure Department by Department, we can break down the Department of the Environment element into the environment sector as opposed to the housing or local government sectors, we see a reduction from the estimated outturn this year—£750 million—to £610 million next year, £600 million for the following year and £580 million for the year after that. It is a matter of fact that, according to the Government's projections, the amount of money that has been committed is less. That may be defended, but it is incompatible with their argument that priority is being given to environmental matters.

Also shunted off into a convenient siding was the Government's commitment to do what they said was necessary about raising fuel prices. On Monday of this week the Advisory Committee on Business and the Environment expressly recommended that fuel prices should be increased. The Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Trade and Industry said that they could not comment on that; it was up to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. But the Chancellor said nothing about raising revenue from that source. I appreciate that that is principally a matter for the Budget. Nevertheless, the Government could have said something about taxing the use of environmental resources. When the Chancellor referred to the success of the economy he could have talked about evaluating growth in environmental terms rather than in traditional gross domestic product terms, but all that was ignored.

We welcome the fact that the Government published their checklist of action a year after publication of the White Paper. In it they were honest enough to admit some failures. We also welcome the fact—although it has been commented on with cynicism, because many argue that this should have been Government policy for many years —that there has been a substantial increase in the Government's commitment to improve public transport. That may have something to do with the impending general election and public perception of the importance of the issue.

I want to deal, as did the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), with the European Community's environmental impact assessment directive.When the directive came before the House, in regulation form, the Government commended it through the mouth of the then Minister of State, now the Secretary of State for Health. It was a debate in which the Labour spokesperson, for whatever reason—I have never discovered why—did not show up. The hon. Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland) had to hold the fort. In January of this year the Commission gave an early warning to the Government. In March the Commission sent a draft letter to the Government. Subsequently there was a continuing dialogue between Brussels and Westminster. The Environment Commissioner says that in the summer he had a long telephone conversation with the Secretary of State for Transport regarding his concern about non-implementation of the directive. There was a last-ditch meeting the night before the letter was made

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public. it is not true to say—it is no good the Minister of State trying to duck out of it—as the Prime Minister said in Harare:

"we had no previous notice of it."

Not only had the Government had notice of the letter; they had had conversations about it and they had seen a draft copy of the letter. The Government must not pretend that this was a belated attack by Brussels. The matter had been under discussion for nine months. They—the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Transport and the Secretary of State for the Environment—knew it.

Mr. Win Griffiths: Will not the hon. Gentleman admit that for a Prime Minister who thought that the poll tax had been abolished this was one of his lesser slips?

Mr. Hughes: Nobody is perfect, but there is a difference between making a slip and saying that one did not know about something when one did—unless the members of the Cabinet do not talk to each other and do not talk to the Prime Minister. I suppose it is possible that the Secretary of State for Transport had never talked about it. In that case, somebody should have briefed the Prime Minister to say nothing instead of what he did say. There is an inconsistency. In another place Lord Brabazon was asked questions yesterday about it. It appears that the Government's answers are all over the place too. On Wednesday the Under-Secretary of State did not answer my question; he answered another question instead. We must, therefore, take it as admitted that the Government knew what was coming.

The solution now is easy: to give in, to say, "Okay, if you don't think the regulations are perfect or satisfactory, let's negotiate, get some satisfactory ones, bring them to Parliament and apply the test." That does not mean that all the projects suddenly stop; it means that we shall have the proper methodology for judging them. The same methodology should be applied throughout Europe. As a postscript, I do not believe that the people of Twyford Down in Hampshire, or the people who live in the London borough of Greenwich in south-east London regard Twyford Down and Oxleas Wood as "nooks and crannies"—a description from some who suggest that the European Community is prying and probing into our affairs. These places are important environmental assets in Britain. I hope that we regard them as such.

I agree with the hon. Member for Walthamstow that we must consider how the public's natural demand for the accessibility and mobility which the car offers can be rendered compatible with a decent quality of life, particularly in urban areas. It is not only, as the hon. Member for Billericay hinted, an air pollution problem, but a resource depletion problem. According to some good estimates, we have only 45 years of oil left. Therefore, cars may not be able to be powered by oil-based fuels 45 years from now.

Although those estimates may be wrong, we must consider the best options. There are problems with the electric car because it is still necessary to generate electricity. There are also problems with a car driven by water because, again, it must be powered by electricity.

There is an urgent need to give the public information on the best form of motorised transport. It is best to walk and the next best option is to cycle, but if neither of those is possible and it is not possible to use public transport, which is the most economic use of resources and causes less pollution per number of users, we must give people advice about the best alternative.

The Government have been honest to admit that petrol prices will increase. We must therefore protect those who will be particularly disadvantaged. My colleagues and I will shortly explain our policy on that, because people must know how they will be affected. We are right to address that as a key part of the environment debate.

For those who represent and live in urban areas, excessive congestion and the disadvantage of additional people and cars are bad news. In other parts of the world, the problem is becoming considerably worse. That is our legacy to people who are far less able to cope than we are.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: The issue with which the hon. Gentleman is dealing is supremely important. I have followed with interest his comments about the need to price fuel appropriately. He now acknowledges the essential dilemma in his proposal—that to be effective, energy taxes must be raised enormously. The problem is how to raise them without penalising the people who are least able to afford increases, such as those to whom the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) referred yesterday—car drivers in rural areas—but it applies equally to people who would face higher fuel bills and can least afford to meet them and who do not have the flexibility of changing from one fuel system to another. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that in supporting energy taxes he is creating such dilemmas.

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Lady makes a perfectly proper point. I have spent much time with my colleagues working out how to deal with that dilemma. She rightly alluded to two aspects of the problem. First, we must ensure that we do not penalise people who have no alternative because they have no public transport. I was brought up in rural Britain and know that such people cannot fairly be clobbered by huge increases when there is no alternative. Pensioners and people on basic incomes should also not be penalised by increases in the price of domestic and other fuels. They must be protected. I assure the hon. Lady and those who are concerned about the problem that it would be irresponsible of me as spokesperson of my party not to address it properly. I hope that she will respond positively when we make our announcement of our conclusions, which may be within days, although the final timing is not entirely in my hands.

One of the other great issues that are tests of our environmental progress is what we do with water. I entirely endorse the comments of the hon. Member for Walthamstow. We must reduce consumption. We must stop wasting water. Because of defective pipes, 25 per cent. of water does not get around the system and move from reservoir to tap. We must make people value water properly. My mother lives in a house which still has a well. When we go home, we are used to not having water sometimes but also to looking after it carefully. Those of us who have been brought up without immediate access to mains water know how valuable water is, just as most people in the third and fourth world do.

We must also be much tougher about extraction, particularly in areas around London. People are extracting water from urban rivers and there is a serious problem

with the drying up of river beds. We must provide the facility to get water to where we need it and we must consider whether that should be done through a national grid or some other means.

Drinking water quality is generally good, although not as good as the Government would argue. But I urge the Minister to pass on to his colleagues the need urgently to improve bathing water quality. If we had not had this environment debate today, I would have been in Swansea bay in a wet suit, surfing with many people from all around Britain as a protest against the toxins in Swansea bay.

Mr. Win Griffiths: I would have been there as well.

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman would have been there as well. I do not know whether he would have been in a wet suit as well, but if so, the pair of us might have been a sight for sore eyes.

Air pollution is bad enough in Baglan bay and Port Talbot, but the sea is equally polluted. During the Langbaurgh by-election, I went to the coast at Saltburn and Marske. A pipe that is about 25 in across discharges sewage into the sea 24 hours a day. One can see all the stuff that comes out and which is thrown around straight into the sea. At high water, an escape hatch on a pipe also opens and the sewage is then also pumped straight on to the beach—there is no pretence that it goes further out. The same happens in many places around the coast—in the south-west, the east and in places such as Southend-on-Sea.

Not just rural dwellers worry about bathing water quality. Urban dwellers who go to the coast for their holidays also worry. They want to take their children to the beaches. There are also all the people who swim, sail, surf or windsurf.

If I could achieve only one thing as a result of today's debate, I should like the Government to take more seriously the need to clean up our act around our shores. It is clear that they are backsliding. The first-year report makes that clear. The original commitment in "This Common Inheritance" refers to

"£13·7 billion to improve sewage works which includes £2·9 billion to bring all bathing waters up to EC standards by the mid-1990s through building long sea outfalls and treating the sewage discharged through them".

That commitment has one year later been modified to read:

"agreed an accelerated programme of investment for the improvement of bathing waters to bring virtually all bathing waters up to EC standards by 1995".

There must be much better monitoring, not just in the summer but all year round. There must be more frequent monitoring of bacteria and viruses, not just of one. It is not good enough to say that we have cleaned up our environmental act, when around Britain's coastline the beaches are often foul.

Mr. Morgan: It is just going through the motions.

Mr. Hughes: I shall attribute that one-liner to the hon. Gentleman—it is just going through the motions. The hon. Gentleman is good at those one-liners.

Pollution was a big issue in Langbaurgh and our good candidate, Peter Allen, rightly joined those campaigning for improvements.

I hope that we will be tougher on toxic wastes and will not just allow this country to become a trading post for them. I hope that we will be much more committed to renewables than the Minister announced this week we would be. The Government's belated conversion is welcome, but a real conversion would be much more welcome. I hope that we will be much more committed to energy efficiency. The commitment has been pathetic, starting from nothing and moving on only slightly.

This is an important issue and it is good that we have held a debate on it so early in a Parliament.

Mr. Morgan: It should have been in the Queen's Speech.

Mr. Hughes: Yes, it should have been in the Queen's Speech, but at least we have debated it sooner rather than later.

The psephologists tell us that if the results of yesterday's three by-elections are followed by similar results, there will be no one party in control after the next general election. Therefore, if there are general election results like yesterday's, my colleagues will be in the House in increasing numbers to fight for these issues. Our pledge is that the environment will remain a very high priority for us, higher I believe than it has been for Labour or for the Tories during the past decade and more.

12.45 pm

Mr. Gerald Bowden (Dulwich): The debate has covered a wide range of global issues, but I wish to bring a tighter focus to the environment in our towns and cities—the urban environment—because care for one's locality can influence the quality of life of those who live there perhaps in an even more dramatic way than by dealing with the broad global issues.

Where we live and how we look after it has in recent years become an issue of greater concern to those who are interested in the environment. The growth in the number of amenity societies is reassuring. The Southwark Environment Trust in my constituency and borough plays a full part in ensuring that aspects of urban life which should be preserved and conserved are cherished. The Dulwich Society plays an important role in ensuring that the aspects of rural life which remain in an urban area are retained. The Camberwell Society and the Peckham Society have in the past few years been active in trying to preserve the benefits and good points of their areas which have been under threat from the channel tunnel rail link proposals.

Dulwich village, in my constituency, is one of the most attractive urban environments to be found in the United Kingdom or—dare I say it—in the world. It is a highly desirable area in which to live and it is appreciated and treasured by those who live in it.

The area around Warwick gardens—also in my constituency—has over the years been neglected. Only in the past 10 years has there been an appreciation of the inherent and intrinsic quality to be found in its architectural heritage, in its layout and in the opportunities for regeneration. It has not been a matter of local authority planning or large-scale capital investment; the area has regenerated itself. Its architectural heritage has been brought back to its former glory by those who live there and often by those who have little money but who appreciate the opportunities of the locality and have developed them.

That work was at risk when British Rail decided with great insensitivity to drive the channel tunnel rail link through south-east London and through the Warwick

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gardens area. The effect was that during the past three years there has been a loss of confidence in that area. A blight settled on it and will remain for some time. It is important to appreciate the need to preserve and conserve and to recognise that it is an environmentally sensitive area —like so many in London—which can be built slowly and painstakingly, but which can so easily be damaged by an insensitive decision, which is what happened. I plead today for our urban environment and for the quality of life that should be retained there. When we consider how the blight can be relieved, we should do so in a way that reassures and which re-establishes co[illegible] the area.

British Rail purchased some houses that were within its corridor of intended operations. It also purchased some houses that were not in that corridor, because once such a route is threatened the adjacent housing market collapses and there is no opportunity for those who wish or need to move to sell their properties. In one instance firms of estate agents refused to take any flats in one block on their books on any terms. I think that that is the first time that that has happened, and it was due to the negative housing market in that area. With great wisdom, the Secretary of State for Transport has turned down British Rail's proposed route and has chosen another which is far more environmentally sensible.

Mr. Win Griffiths: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman about the sensitivity of rail routes through urban areas. Does he agree that in choosing the alternative route the Secretary of State for Transport was second guessing and ignoring the possibility that an environmental assessment would conclude that the general route that he has selected was as inappropriate as the one from which the hon. Gentleman thinks his constituents would suffer?

Mr. Bowden: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. I hope that I can approach the issue as a fighter for my constituents' interests while at the same time recognising the broader issues. I shall later develop that point.

The alternative route was chosen on three criteria: that it should be environmentally acceptable, operationally effective and financially viable. The British Rail route failed on all three. The alternative route proposed by Ove Arup, which the Secretary of State has sensibly accepted, was acknowledged in all its aspects to be environmentally acceptable. Of course in one or two places difficulties will arise, but the route will pass through areas which will benefit environmentally. For example, industrial waste-land which needs an uplift will benefit from a freight and passenger route passing through it.

British Rail is now a large residential landowner in Warwick gardens and will wish to offload on the market the expensively obtained properties that it has acquired. That will have a disastrous effect upon the locality equal to that which arose from the threat of the route. A glut of properties could cause a slump in the housing market. It will take time and sensitive marketing to ensure that the housing market recovers progressively rather than being artificially injected with activity. In order to ensure confidence in the Warwick gardens area, British Rail should be told to ensure that the properties are offered for sale in a positive and constructive way that will benefit the community and the quality of life in the area.

We must also consider the question of compensation. To some extent, the environment must be planned and allowed to grow organically. However, when planning we need to make sure that people are compensated for disruption in a way that does not put them at a disadvantage. It is a matter of planning, management and marketing to ensure that what is good in the locality is preserved and conserved. It is also a matter of money, but I would argue that money plays a lesser part than the necessary will and the understanding of those other factors.

The channel tunnel rail link has been at the centre of my thoughts about my own urban concerns. It offers an opportunity to improve the environment of the United Kingdom generally, by taking traffic off the roads and by diverting some of the airline traffic which causes such congestion because the link will probably provide an equally fast alternative route to the continent. What causes me some disquiet, however, is that British Rail's thoughts seem to be entirely devoted to the passenger opportunities that the link affords. I agree that they are important, but I am concerned that so little is made of freight. The current culture at British Rail seems to be—and I have heard this said by the chief executive—that freight is not time-sensitive. The chief executive and British Rail generally reportedly say that they do not see themselves as being in the business of transporting goods that need to be moved fast. They are looking only at aggregates and pig iron and other goods which can be trundled around the railways for many weeks and do not need to reach their destination at any particular time.

That attitude will create a knock-on problem. If British Rail feels that the first stage of the channel tunnel rail link to Stratford and King's Cross does not offer immediate opportunities for a freight route, there is something seriously amiss in its thinking. The implication of such a decision is that freight will continue to be carried, as at present, on existing lines, with the intensified use of those lines possibly throughout the night. By and large, we are talking about commuter lines designed to bring people from the south-east to central London in the morning and to take them home in the evening. There is little traffic on them during the dark hours at present, but if the lines are to be used by freight trains—some of them a mile long—trundling through the night and causing heavy vibration and noise, there will be a dramatic effect on the environment and quality of life of those who live in proximity to them.

That brings me back to my earlier point about the importance of considering giving compensation in such circumstances and perhaps introducing a new code of compensation. If one buys a house near a railway line, one expects some disturbance from it, and that is a factor which will no doubt be reflected in the price. I would argue, however, that there is a difference between what one might consider to be reasonable use by passenger traffic during the day, and the disturbances that might arise from that, and the use of the line at night by heavy goods traffic. That represents not merely an intensification of the use of the line but a change in its character. To my mind, it represents a change of use so significant that compensation should be given to those who suffer injury as a result.

If we are to ensure that we preserve and protect the quality of life in the urban environment, we must recognise the need for a change in the code of compensation and the circumstances and amount in which it is given. It should be

more generously calculated than at present and should not merely be the bare minimum market value, as seems to be the case at present. When the bare minimum market value is offered to compensate for disturbance or injury, disputes inevitably ensue, with professional advisers saying, "This is too little" and the proposer saying, "It is about right" with the inevitable delay that results.

By increasing compensation in those circumstances to a more generous level of 10 or 15 per cent.—and in some countries it is 25 per cent. above market value—we would not only right an injustice or injury, but speed up the process. People would believe that it was unnecessary to dispute the matter and that they had received an additional benefit for the injury that had been forced upon them. In the long run, that would be a cheaper and more effective way of dealing with the issue. As a lawyer and a chartered surveyor, I recognise that the professional opportunities in the area of compensation would be limited if people did not dispute the compensation that they were offered.

Elsewhere in Europe, freight is being taken off the roads. There are refrigerated freight vans and trucks travelling on the railways throughout Europe. Why are there no plans in this country to ensure that we have a fully compatible freight arrangement that could take refrigerated herrings from Aberdeen to Milan on refrigerated rail trucks instead of having traffic trundling along our motorways and on channel ferries? We have an opportunity to improve the environment of our towns and cities by ensuring that freight is taken off our roads.

The decision on the channel tunnel rail link was environmentally sound. It has provided an opportunity to develop many aspects. I beg that those who are responsible for making it work will now take full advantage of the opportunities. I trust that the issue will be considered not simply as a transport or environmental matter, but as a trade and industry matter as well.

1.1 pm

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a few points about the environment. Initially, I want to consider environmental impact assessments from a slightly different perspective from that which has been referred to so far. There have been disputes between hon. Members over whether Carlo Ripa di Meana, the European Community Environment Commissioner, was within his rights or was interfering in every nook and cranny of British daily life—as our Foreign Secretary put it in rather colourful language—when he commanded that work on construction projects in this country should cease because environmental impact assessments had not been prepared although they should have been. I do not want to enter that dispute. I want to consider whether the way in which environmental impact assessments are drawn up at the moment is satisfactory. Are they objective? If they are not, can we introduce improvements to the current environmental impact statement—EIS—procedure to make them objective?

It is timely to consider that, because since the beginning of this Session it has become compulsory for us to comply with European EIS legislation. We have modernised the procedures of this place to make it compulsory for all private and hybrid Bills to incorporate environmental impact assessment statements.

The Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill, which affects my constituency and is returning to the House for the third time, now has an EIS which has been published and is freely available to the hon. Members in the Vote Office. It is a large document which is one inch thick. There is also the compulsory brief, non-technical summary which, although it tends to fall apart when one tries to read it, due to unsatisfactory stapling, is nevertheless an easy, quick 10-minute read.

The wider question is not whether the summary falls apart because the staples are not strong enough, but whether it falls apart because it is not sufficiently objective simply because it has been commissioned, paid for and its contents finally determined by the promoter of the original Bill, now working in co-operation with the Government. That aspect is the essentially corrupt relationship between promoters of private legislation or Government Departments, when using the hybrid Bill procedure, and the consultants who are asked to draw up environmental impact assessments.

For a further improvement in our environmental legislation, in future, when consultants are hired—there are some very good environmental consultants—to produce environmental impact assessments to comply with European directives and with our new private and hybrid Bill procedures, the last word on exactly what is contained within the environmental impact assessment should not be left exclusively with the Bill's promoters. Some further strengthening of the environmental obligation that we and the European Commission's directives are now laying on the promoters of private Bills should be introduced by not giving a promoter the last word.

I hope that other hon. Members on green Benches—we can see mostly green Benches today—will join me in trying to find out how we can avoid the consultant-promoter corrupt relationship. Perhaps "corrupt" is too strong, because we do not know who has actually taken out key words or added sections at the last minute because they are worried about the public impact of certain phrases. We do not know what the consultants originally said when they first produced a draft for the promoter, and what they were then asked to add afterwards to make it a little more toothsome for the promoters, to make it a safer version of the environmental impact assessment.

When compulsory environmental impact statements are produced for Parliament for a private or hybrid Bill, the promoter obviously has to pay for the environmental impact assessment. There can be no question about that. It is not an obligation on the taxpayer, because the promoter wants to build a harbour, bridge or whatever it might be that requires parliamentary procedures. The trouble is that the promoter can then bowdlerise or doctor the final version that appears before the House, and it is presented as though it is objective, but is it really objective?

Once a Bill or a proposed measure requiring parliamentary approval enters the lists and it is realised that an environmental impact assessment must be produced, and once it is decided to commission an environmental impact assessment it becomes public property. My idea—I admit that I came up with it only this morning—is that the entire transaction involving the definition of the terms of reference for the study for the consultants should then become public property and not an enclosed relationship with the promoters.

Reference should then be made to the Environment Select Committee, and its staff, jointly with the promoters of the Bill, could settle the terms of reference and observe

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the final version of the EIS. The report that hon. Members receive and that the public pick up outside would have been looked at from the point of view of the client, the promoter and the public interest. The Environment Committee and its staff would ensure that the promoters could not interfere with the consultants' conclusions and that the consultants, during the preparation of the report, had consulted local authorities and environmental agencies such as HMIP or the NRA, or other agencies.

I am concerned about the contents of, lack of objectivity of and lack of thoroughness in the study that was carried out by the Environmental Advisory Unit of Liverpool University Ltd. for the Government and the promoters of the Bill, Cardiff Bay development corporation, when there was still a private Bill, in preparation for the Government's hybrid Bill, which was laid before the House on Tuesday.

I should like to give some examples of my concern about the report's thoroughness and/or objectivity. I say "or" simply because I am not aware—and at the moment there is no way of finding out—whether the consultants who wished to involve the NRA or Cardiff city council's environmental health department were told not to do so by the Cardiff Bay development corporation or whether, off their own bat, they simply chose not to do so, in which case, if there is a design fault, it lies with them. At the moment, we have no way of knowing and, although the report is now public property, its contents during preparation and its final contents are determined entirely by those paying the bill—and they are the promoters who have every interest in avoiding drawing attention to anything that could be used against them when the Bill is debated publicly or scrutinised in the House on Second Reading, Report or in the Special Select Committee or the Standing Committee.

At those stages, people from outside the House who oppose the legislation as petitioners or hon. Members who might also be opposed to it can seek to improve the Bill and can point out the problems that the proposal might cause. Although the promoters are faced with an environmental impact statement compulsion, at the moment there is no way of ensuring that the work is carried out objectively.

One of the issues covered in the non-technical summary and then, in detail, in the full-length version of the statement, is flooding. The statement tries to come to a view on whether the proposed barrage would be good, bad or indifferent in terms of the flooding problem in the low-lying areas of Cardiff. The problem is that flood control is the responsibility of the National Rivers Authority. The statement says that the barrage will improve the position as regards flooding, but we are not sure how that statement was arrived at. Was the NRA consulted? It has the statutory obligation. Are the promoters giving their view after consulting the NRA, or are they giving the NRA's view?

I spoke to the NRA this morning and asked what consultations it had with the Environmental Advisory Unit of Liverpool University Ltd. before the unit produced its chapter of the full-length study on the Cardiff bay barrage proposal. The message that I received from the NRA was:

"The answer to your question is no. Liverpool University has not approached us regarding flood defence assessment."

Why not? Was that the consultants' own decision or were they prevented from consulting the NRA by the Cardiff Bay development corporation which originally proposed the Bill in close co-operation with the Welsh Office? Can we rely on the document? Can people who read it believe it to be objective and thorough when those who prepared it did not consult the agency that has the statutory responsibility for preparing flood prevention plans and for carrying out works to prevent flooding?

After the expenditure of a large sum—about £150 million or so—on improving the environment and creating an impounded lake behind the barrage, one of the attractions is supposed to be the facility for water sports. Paragraph 4.15 of the non-technical summary rightly states:

"there will be restrictions on the type of watersports that can be carried out in the Bay. Whereas angling, pleasure cruising, canoe touring, rowing and bankside activities will be possible, water sports which inevitably lead to immersion, such as bathing, diving, rafting and waterskiing, will not be permitted.

There is some dispute as to whether dinghy sailing and windsurfing are classified as immersion sports and whether or not they will be permitted. Regular monitoring will be taking place to see whether the water is of suitable quality for immersion sports."

I ask myself whether that is a fair summary which is based on the views of the body that will have the job of monitoring water sports and the safety of the water in which the water sports will take place. That body is the environmental health department of Cardiff city council.

I spoke to the environmental health department this morning. I asked whether the Liverpool university environmental advisory unit consulted it on whether certain water sports might be, would be or would not be permitted. It said that the unit had not done so in the past three or four years. I find that breathtaking. In the case of flooding and water sports the unit did not consult before giving to Parliament the final version of the environmental impact assessment. If that is true of flooding and water sports, on how many other matters did the unit not consult? The assessment purports to be an objective statement to be given to the House and, via the House, to all the people outside who will be directly affected by the proposal. The unit did not consult the statutory body with the job, again given to it by our legislation, of taking care of flooding or water sports.

Furthermore, the environmental health department of Cardiff city council told me that one of the statements that I have just read out was plain wrong. What is one to do about that?

We have been given the printed version. We will not receive another version. The department told me that windsurfing is definitely out and that it was true that:

"There is some dispute as to whether dinghy sailing and windsurfing are classified as immersion sports and whether or not they will be permitted."

That statement left the matter open and as yet undetermined. But that is not the case according to the body that is responsible for deciding whether certain sports will be permitted. That body has already made up its mind. Windsurfing is out, not "still to be determined".

This is supposed to be the Parliament of the United Kingdom. Its legislation is supposed to be followed once laws are passed. We have just introduced a great improvement to the existing legislation by making environmental impact assessments compulsory. However, we have no way of controlling the quality, objectivity or

thoroughness of the assessments or interference in the final version by the promoters of a private Bill, who have every interest in fixing the assessments so that they do not say anything which could later be used against them during the proceedings of the House and when people make their minds up.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that it is our rule that in an Adjournment debate we do not discuss legislation. If the hon. Gentleman confined himself to discussing the merits or otherwise of the scheme, he would be on good ground. I may have to reproach him if he impinges too much on the debates that we are likely to have when the legislation comes before the House.

Mr. Morgan: I appreciate your point, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I do not intend to raise questions about the merits of the scheme. I simply wish to deal with whether we can rely on the objectivity of environmental impact assessments when we have no procedure for ensuring that promoters do not interfere with them during their preparation, to avoid the inclusion of material that may be critical of the scheme. Such material may give rise to problems for the promoters when seeking to secure the passage of the Bill through Parliament.

My point relates to the structure of our legislation and whether we should be satisfied with it. It became law only this week. I wonder whether we need to go a step further and take out further insurance so that we can be certain that environmental impact assessments are reliable documents. The Environment Select Committee should be involved to ensure that there is joint commissioning and setting of the terms of reference, even though the promoters obviously have to pay. At present it is a simple case of he who pays the piper calls the tune. That is thoroughly unsatisfactory.

The Government are trying to pretend to the country at large that they are far greener than in the so-called bad old days and that the Secretary of State takes full account of environmental matters when preparing legislation. However, in the past week something has cast severe doubt on whether that is a sustainable proposition. I refer to the decision last Friday to exclude the area within the Cardiff bay barrage site of special scientific interest from the special protection area to be registered in Brussels under article 2 of the European Community's wild bird directive. It is probably fair to say that many of us deeply suspect anything that the Government announce late on Friday afternoon. It is probably almost entirely done to secure the minimum amount of press discussion.

Last week the Government submitted a four-page document to the press and to the successor to the Nature Conservancy Council—the Countryside Council for Wales—and to English Heritage. The document stated that they had to take the Cardiff bay area out of the proposed special protection area that they intended to register with Brussels because otherwise they would be in severe legal trouble due to their proposal to build a barrage across the mouths of the Rivers Taff and Ely.

What does that say about our procedures? Obviously, when one is about to register a special protection area—I think that we have about 41 such areas now—one receives documentation about it from what was the Nature Conservancy Council. It was subsequently split up into three bodies to cover Wales, Scotland and England, but their part in the process remains the same, as they classify sites according to their significance for nature conservation and they inform local landowners, local authorities and do all the donkey work and the accounts. They also inform local wildlife organisations and then give the documentation to the relevant Minister. In the case of Cardiff bay, it had to be given to two Ministers, the Secretary of State for Wales and the Secretary of State for the Environment because it involves both sides of the Bristol channel. They check that it is in order and finally make their decision.

After the Nature Conservancy Council had submitted the lower Severn estuary special protection area proposal to the Secretaries of State for Wales and for the Environment, a court case took place in the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg—we call it the Leybucht bay case—which involved a German Government-assisted fishing harbour on the German-Dutch border. The case resulted in a victory for the German Government, not for the European Commission.

As an interesting obiter dictum, a signed letter from the European Court of Justice last year, affirmed the principle that in areas designated as special protection areas, the first priority was to be given to developments offering an improvement to human health or life, such as protection from flooding, the second priority to ecology and nature conservation and the third priority to leisure or economic development.

At that time the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill was live in the House and opponents of the Bill, such as myself, pointed out that the judgment could deal a blow to the proposal as it was already a proposed special protection area—it was merely awaiting a decision on the Minister's desk. That idea was pooh-poohed and we were told that there was no comparison between Leybucht bay and Cardiff bay and that the judgment was irrelevant. The fact that the Government sent a posse of lawyers from the Welsh Office, Cardiff Bay development corporation, the Treasury Solicitor's department and a local firm of solicitors in Luxembourg to observe the case was merely because they wanted them to have some alpine air or because they just happened to be passing through Luxembourg. The case was of no interest and immaterial to Cardiff bay.

Now we know the truth—it was a killer blow to the Cardiff bay barrage proposal because SPA status for Cardiff bay would have meant that only those forms of construction development that contributed to the avoidance of flooding and endangering life or health could take priority over the nature conservation designation: not economic development, marinas, leisure developments, dredging to deepen the water for fishing harbours or creating large walls of concrete for a barrage that would completely inundate the inter-tidal mud flats—the reason for the SPA designation proposed by the Nature Conservancy Council. Last Friday the exclusion device employed by those in favour of the barrage was to admit that the principle of the Leybucht bay judgment in the European Court of Justice last February would apply to Cardiff bay, but to say that the way round that was to exclude the bay from SPA.

The argument used was that although we might agree that an SPA designation would imply that a barrage could not legally be built across Cardiff bay, we could go to the European Court of Justice—although it lacks injunction procedures—and ask that court to declare the barrage proposal to be contrary to the directive relating to the

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special protection of wild birds. We could then say that we would put a ring fence round the district, which we would not submit for SPA status, even though the Nature Conservancy Council proposed to do so. That leaves us with the question: why bark and keep a dog? Why do the Government collect taxes to pay the salaries of those in the Countryside Council for Wales but not take its advice? The Nature Conservancy Council has assessed the district as being of higher nature conservation interest than the other parts of the Severn estuary mud flats that are being submitted for SPA protection. Therefore, the district with the higher nature conservation importance is being excluded from SPA protection, while districts with lower nature conservation importance are included.

The Secretary of State has taken upon himself the power to override his own nature conservation experts, who are up in arms. As from last Friday they feel that they have been stabbed in the back, betrayed and made to look foolish because the Government have used the blatant and perverse device of excluding the most important district on the Welsh side from nature conservation.

Where does that leave the Government's proud desire to register more sites at Brussels for SPA purposes? It leaves the Government's reputation in tatters because it simply means that the Government are interested in nature conservation only when it is in their interest and when they feel like it. That is not the spirit in which the European directive on wild birds should be interpreted. Nature conservation sites are supposed to be designated according to their importance to nature conservation, not according to how convenient they are in relation to man-made proposals for economic or leisure development. The criteria should not be whether the Government feel like having the protection sites, but whether those sites are important for nature conservation.

The Government's decision to exclude the site has blown to smithereens any reputation that they may have had for being interested in green issues. It was an embarrassing decision for the Government to make. During the Prime Minister's recent visit to Cardiff he was told—as Conservative party managers are always told—that it would be a great moral boost if he visited the people running the Cardiff Bay development corporation and looked at the proposed site of the lake that was being impounded behind the barrage. The Prime Minister went to visit the Cardiff bay district, and was taken for a walk down by the pier head along the newly constructed boardwalk intended to attract visitors to the district. He was surrounded by a large number of security men. Those who were there, including reporters from the *South Wales Echo*, said that there was a peculiar, foul smell due to the fact that during construction of the boardwalk two years ago, the Cardiff Bay development corporation fractured Bute Town's main foul sewer which runs directly underneath the boardwalk. When they were sinking the boardwalk piles they did not know exactly where the old sewer was and went right through the middle of it. That has resulted in a steady trickle, which I shall not describe, running out from underneath the boardwalk to the mudflats. There was the Prime Minister, surrounded by security men, journalists and television crews, trying to avoid breathing in the smell. Two opponents of the Cardiff bay barrage, Stan Perkins and Les Baxter from the docks area of Cardiff, managed, in their baseball caps and anoraks, to get through the security cordon surrounding the Prime Minister and went up to him, at which point Stan Perkins uttered the immortal words, "Get a whiff of that."

Earlier this week I asked the Prime Minister what consultations he had had concerning the Bute Town main sewer and the foul odours emanating from it underneath the boardwalk at the pier head in Cardiff. In classic Majorese, he replied that he would write to me shortly. Such an embarrassment would not occur if the Government adopted a comprehensive, integrated and committed approach to improving the environment. Instead they regard the issue as a convenience, to be used only when they feel like it, and regard it as an inconvenience when it conflicts with other Government objectives.

1.31 pm

Mr. Neil Thorne (Ilford, South): I am delighted to be able to participate in the debate. I listened carefully to what the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) said about his constituency, in particular about nature conservation. I have many happy memories of South Wales. Some of my relations live in the Porthcawl area. I have spent many happy holidays in that part of the country. I can well understand his constituents' annoyance at the fracture of the sewer pipe. The Government are, however, listening. What the hon. Gentleman said will not fall on stony ground. The Government are firmly committed to improving the environment. Many issues that have been a source of considerable annoyance to me and others in recent years are coming to the top of the agenda and will, I hope, be taken seriously.

I hope, too, that the general public will recognise their importance and will want considerable improvements to be made so that infringements of what we all consider to be our right to enjoy the environment to the full are dealt with properly. We do not want the environment to be desecrated by thoughtless and mindless individuals and corporations. That is at the root of the problem.

People are thoughtless on many occasions and cause environmental pollution for others. We must educate people. I refer to parents as well as to children. Parents have an important role to play. They must teach their children to look after the environment and not throw tin cans and litter about. People must be taught that it is not environmentally acceptable to wind down the windows of their cars and throw out used cigarette packets. It causes much annoyance and offence to others. We must educate the population to clean up the environment.

Some people will begin to understand its importance only if they are fined severely. We must ensure that the law is implemented. I realise that the police have many other duties to perform. When laws are passed they say that they will do their best to implement them within the resources available. I accept that murder, rape and other extremely important issues are right at the top of their agenda. Nevertheless, the standard of our lives depends considerably on the way in which other people abuse the system by scattering litter, which is extremely expensive to clear up.

The Scandinavian countries recently conducted an experiment whereby each housewife tried to divide the household refuse so that it could be collected and recycled. That is a major step forward.

Wastepaper is not readily marketable. For many years, I had the pleasure of saving all my newspapers for the scouts, who collected it, sold it and used the proceeds for their own purposes. It is not worth their while doing so any more because there is too much paper. People do not appreciate that many soft-wood trees grow much faster than they can be used, so there is little pressure for recycling.

It is more expensive to recycle paper than to start from scratch with wood pulp. We therefore pay a premium for wastepaper to be recycled. We must seriously consider whether it is not worth having wastepaper recycled and suffering the premium to ensure that we do not have so much litter on our streets and general environment.

Glass recycling is now well established and I know of many points in my constituency where it is collected in brown, green and white canisters. That makes a valuable contribution to reducing the amount of glass that is thrown around. When people visit supermarkets, they are careful to take along their used glass.

Cans and plastic, which is so difficult to break down through natural processes, need to be collected separately. The Scandinavians divide waste into metal cans, glass, paper and plastic. That is a good idea and I hope that it catches on throughout the western world so that those items can be reused.

The situation is quite different in the Indian sub-continent. When I go trekking, I find that everything is collected. Porters take home plastic bottles because they are valuable in villages. They are pleased to be able to reuse them.

We certainly have become a throw-away society and we must become more disciplined than in the past. When I was a boy, the majority of bottles had to be reused. I remember that immediately after the war if one did not have a bottle one could not buy a new bottle of whisky. One had to take an empty bottle to the off-licence to buy another one. In some respects, the container was more important than its contents. The situation has changed considerably, but we must train ourselves to be much more conscious of the environment.

There is a good argument for introducing a tax on packaging. Sometimes, the packaging is disgraceful. It is important to have packaging that presents goods to the best possible advantage, but there can be no excuse for having three or four different layers around a product. That aspect must be considered. If people have that much money to waste on packaging, perhaps they are not paying enough tax.

As I said, the way in which people behave in the environment needs to be considered. In recent experiments in the United States, the authorities tried to make the punishment fit the crime. I should very much like to see that in operation in parts of this country. People who paint graffiti should be made to spend a certain number of hours cleaning up the mess. I can think of no better way of ensuring that they stop committing that offence against society. Sometimes for example, people paint graffiti on the supports of the elevated sections of motorways. There is no earthly reason why that should be allowed to continue.

I wish to mention a local issue. The north circular road includes a section which now passes through my constituency known as the South Woodford to Barking relief road. That road was opened three or four years ago and trees were planted, but I am sad to see that a number of them have died. I hope that the Department of Transport will take an early opportunity to replant. As we now have a replanting system, I hope that, as the Department's contribution to improving the environment, it will replace the trees that have died. I hope also that strenuous efforts will be made to clean up the horrible rubbish which was thrown out of cars and has collected on the roadside. Both measures would bring a considerable environmental improvement locally.

As I said, we should pay much more attention to education. That responsibility lies not only with schools but with parents. Parents have a major role to play in showing their children how to behave, in telling them to collect rubbish in the countryside and not to throw rubbish out of the car window. Parents have a responsibility to show by good example how responsible citizens behave. There is no reason why the rest of us should pay enormous sums of money to have other people's litter picked up. If that approach does not work on a voluntary basis, we must introduce an effective system of fining and persuade the police to take this aspect of the environment seriously.

1.42 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): This has been an important debate. The two Front-Bench spokesmen talked about the environment in terms of this country and abroad. One morning recently, I listened to "Farming Today", as I do quite frequently. I am waiting for a general election to be called and I expect the announcement to be made on "Farming Today". The election was called off last time and not everyone was told.

While I was listening to "Farming Today", I heard some startling news about the environment and the ozone layer which should make us all feel startled about what is happening. Sheep in Patagonia in Chile, rabbits and fish had gone blind because of the enormous hole in the ozone layer. That aspect of the chain of life should concern us all. It makes us stop and think about what is happening and about what we in this country can do.

People tell me that socialism is off the agenda. When I think about the need to save the environment, I know that it cannot be saved by market forces, as I had to tell the former Prime Minister before she left office. I said, "You will not patch up that hole in the ozone layer with a man, a bike, a ladder and an enterprise allowance." The only way to save the planet is not through nation states but through states getting together.

I want to put on record a few problems on the micro level in my constituency because it is important that the Minister who replies to the debate should be fully aware of the problems emanating from north Derbyshire. Dioxin has contaminated milk on three farms. That is alarming, not merely because there is dioxin in the milk, which is bad enough, but because it is only in the past few days that any Department has even acknowledged that there was a problem.

There was an admission the other day with regard to Bolsover Coalite which claims not to have much to do with the dioxin, although most people do not believe that. Bolsover Coalite has to install a new incinerator at the end

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of November which I hope will clear up the issue, but there is still a long way to go. The River Doe Lea, which is little more than a stream where it runs past that plant, several other chemical plants and industrial firms, has, according to a recent statement by Friends of the Earth, pollution levels more than 1,000 times the accepted safety level. Even if that figure has been embellished, it is still bad news.

There are also problems for the farmers. Since June, two of the farmers have lost their livelihood, which was to produce milk, but the Government refuse to pay compensation. If someone has a roof missing from his flat or house, the local authority can have the repairs done if the landlord will not do them and can then charge the landlord. However, when I question the Government, they say that the polluter must pay. It will take a long time to discover who the polluter is, although we all have ideas which are not a million miles away from Bolsover Coalite in Buttermill lane.

If a civil action to claim compensation is necessary, it could take years and in the meantime the farmers are losing their livelihood. In view of the Government's talk about "greenery" and citizens charters and everything else, they should adopt the system that operates in Holland whereby, if dioxin is found while the case is being contested to discovered who is the polluter and to force him to pay, the Government will ensure that payments are made and will then secure the money from the polluter. That means that in the meantime the people affected do not lose out.

In October, pollution was discovered in a third farm in Bolsover. It is apparently one of the worst recorded instances of dioxin, which is one of the most deadly toxins known to man, or to woman. The pollution is so bad that the farmer has had to stop operating his suckle herd, and he is clearly losing money as a result. Thousands of people in my area are very concerned.

The other day I heard it said on television that a cluster of breast cancers had been discovered in an area adjacent to the plant and close to the farms. The occurrence is 50 per cent. higher than in other parts of north Derbyshire. The programme made comparisons not with leafy Surrey, but with parts of north Derbyshire where there have long been industrial firms and pits. We need more action.

The other day the Secretary of State for the Environment went trotting off to the Confederation of British Industry. I am told that he made a better speech than the bloke whose name no one remembers—I think that he is from the Department of Trade and Industry. I do not remember his name, but apparently he went and was followed by the Secretary of State for the Environment, who made a great speech. He said that there was a correlation between the environment and British industry. Those of us who live in mining areas know that there has always been a need to strike a balance between producing coal—in this case producing coke from coal—and causing minimum damage to the environment and to the people who work and live in the vicinity. Coalite must be told to find that balance. I hope that the Government will press for that and will pay the compensation that is so badly needed in the area.

When the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food found that the milk in the area was contaminated, he decided to send it to the west midlands to be incinerated. It is typical of the Government that they sent it to a firm that did not have the equipment to burn it. Dioxin must be burnt at no less than 1,200 deg. C. It could not be properly burnt at the incinerator to which it was sent and as a result goodness knows how many square miles of the west midlands were polluted with dioxin. Some of us found out about that and said to the Government, "Do you know what you are doing?" Apparently they have now sent it somewhere else to be incinerated.

Throughout this episode I have demanded compensation for the farmers and a public inquiry. That is not asking a great deal. Three farms have dioxin-contaminated milk and a river in the area is polluted 1,000 times more than it should be. There are other pieces of evidence, such as an incinerator that is not working properly and cases of breast cancer.

In the run-up to the general election, when the Government are scouring for votes anywhere, one would think that they would announce a public inquiry to enable the people of Bolsover to say exactly what they want and have it placed on record. It would also enable the people who work in the industrial plants, including Coalite, to present statements that are not influenced by people being victimised or witch-hunted. A public inquiry would allay many fears.

The Minister should discuss the matter with the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and with anyone else in Departments that are affected. They should discuss paying compensation and announce a public inquiry so that we can get to the truth of the matter about how dioxin has found its way into the milk, who is responsible, and who should pay. That should be done quickly.

1.52 pm

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): I hope that the House will forgive me for referring first to the speech and the impassioned plea by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). He has tried to raise this issue many times in the past few months. If the Government have not acted by the time of the general election, a Labour Government will definitely hold a public inquiry, because my hon. Friend has made a most convincing case for one.

The debate has been wide-ranging and of a high standard. It has covered global issues, such as the depletion of the ozone layer, and has ranged down to the most micro of micro issues, street parking in one of my old haunts in Cardiff. We are debating extremely important issues.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) joined the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) in speaking about the issue of the dangers of hospital incineration. A short time ago the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs investigated hospital incineration in Wales and found that the old standards, let alone the new far higher standards, were invariably not being met. There is no doubt that we need higher and more stringent standards, and inspections not only of hospital incinerators but of all incinerators.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tooting referred to the need to help the emerging democracies and developing countries with the implementation of clean technologies. They definitely need our help, and I hope that the United Nations conference to be held in the not-too-distant future

will reach some positive agreement on such matters. I, too, should be interested to hear the Government's views on the EC's fourth action programme on the environment, backed by the Council of Europe. My hon. Friend the Member for Tooting told us from his own experience that that programme was being heavily criticised by Conservative members of the Council of Europe, and it would be interesting to know whether the Government uphold that criticism or whether they are wholehearted partners in the action programme.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) spoke widely and with much knowledge about the deterioration of water quality, the dangers of incineration, the difficulties under which Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution operates and the fact that, although we have known for many years about the problems of acid rain, not one power station has yet been fitted with flue-gas desulphurisation equipment while other countries are moving further and further ahead of us.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) and a number of other hon. Members referred to environmental impact assessments and the way in which the Government seem to be trying to traduce the whole legal process and divert it into an attack on the Commissioner for the Environment, for political purposes connected with the Maastricht summit. The fears about our failure to implement the directive properly are well founded, but we should not lay our criticisms entirely at the Government's feet, because we are talking about a new procedure with which other countries are also having difficulties. We ask that the operation of the directive should be properly reviewed. The Commission is obviously very unhappy about the matter and—as the Minister knows, because he and I both spoke at the conference organised by the Institute of Environmental Assessment—the expertise is now available to improve our environmental assessment procedures. In particular, we need to open those procedures to the public gaze.

The Minister sought to impress us with the Government's commitment to the environment. Unfortunately, however, as we cast around and seek the opinions of those who work in the field, we find a quite different hue of green from the bright green that the Government would wish us to believe they wear. The Government's green credentials are like the autumn leaves —yellowing at the edges. Let us take an example. The Council for the Protection of Rural England looked at "This Common Inheritance" and at the Government's record and drew up a list of credits and debits. It examined thoroughly a number of matters, including planning for the environment, environmental assessment, agriculture, transport, mineral extraction and coal, energy policy, water resources, protecting the countryside, forestry and institutions, and came up with 28 credits, some with caveats attached, and 48 debits. That sums up the way in which the Government operate. After all, the Conservatives are the party of free enterprise and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover said, free enterprise is not naturally concerned with protecting and enhancing the environment. Its natural concern is to make profits. Only if the Government regulate the environment in which businesses operate will we provide a framework in which business rises to the challenge.

The Government's green credentials are hesitant, half-hearted and, at the end of the day, unconvincing. The Government's brief sets a target of stabilising Britain's carbon dioxide emissions at 1990 levels by the year 2005. However, they include the caveat that they will do that only if other countries play their part. We should not say that. The issue is so important that we should play our part and try to convince other countries to come in as well. To stand on the sidelines because other countries will not play ball demeans the fight to protect and enhance our environment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover said that the Secretary of State for the Environment was at the CBI conference this week exhorting business and industry to accept the challenge of clean technologies and greenery. The Secretary of State said that a British Institute of Management survey showed that half the member companies did not have an environment policy statement: one third did not have someone responsible for environmental issues and fewer than one quarter carried out environmental audits. No wonder companies are not responding. The Government had an opportunity in the Companies Act 1989 to accept an Opposition amendment to introduce environmental audits, but they turned it down. The Government's failure to give a lead is critical in that area.

Let us consider what has happened in the United States. In 1986, a law was passed, overseen by the Environmental Protection Agency, under which companies had to publish the annual output of 307 hazardous chemicals. Monsanto decided to accept that challenge. It considered the legal requirement and decided that it would achieve a 90 per cent. reduction of its release of harmful chemical emissions into the atmosphere by 1992 and work for a goal of zero. It is on track to achieve that goal, but it has operated within a legal framework and it has been successful.

Early in December B and Q will be launching a green initiative in this country. It has stopped buying peat from sites of special scientific interest. It no longer buys tropical hardwoods where it can establish that they have been harvested in an unsustainable fashion. The company is asking its suppliers to tell it what they do in terms of environmental audit and I hope that B and Q succeeds. However, it could do much better if it were to operate within a legal framework.

Mr. Summerson: Earlier, the hon. Gentleman said that private enterprise was incompatible with environmental friendliness, but he is now giving examples of private enterprise being very environmentally sound.

Mr. Griffiths: The hon. Gentleman either misunderstood or misheard me. I said that private enterprise, left to its own devices, does not by and large place a premium on the protection of the environment. Only if a legal framework is provided will it respond well to the challenge. The challenge must be placed before private enterprise; exhortation is not enough.

I am glad that GATT has revived its working group on the environment. I hope that, as a result of that, further pressures will build up to force the Government to act. The story of this Government is that they have been reluctant to act. They have often ignored problems until the weight of evidence has been so overwhelming that they have had to act at last.

To see the way in which business can fail in that respect, we have only to look at the huge profits that the Tory party's treasurer, Lord Beaverbrook, made out of the

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tropical rain forests of Guyana. One cannot say for certain, but it appears that there will be a profit of about £10 million a year for five years for no actual investment. It is quite likely that there will be unsustainable harvesting of tropical forests.

The Government are proud that they introduced integrated pollution control. They have made progress, but they are not prepared to accept the logic of their own position and provide real resources to enable it to work effectively. At the conference, the CBI environment committee chairman, Chris Hampson, said that companies still lacked important details about the Government's plans to introduce integrated pollution control covering more than 8,000 processes in the next five years. An environmental protection agency is wanted. The Government have promised one, but it would require a volte face to provide one. A year ago they totally opposed it.

Mr. Trippier: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman really means what he has just said. If he looks a little more carefully at the White Paper that was published last September, he will see that we made it clear that we have not ruled it out and that, in fact, we would look positively at it. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will withdraw his remark.

Mr. Griffiths: Unfortunately, I cannot withdraw my remark, because the Government had the opportunity to vote for the creation of an environmental protection agency, but they refused. The fact that they have now accepted it shows a complete change of attitude from that of a year ago. Despite an environmental protection agency being promised in "This Common Inheritance", they still voted against it. They voted against our amendment to fulfil a promise that was made in "This Common Inheritance".

Many companies ignore green laws and are failing to register under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 processes which should be registered. Why is that? The director of pollution control has pointed out that more resources are desperately needed to monitor pollution. A National Audit Office report has pointed out that the pollution inspectorate is probably more than 100 inspectors understaffed. In 1990-91, the number of inspections fell from almost 8,000 to just under 4,000. A report published yesterday by the National Audit Office on chemical and oil pollution stated that inspections in the North sea and in the seas off this island are so infrequent that it is virtually impossible to catch the polluters.

Against that background of failure, we must say that the Government are simply not doing enough. We know the dangers that global warming presents, but still the Government are hesitant. At one time, they even reduced the amount of money available to the Energy Efficiency Office, although I am pleased to see that in the public spending round there will be a 40 per cent. increase in the coming year. The amount of money that the Government are providing—£59 million next year—is peanuts. The Dutch spend about 13 times as much as we do on energy efficiency and conservation.

Let us consider the profits. We do not need to talk about the need for carbon taxes. All we need to do is to look at the profits of companies such as British Gas. It made £65 profit per customer this year—nearly £1 billion in profits. If we creamed off the super-profit aspect, which is far above the amounts that were set aside in the Bill before privatisation, and used it in respect of all the power producers, we would have four or five times the amount currently readily available for conservation measures to be introduced.

Our private utilities should follow American examples. The Americans provide low-cost or no-cost energy efficient bulbs and even pay customers $50 if they install an environmentally friendly fridge in their home. They do that to reduce energy consumption and because that, in turn, means that there is less need for new power stations and thus costs generally can be cut.

By reducing energy consumption, we can significantly reduce carbon dioxide emissions. The Government's year-on statement does not refer to any measures against transport polluters. I am, however, glad that the Secretary of State for Transport has suggested that the Government will introduce regulations governing the amount of pollution that cars are allowed to cause. That is all to the good.

However, the Government's record is one of hesitancy and halfheartedness and reveals their lack of commitment to the concept of planning or to regulations that would allow industry to get on with its job and to respond. Whenever the election is called next year and Labour comes to power, we will provide that lead and that framework. Many industrialists will breathe a sigh of relief, knowing that they will get a proper lead from a Labour Government.

2.10 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tony Baldry): This has been a wide-ranging and interesting debate. We welcome the opportunity of a full day's debate on our environmental stewardship. It has provided us with the opportunity of trumpeting to the world all that we have achieved and of promoting the first-year report on our White Paper "This Common Inheritance".

The hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) was charitable enough to say that the first year report and its approach are unprecedented—as they are. The report is thorough, open and accountable and demonstrates that of the 350 commitments that we made in last year's White Paper, 200 have already been fulfilled. Not only does the report list the measures that we have already taken, but it identifies those that we intend to take. It sets targets. We do not need great chunks in the Queen's Speech to demonstrate our commitment to environmental stewardship because it is clear to anyone who cares to look. Not only have we set out what we intend to do, but we have set out the date by which we intend to do it. We have continuing priorities for action and intend that our environmental stewardship should be accountable and open. That is why we have put green issues at the heart of the machinery of government, with ministerial committees that are chaired by my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for the Environment.

We are seeking an environmental dialogue with the whole community—with businesses, local authorities and the voluntary sector. There is now a general recognition that everyone has an interest in enhancing the

environment. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment said in his excellent speech to the Confederation of British Industry conference,

"the market is demanding. The market set by our own advanced environmental legislation; the market set by European Community legislation; above all, the market set by the consumer—increasingly the green consumer. The single market will be a green market."

I have absolutely no doubt that that will be the case and that is why we are determined to have higher environmental standards. I am therefore pleased that the United Kingdom is one of the top four European Community countries in complying with environmental directives.

It is our intention always to promote accountability and access to environmental information. The White Paper and the first-year report are part of that exercise, as is the report of the drinking water inspectorate. I am glad that it has shown that in 99 per cent. of the tests, our water is meeting European Community standards——

Mrs. Ann Taylor: What about prosecutions for drinking water failures?

Mr. Baldry: The hon. Lady is keen to have prosecutions—*[Interruption.]* Part of establishing high environmental standards is ensuring that those who do not meet the standards are prosecuted. She will be interested to know that in its second year—after September 1991—the NRA trebled its original number of successful prosecutions.

We wish to see not only high environmental standards but an increase in investment. We wish to see not only investment such as has been made possible by water privatisation—£28 billion has been invested in enhancing water standards. That is some £5,000 for each and every minute between now and the end of the century. We also want to see increasing investment in the staff of HMIP for example. My hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside announced an increase in its staff today. We also wish to see organisations such as the NRA enhance their standards with water quality objectives.

There may have been a misunderstanding about what the National Audit Office said about HMIP. It said:

"it is not feasible to double a specialist professional organisation at a step. . . . the pool of people with the qualifications and experience to become pollution inspectors is relatively small and thus constrains the achievable pace of recruitment."

Thus HMIP is seeking to proceed by continuous expansion. My hon. Friend's announcement earlier today is the proof of that continuous expansion. Indeed, HMIP intends to continue to recruit more inspectors over the next four years to maintain higher standards.

The determination to maintain high standards is reinforced by clear public spending commitments, as was made clear by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the autumn statement earlier this week. He announced investment in the environment, and more investment in public transport and environmentally friendly farming.

There was a misunderstanding on the part of the hon. Members for Dewsbury and for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) about the other environmental services line from the autumn statement. It included several headings which are not green in the accepted sense. I am not sure that the hon. Members appreciated that it included such matters as property holdings. So when my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside next week announces the detailed breakdown of those figures and the figures are published, it will be seen that when one concentrates on what we would all perceive as the green environmental issues, that investment has done well. We are determined that there should be higher standards, more investment and a partnership between the Government and the people to ensure the highest possible environmental standards.

One or two themes have run through the debate. There has been much to-ing and fro-ing about the environmental agency. I make it clear that our aim is to create a powerful, independent agency which will provide consistent and coherent controls on discharges to air, land and water. It will be a fully integrated, multi-media approach to pollution control. If one intends to take that step, it is essential to have full consultation.

It was somewhat disingenuous of the hon. Member for Dewsbury to suggest that legislation for an environmental agency could have been passed during this parliamentary Session. She was challenged by my hon. Friend the Minister to comment on her party's attitude to the waste disposal regulatory functions. He response was that that would be a matter for a regional tier of local government. We do not have a regional tier of local government. A condition of creating an agency would be to legislate to introduce a regional tier of local government. It is disingenuous to say that we could have introduced a Bill to set up an environmental agency during the lifetime of this Parliament.

We want to ensure that there is a full opportunity for consultation on the proposal to set up an environmental protection agency. That consultation will continue until 31 January next year. We want to work with the NRA and local government in paving the way for the agency. Our timing is to reach final decisions early next year and introduce a Bill early in the new Parliament once we have won.

Of course, part of our achievement in enhancing standards is the concept of integrated pollution control. Chris Hampson, the chairman of the Confederation of British Industry's environment committee at the CBI conference last week, said:

"when it is fully up and running, Integrated Pollution Control will give Britain the highest standards in Europe."

Anxieties were expressed that some processes and factories had not yet applied for IPC under air quality regulations. Of course, that is a serious matter, but it must be a matter for the judgment of local authorities about individual firms. Local authorities have a wide range of options, including the opportunity to prosecute if companies do not comply. They have the statutory duty and the initiative for action must lie firmly with them and with the firms involved.

We heard a fair amount from the hon. Members for Dewsbury and for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) and others about river quality. It is well to remind the House that river quality is high in the United Kingdom in comparison with the quality in the European Community. In the 1985 survey figures 95 per cent. of United Kingdom rivers were of good or fair quality, compared with an average of 75 per cent. of river length in Europe.

To link leaked or reported changes in water quality in 1990 to privatisation is daft. Everyone knows that it can take years for changes in water industry investment to feed

[Mr. Baldry]

through to river quality. What happened in the year before and after privatisation would have had no impact. What is certain is that privatisation has opened the door to an unprecedented scale of investment in improvements by the water industry. The industry is spending £28 billion in the 10 years to the turn of the century to meet higher standards and it plans to spend £3 billion in 1991-92—a 20 per cent. increase on last year, which was a 40 per cent. increase on the previous year.

The performance of sewage treatment works is steadily improving and information provided by the NRA shows that non-compliance with long-term conditions is substantially down. So, we are witnessing a substantial and continuing improvement in the water industry.

May I try to make clear, once and for all, the position with regard to a letter sent by Mr. Ripa di Meana. Despite the best efforts of my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside to put everyone straight, the Opposition are determined to misunderstand. Our quarrel is not with the Commission's right to ask questions about the implementation of the directive. There is no argument about that. We are used to complaints being made and for the most part, on proper consideration, they are not found to be worth pursuing. We are among the top four European Community nations when it comes to compliance with Community directives and I am confident that that will be the case with this issue. A genuine disagreement about the interpretation of the directive lies at the heart of the matter, especially in regard to the transitional arrangements to cover the period when the directive is coming into force. That is the legal issue.

Our dispute with the Commission is not concerned with the legal issue, which I am sure can be resolved. Our dispute is simply a straightforward matter of good manners. Having sent what was purportedly a personal letter to the Secretary of State for Transport, the Commissioner leaked it to the press and to various environmental groups before the Secretary of State knew that it was coming. It is as if I wrote a letter to the hon. Member for Dewsbury and, before telling her to expect it, sent a copy to her local newspaper. I think that she would feel that that was simply bad manners. Our complaint is a simple one about bad manners.

There is an accepted convention that communications between the Commission and member states are confidential. The Commissioner breached that convention by issuing a press notice when he sent the letter, and by making public the contents of a private letter to the Secretary of State for Transport. That is what the row is about.

The Prime Minister was right to take the action that he did and the Government were right to be aggrieved at the manner in which Mr. Ripa di Meana handled the matter. I am glad to say that the Government have received a satisfactory reply from Mr. Delors.

As to the substance of the technical dispute on transitional arrangements to cover the directive, I have no doubt that it will be possible to come to a satisfactory arrangement and agreement with the Commission in due course.

A number of hon. Members mentioned detailed matters during the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones), who is an assiduous champion of his constituents' interests, mentioned a number of environmental concerns in his area and he made it clear to the House that he had drawn them directly to the attention of our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales. I have no doubt that the Secretary of State will take such action as he considers appropriate.

One of the worries of my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North was similar to that of the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) and involved hospital incinerators. Tougher air quality controls must be a matter for local authorities to enforce. Under part III of the Environmental Protection Act, local authorities are under a duty to investigate complaints about statutory nuisance, and under part I of the Act hospital incinerator operators were required to apply for authorisation by 30 September or be liable to prosecution. Tougher standards should lead to cleaner emissions. If the hon. Member for Tooting wishes to pursue a specific point he should write to me and I shall be happy to look into it.

The hon. Member for Tooting rightly said that many people were worried about the quality of their local environment. That is why, under the Environmental Protection Act, we have taken action on litter, dogs and noise. The hon. Gentleman's concerns were echoed by my hon. Friends the Members for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson) and for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne). Due to those fears we have substantially increased the penalties for actions such as littering—enhancing the quality of the local environment is important.

The issue of eastern Europe was also raised and many environmental concerns cross boundaries. That is why we have made available money for eastern Europe over a three-year period to encourage the transfer of all types of expertise. In addition to the money that central Government are making available, many British companies, including water companies, are seeking to make their expertise available to eastern Europe to help them with the challenge of cleaning up their environment after 40 years of state socialism.

Unfortunately, my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) is no longer here. It is a great pity that she did not hear the speech by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and that he did not hear hers. We must get those two Members together because they make interesting speeches.

We shall always promote best science. The United Kingdom hosted the second meeting of the parties to the Montreal protocol. I am glad that in March this year the European Community agreed to phase out supplies of CFCs within the European Community by July 1997—two and a half years earlier than required by the Montreal protocol. That is all good news and demonstrates our commitment to enhancing standards, and tackling global and environmental problems.

The hon. Members for Carmarthen and for Bolsover expressed concern about dioxins—the hon. Member for Carmarthen in a general way, the hon. Member for Bolsover more specifically. The Government have been taking tougher action to control potential sources of dioxins, including higher controls on the contamination of chemicals and waste, chemical incineration and the phasing out of leaded petrol. They are prompting the highest practical standards for incineration through integrated pollution control.

The hon. Member for Bolsover knows—because I made it clear to him on Wednesday—that a host of

agencies are carrying out expensive studies into the problem that he raised, which calls for a public inquiry. Those organisations include the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the National Rivers Authority and Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution. It will be some time before the full results of those investigations are available, but they will be published. Once they are made available, they will assist the farmers in any action that they may wish to pursue.

The BBC "Close Up North" programme yesterday suggested that there had been an increase in the incidence of breast cancer locally. I understand that the advice from the North Derbyshire health authority is

"there is currently no reason to suppose that cancer in Bolsover is a bigger problem than cancer elsewhere".

I am not sure of the basis on which the BBC allegation was made, but medical advisers in the Department of Health will be looking into this further. The BBC said that it was difficult to draw any significant conclusions from the cancer incidence data. Therefore, it would be sensible to consider the nature of that evidence before seeking to extrapolate too much from it. The hon. Member for Carmarthen referred to acid rain. However, it is worth reminding the House that United Kingdom SO2 emissions have fallen by approximately 40 per cent. since 1970.

In a debate such as this I am always conscious that it is never possible within the time available to the Front Bench spokesmen who wind up to do justice to all the points that have been made. I am afraid that that is the position today. However, what we have demonstrated both in the debate and in the first year report is that the Government have made substantial progress. We believe, however, that the protection of the environment is a management task on a huge scale, comparable in long-term importance with the management of the economy and the defence of the realm. The Government's stewardship of the environment—

It being half-past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

FINANCE AND SERVICES COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Standing Order No. 125A (Finance and Services Committee), agreed to on 18th July in the last Session of Parliament, be amended, in paragraph (2), by leaving out the words 'eight Members' and inserting the words 'nine Members'.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

2.30 pm

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): This debate follows naturally on from the one that we have just had.

Today, in east London, the public are cheering the Environment Commissioner of the European Community, Carlo Ripa di Meana, for issuing a directive that no work should be undertaken on the channel tunnel rail link because the Government have not carried out an environmental assessment. Carlo believes, and rightly so, that the British Government should have carried out an environmental study before the route was chosen, not afterwards. He has exposed our Prime Minister as the leader of a Government of environmental law breakers whose leading environmental criminals are to be found at the Department of Transport and the Department of the Environment.

The first misunderstanding that I should like to clear up is the assertion that the Government have chosen King's Cross as the terminal for the channel tunnel link and that Stratford will be merely a station along the route. That is far from the truth. Effectively, the Government have said that there will be two channel tunnel terminals—one at King's Cross for passengers using public transport, and the other at Stratford for those using cars. It is clear that Stratford will be a motorail terminal and a park-and-ride terminal. The likelihood must be that half the trains will terminate at Stratford.

British Rail has produced four excellent internal documents. I shall refer to each. They conclude that the easterly route does not give value for money and cannot be justified on any conceivable cost benefit analysis, or on any opportunity cost analysis, or on any orthodox accounting analysis.

The environmental report prepared for British Rail—I have a copy here—shows that the Ove Arup route chosen will cross and ruin more land than any other scheme in areas of special significance for agriculture, a designation identifying the most valued high grade agricultural land in Kent. In particular, millions of pounds of market garden produce will be destroyed by dust during the construction period. For a time it will be as though the locusts had invaded parts of the heart of the garden of England. The route chosen will cross a number of highly-prized marsh areas of high ecological value, some of which have been designated by the Nature Conservancy Council as sites of special scientific interest. It will destroy sites with a wide variety of habitats. The gault clay woodlands in mid-Kent are of particular concern.

The chosen route will pass through more high-risk contaminated land sites than any other scheme and it will pass through more areas currently in business or industrial use, including the Ford works at Dagenham. Amazingly, no one has yet worked out what the effect of that will be on Ford's operation.

Newham council says that its residents are in favour of the scheme, but will they still support it when they learn that 1,000 homes in Stratford will be at risk from settlement when the railway line goes into a shallow tunnel because of the geological conditions in the area? Although it should be possible to repair the external and internal

[Mr. Brian Sedgemore]

cracks in these 1,000 homes, they are bound to be blighted once they have been identified. Newham council has kept strangely silent about that.

We are told by the Government that we must be prepared to tolerate environmental devastation and a senseless waste of more than £1,000 million worth of extra public money because the Ove Arup route is necessary if prosperity is to come from the regeneration of east London and the east Thames corridor. Alas, British Rail's reports demolish this central plank of the Government's argument. The British Railways Board concludes:

"Regeneration of the East Thames Corridor may be better promoted by other measures, eg provision of domestic rail services, improved road access, site preparation at public cost."

The report of Planning, Industrial and Economic Development Advisers, which was prepared for British Rail, goes into more detail on that critical point:

"Stratford is not strongly placed to attract high quality uses, such as corporate headquarters or European Community institutions. The draw of central London is still very considerable, and it is doubtful that the pull of an international rail terminal itself is sufficient to significantly alter patterns of business location . . . The Rail Link would not be sufficient to achieve this change in the image of and prospects for the Lea Valley implied by the Gateways scenario: it may not even be necessary. It is certainly less important than central government commitment to investing in road and related infra-structure and dealing with the problems of land contamination and improving the environment."

If the Government disagree with the conclusions of the PIEDA analysis, will they tell us what reports they have carried out to suggest that British Rail and PIEDA are wrong, or are they preparing to spend £4·5 billion, not on the basis of sensible planning, but by hunch, guess and God?

The Government's problems have been compounded by the crazy suggestion of the Secretary of State for the Environment that the Ove Arup route via Stratford will act as a springboard for the creation of a new linear city from Stratford to Southend. This proposal is sheer fantasy and the product of a feverish mind. Already it is being dubbed by planners as "Tarzan's folly".

No one who is serious about urban planning believes that a linear city stretching for mile after mile on both sides of the Thames will ever be built. It is more likely that the Secretary of State for the Environment is preparing us for what used to be called ribbon development and pock-marked urban sprawl stretching from Stratford to Southend, with unfettered market forces destroying the flora and fauna and every living thing that gets in its way.

I understand that the Secretary of State for the Environment is to develop the concept of "Tarzan's folly" at a London Weekend Television seminar in a few weeks' time, but the right place to develop the concept is on the Floor of the House. Perhaps I could tempt the Minister to upstage his boss today and tell us exactly what the Secretary of State for the Environment has in mind.

Nor does British Rail enthuse over job prospects. Speaking of the maximum number of jobs of 21,000 that could be associated with the Ove Arup proposal, British Rail says that these jobs would largely represent a redistribution of economic activity in Kent and London rather than the creation of new economic activity. When Newham's councillors talk of 40,000 jobs coming to east London, they are conning not only their own people but the rest of us, including, I regret to say, the people of Hackney. There will not be many jobs for the people of Hackney in any of these proposals.

We should take note of reports that the Ove Arup route chosen by the Government will wreck a £1 billion scheme for 7,000 jobs and 6,500 new homes, which apparently have already been approved in principle by the Department of the Environment, in the Barking reach area of the Thames.

Worries about the rape of Hackney led the London borough of Hackney to oppose the idea of the easterly route and a terminal at Stratford. First, the use of Stratford as a motorail and park-and-ride terminal will necessitate increased road capacity from the west. This probably means a motorway or fast-track dual carriageway to Stratford, running through the heart of Hackney from Highbury corner to the Lea interchange. That would mean the resumption of the heroic and successful anti-motorway battles of the past two decades.

Secondly, traffic levels in east Hackney, with more juggernauts and heavy goods vehicles, would rise considerably, bringing noise, fumes, dirt, accidents and nightmarish living conditions to a wide area.

Thirdly, the accompanying redevelopment of Stratford town centre could draw trade and investment away from Hackney and sap the vitality of our existing shopping centres in Mare street and Kingsland road.

Fourthly, a successful terminal at Stratford would inevitably and inexorably encroach on the Lea Valley regional park and reduce leisure facilities. I live on the banks of the Lea and I cannot properly tell the House what an amazing joy it is to wake up every morning and look over the marshes. The Lea valley is probably Hackney's most precious environmental assets, and there is a paramount need to keep it away from development-mad Newham at all costs.

As someone who once worked full time for two years in one of the most high-powered urban planning teams ever assembled in this country, I see those four points as virtually certain consequences of the Government's proposals. But I am a modest man and I would welcome a second opinion from the Minister: does he agree or does he disagree? In particular, can he tell us whether the continental gauge will finish at Stratford rather than King's Cross, and will there be a freight depot at Temple Mills in Stratford?

There are other problematic possibilities. Is the 8·5 mile tunnel from Barking to Stratford and then to King's Cross feasible? People in the City to whom I have spoken say that private enterprise will never finance it. If the line were to go overground from Stratford—presumably along the north London line—that line might have to be upgraded from two to four tracks, with a loss of hundreds of homes in Hackney. Can the Minister give us a categorical assurance that that will not happen?

In the past, too many tunnel schemes have ended up on the surface because of the cost implications. Are we about to witness that again? Can the Minister confirm that, in any event, and even if the tunnel is built, rail traffic on the north London line will increase significantly, thus bringing pressure to upgrade it from two to four tracks? We need this threat to homes in Hackney cleared up urgently and preferably cleared away today. I beg the Minister to respond positively on that point.

One point is bugging me and, I am sure, everyone who has read the four reports produced by British Rail which I am holding in my hand. I have been through them in every last detail. I must ask the Minister: how on earth have the Government got to where they are today, with a scheme with no money, engineering study or environmental assessment in place, which produces a net loss in financial terms, compared with the southerly option, of a staggering £1·2 billion and which, on that account, has been described as perverse and part of pantomime and parody?

Why do the Government propose to dump a significant proportion of passengers travelling to and from Europe in Stratford? Do they really believe that the people of Rome, Paris, Venice and Vienna want to spend long weekends in the bed-and-breakfast hostels of Stratford, or is it the case that the cast of "The Goon Show" has been resurrected and installed at the Department of Transport?

The answer to all those questions, of course, lies in the fact that the route chosen represents the biggest bribe in British political history. The sum of £1·2 billion extra is being spent in an attempt to save the Tories in six marginal seats. Each Conservative candidate in the election will have to declare to the returning officer, first, that he has spent £7,000 on his campaign and, secondly, that he has had a direct grant from the Government of £200 million. In the rotten boroughs of yesteryear, bribes consisted of buying the electors a few pints of beer; now bribery, corruption and cheating involve hitherto unimaginable sums. In the unlikely event of any of the six Tories being elected, they will, of course, face disqualification.

In the coming weeks, months and years, I shall call on people in Hackney of all political views and of no political views to join in the campaign against the easterly route via Stratford. We shall link up with Members of Parliament and others from the north of England who may feel that the £1·2 billion of extra public money which is to be squandered on this scheme could be better spent on other transport projects, the environment, the national health service or perhaps on educating our children. We shall link up with all those who believe in exciting, rational urban planning which meets the needs of Britain and Europe in the 21st century. We shall combine with everyone and anyone who wants to support a channel tunnel rail link that gives real value for money.

In Hackney, working-class people are intelligent and sophisticated. They do not understand why the Government should set out to protect the environment of the middle classes in Kent and south London only to transfer the problems to the working classes of east London and Hackney. Too many people think that they can ride roughshod over the citizenry of Hackney, which is the poorest borough in the land. They will soon learn otherwise.

How much better it would have been if a Minister from the Department of Transport had come to the Dispatch Box today to tell us that he was concentrating on bringing us the Hackney-Chelsea tube line and the east London tube line. Then we could cheer him as we are now cheering Carlo Ripa di Meana, the European Commmunity Environment Commissioner. Surely that is an offer that the Minister cannot refuse.

2.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): It is not unusual for the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) to be a lone voice. He might be a lone voice on this occasion, although he might attract a few followers. Listening to his description of the way in which the decision was reached, it would seem that there was a party-political divide in the House, the Opposition favouring the hon. Gentleman's arguments and the Government taking another line.

I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the comments of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), who, I understand, still leads for the Labour party on transport issues. He said:

"I welcome what appears to be the endorsement of Labour's policy on an east London-Stratford-King's Cross route which was published 12 months ago, and which was outlined in 'Moving Britain into Europe'".—[*Official Report*, 14 October 1991; Vol. 196, c. 26.]

He said that we should keep reading the documents because there was a lot to learn.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): He was fighting for his constituents.

Mr. McLoughlin: The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) says that the hon. Gentleman was fighting for his constituents, and I appreciate that. I shall try to deal with the issue later.

The hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch suggested that the decision had been taken solely on a party-political basis. I merely point out that it is the line of the official Opposition at the moment to support the route outlined by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport on 14 October. We know what a great European the hon. Member for Bolsover is. He would like us to block the tunnel, but that idea would not find much favour with his colleagues. I wish to respond to the speech of the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch rather than to the intervention of the hon. Member for Bolsover, who has a knack of getting his remarks on to the record.

The Government made it clear on 14 October why we prefer the easterly approach on the route to London for the channel tunnel rail link. He was critical of us for not choosing the cheapest route. The Opposition often criticise us by saying that we go for the cheapest option, but we are now being castigated for not doing so.

The route via Stratford to King's Cross satisfies our transport objectives for London and the rest of the country. A station at Stratford alone would not do that. At the same time, the easterly approach has the least possible environmental impact. Despite what the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch said, there would be environmental consequences wherever we sited the route. We believe that the chosen route will have the least environmental impact and will spur development where it is wanted and needed in east London and in the lower Thames corridor.

To those concerned about the impact of the easterly approach on their constituents, it is worth saying that on the plans so far developed probably only two homes will need to be acquired over the entire length of line between Detling and King's Cross. There are also likely to be only about five homes within 100 m of the line. In the constituency of the hon. Member for Hackney, South and

[Mr. McLoughlin]

Shoreditch the line is proposed to be in a tunnel. The line has been specifically designed to have the least possible impact on people and the environment.

Having made our decision, the preferred route now needs to be worked up in some detail as a basis for full public consultation. This will be done by British Rail in close co-operation with the Government—both Transport and Environmental Departments—and the private sector. The first task is to consider the objectives for the work in terms of benefits to international passengers, commuters and freight, costs, environmental impact and fostering development opportunities in the east Thames corridor. A detailed preferred alignment, based on Ove Arup's proposals, can then be engineered. Only after that will it be possible to make a sufficiently full assessment of the impact on individual properties that is essential for proper public consultation. That will take some months, and in the meantime it is fruitless to speculate on the precise alignment and the fine detail of the environmental impact. I appreciate the concerns that people will feel during that period.

As I have said, one of the objectives of working up the route in detail is how best to foster business and development opportunities in east London and the lower Thames corridor. The hon. Gentleman should have welcomed that and should not have dismissed it in the way that he did. This is fraught with uncertainty, as British Rail's consultants PIEDA concluded. The hon. Gentleman said that he had gone through all the reports. As the Secretary of State said, those reports were made widely available and there was no attempt to hide them.

Nobody should be under any illusion that the rail link on its own can transform the attractiveness of east London for development, not that adding a station here and making a connection there to the existing network is necessarily the answer to the problems. The rail link has to be seen as one item in a package of infrastructure improvements to road and rail. In terms of public transport, the extensions to the Jubilee line and the docklands light railway, the modernisation of the Central line, and the east-west crossrail will make Stratford a major transport hub. It is this concerted effort to transform communications that will over a period of years help to shift economic activity to this part of London. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman welcomes the extensions that we have made, and plan to make, to the transport infrastructure in the area.

Environment and Transport Ministers will play a full part in the development issue, in particular as the route is being worked up in more detail. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has already announced his intention to commission a study to consider the development potential of the lower Thames. He will shortly announce the name of the consultants who will undertake the study.

Local authorities and others concerned with the development issues will understandably be impatient to contribute to the selection of a precise route alignment, connections to the existing network, and stations. But, first, British Rail, the Government and the private sector must put our collective thoughts together if the consultation is to be productive.

The new line is needed primarily to cope with the growth of international passenger traffic, but the further work will also look at commuter and freight traffics. British Rail envisages the use of the rail link for express domestic services from Kent and perhaps Essex—up to 12 per hour in the peak period—as well as regular services during the rest of the day. Precisely what is provided needs to be considered hand in hand with the pattern of stations and connections on the new line.

We want to look again at whether it is desirable, feasible and viable to carry freight on the new line. This is a complex issue. For example, is there an advantage in carrying continental loading-gauge freight, bearing in mind that there might have to be a railhead in the Stratford area? I hope that that answers the hon. Gentleman's point about the continental rail gauge. That needs to be fully considered and that will be done. We cannot give instantaneous answers, and I am a little surprised at the Commissioner's response. It is not surprising for the Government to announce their route and then carry out the necessary work on the environmental implications. There is not much to be gained by saying that the Environment Commissioner has saved us and stopped the project. That is to overstate the case, as was explained in the previous debate.

The alternative to such a railhead would possibly be the expensive upgrading of other lines. Whatever the decision, Stratford will still be an important rail freight hub. It already features in British Rail's plans as a regional centre for handling international freight once the channel tunnel opens.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): The Minister said that he could not predict the implications for individuals, but what about the larger environment? I have in mind the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) about Hackney marshes. Will the Minister assure us that, in the studies, protection will be afforded to Hackney and Walthamstow marshes?

Mr. McLoughlin: I have tried to explain that there is not yet a precise alignment. A number of the points raised in this debate—which will no doubt also be raised in future debates, as I see this subject coming back to the House on many occassions before the final plans and the final alignment go out to public consultation—will be taken into consideration. There is a desire to ensure that we adopt the best approach in terms of transport infrastructure and transport needs while being aware of individual concerns about places that are highly regarded for environmental reasons. There is always a balance—and it is sometimes a difficult balance—to be struck. In our earlier debate, the hon. Member for Bolsover spoke about the balance between the interests of industry and those of the environment. We all accept that difficult decisions sometimes have to be made on development, infrastructure and environmental questions.

I repeat that no decision has yet been made and that we still have a long way to go before the precise alignment is produced. Understandably, concerns will be expressed while the discussions are taking place, but I hope that people will be grateful that at least the route is now known. Many people have been relieved that one route has been excluded because that has allowed them to get on with planning their areas, and it is now the hon. Member for

Hackney, South and Shoreditch who is faced with making suggestions and representations on behalf of his area. Of course, we shall want to listen to them and both we and BR will take them fully into account when the time comes for the precise alignment to be decided.

When the precise alignment comes, a number of the questions now being asked will be properly answered. It is early days yet, and it is difficult to say too much, but I hope that, by the flavour of my response, I have shown that we feel that the route that we have selected is the route that will have the least environmental impact. That is not to say that the scheme will have no environmental impact, because no scheme could match that criterion. It is a matter of trying to get the balance right.

The potential is there for the rail link to be of enormous benefit to east London without there being an unacceptable impact on people and the environment. But more study and full public consultation are needed before the precise details are fully established. The project can then be taken forward by the private sector.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes to Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 11 November 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENERGY

Wind Power

1. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the progress in establishing wind power as a commercial source of energy.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Colin Moynihan): Wind energy is being given an unprecedented opportunity to become established as a commercial source of energy. The 1990 and 1991 Renewables Orders under the non-fossil fuel obligation have required the regional electricity companies to contract for 58 wind energy projects with a total of 94·63 MW declared net capacity. We have invested more than £38 million in the Government's wind energy research, development and demonstration programme. That is now beginning to bear fruit, as evidenced by the encouraging response to the opportunity being created by the non-fossil fuel obligation.

In addition, we are preparing a planning policy guidance note on renewable energy and hope to go to consultation on the draft later this month. The document will comprise general guidance on planning for renewable energy, with more specific guidance on the environmental impact of wind farms which we recognise to be an important and pressing issue.

Mr. Shaw: Will my hon. Friend confirm that electricity privatisation has enabled wind energy to develop in a way that it could not have without privatisation and is not that good news for all of us who are concerned about the environment?

Mr. Moynihan: My hon. Friend is correct on both counts. It is good news for the environment because the development of renewable energy, which is environmentally sensitive, is essential to security and diversity of supply in this country. Without privatisation, we would not have the non-fossil fuel obligation, which has enabled us to bring two substantial orders before the House.

Mr. McAllion: As Scotland has more than half the United Kingdom's land-based wind energy potential and as even Government agencies such as Highlands and Islands Enterprise are calling for the immediate full extension of the non-fossil fuel obligation to Scotland, will the Minister explain why the Secretary of State for Scotland has failed to respond to that call—or will it require a Labour Secretary of State for Scotland fully to develop the potential for wind energy in Scotland?

Mr. Moynihan: The hon. Gentleman should be well aware that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland responded recently to the importance of renewables by announcing a scheme under which Scottish Power and Scottish Hydro-Electric will contract for renewables projects in Scotland. The Government are considering the longer-term arrangements for Scotland in the current review of the renewables energy advisory group.

Mr. Conway: Does my hon. Friend think it a little curious that the people who argue most fervently for this method of energy production often seem to complain most bitterly at public inquiries about planning applications for this alternative energy source?

Mr. Moynihan: As ever on energy issues, my hon. Friend makes a pertinent and important point. He is right and for that reason we have issued a planning policy guidance note, on which we hope to have further consultation before the end of the month. I hope that we shall manage to reconcile the problems that my hon. Friend has highlighted.

Gas Disconnections

2. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met the chairman of British Gas to discuss disconnection for debt.

The Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. John Wakeham): I have had no recent discussions with the chairman of British Gas on the subject of disconnection for debt. This no doubt reflects the fact that the number of British Gas customers who are disconnected for debt is lower than at any time since records were first kept in 1977.

Mr. French: When my right hon. Friend next meets the chairman of British Gas and discusses the subject, will he try to discover why some people receive letters threatening disconnection for non-payment as much as seven days or more after they have made payment? Will he inquire of the chairman whether British Gas's accounts system could be tightened to prevent such aggravation to members of the public?

Mr. Wakeham: Certainly, I shall discuss that point with the chairman of British Gas. Although the number of disconnections has fallen dramatically from almost 61,000 in the year to December 1987 to just over 19,000 in the year ending December 1990, there is a code of practice on disconnections and I want it to be adhered to.

Mr. Harry Barnes: Gas showrooms all over the place are being closed, including those in Clay Cross and Staveley in my constituency. Is there any evidence that indebtedness increases because people have difficulty paying bills which previously they could pay through gas showrooms?

Mr. Wakeham: No. Showrooms are, of course, a matter for British Gas. There is no evidence of additional payment difficulties—indeed, the number of people with difficulties seems to have fallen. That is partly due to the fact that, in the five years since privatisation, gas prices

have fallen by 14 per cent. whereas, during the last five years of the Labour Government, they increased by 11 per cent.

Domestic Energy Prices

3. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the real price of energy supplied to domestic households during the last five years.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): The price of fuel, light and power supplied to domestic households is now estimated to be 6 per cent. lower in real terms than it was five years ago.

Mr. Arnold: Is not that reply an absolute vindication of our policy of privatisation, linked to the operation of the regulators? Is it not good news that, under the new proposal before the House, the work of the regulators is soon to be extended further?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My hon. Friend is right. Privatisation of the industry has brought with it assurances of higher standards of service. For the first time, domestic and smaller industrial customers are protected from unjustified price increases.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Do those figures include the rapid escalation in standing charges, which are, in fact, the industry's poll tax on its consumers? Do those figures include the threefold increase in service charges applied by British Gas, or is this just another way of massaging the figures, as the Government always do?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No. I can confirm that the figures which I gave include all charges to domestic customers. Over the past seven years, domestic prices have fallen by 2 per cent. in real terms, whereas under the last Labour Government domestic prices increased by a staggering 2 per cent. in cash terms every six weeks.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: The question refers to the real price of energy. That must include environmental considerations such as the disposal of nuclear waste. Will my hon. Friend therefore join me in congratulating scientists at Culham who, through an EC experimental station there, have made a breakthrough with fusion?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Yes. We should take pride in the success of the experiment. However, I should strike a note of caution. There is still a long way to go before fusion power surmounts the engineering and commercial challenges ahead.

Mr. Morgan: Is not it true that the Government and the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) have been using statistics in a phoney manner which surpasses all understanding, so that a 38 per cent. increase in electricity prices in the past four years somehow becomes a 6 per cent. drop in so-called "real terms"? "Real terms" must be set against the fact that the price of the crude fuels that are being bought, such as coal, oil or gas, has remained stable. In any common-sense meaning of "real terms", a 38 per cent. increase in cash terms is a 38 per cent. increase in real terms as well.

Did not the hon. Member for Gravesham get it right when he said, "Is it not good news"? Indeed, it is not—*[Interruption.]* That is what the hon. Gentleman said. Have not the privatised electricity companies got such a one-sided bargain out of the Government that it has meant the creation not of privatised companies but of pound note machines?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: It is a matter of record that, over the past seven years of Conservative Government, the electricity prices charged to domestic customers have fallen by 2 per cent., whereas under the Labour Government they rose by 22 per cent. in real terms. It is not speculation but fact that Labour Governments are bad news for electricity customers.

Dr. Michael Clark: Does my hon. Friend expect the real price of energy to domestic households to rise if an energy tax is introduced? What would be the effect of such a tax on British industry, exports and jobs?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Yes. My hon. Friend makes the fair point that we must be very cautious before we assent to a carbon tax which could increase the price of domestic energy. If that were done unilaterally ahead of the rest of the world, it could put British industry at a severe disadvantage. Therefore, although we are interested in continuing the debate in a European context, we shall not make any premature decisions.

Coal Imports

4. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what were the total amounts of coal imports and the countries from which the coal was exported in the last year.

Mr. Wakeham: Coal imports in the year to September 1991 were 19·6 million tonnes. The principal sources were the USA and Australia.

Mr. Skinner: Does the Minister agree that every 1 million tonne of coal imported is roughly equivalent to the closure of a pit of average size and probably results in the redundancies of about 1,000 men, between 67 and 80 per cent. of whom are thrown on to unemployment benefits and other systems of benefit? That means that there is an increase in the amount that the state has to pay for people thrown out of work. Every 1 million tonnes of imported coal is equivalent to £40 million on the balance of payments. If one considers the issue from either angle it must be economic lunacy to continue the import programme.

Mr. Wakeham: I cannot agree with the hon. Gentleman. The best protection for the British Coal industry is for it to produce reliable supplies that are competitive on the world market. I want to achieve the largest competitive coal industry. To consider only the balance of payments effect of imported coal is to consider merely one part of the issue. The buying of more high-cost British coal would increase the cost of electricity which would be bad for competiveness, for the consumer and for the balance of payments.

Mr. Eadie: Did the right hon. Gentleman read a report in the *Sunday Post* two or three weeks ago which stated that Colombian imported coal was being subsidised by the drug barons? Is he going to examine the question of

imported coal in a broader sense, as there have been complaints about unfair competition and we are doing British coal miners out of jobs by importing foreign coal?

Mr. Wakeham: The question of unfair imports of coal is a matter for the European Commission to investigate. It is for the Commission to consider British Coal's complaints. The hon. Gentleman must keep these matters in perspective. Colombian coal is a relatively small amount of the total coal used in this country. The most important task for British Coal is to be competitive.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is significant that the Opposition refuse to speak for consumers? Do not coal imports help those, such as old-age pensioners, who consume coal and are not they good for employment in energy-intensive industries? They are objectives that most people would share.

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. A low and competitive price of coal used in power generation will reduce the price of electricity. That is the most important issue that the coal industry must face.

Coal Privatisation

5. **Mr. Strang:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what measures he is taking to prepare the coal industry for privatisation.

Mr. Wakeham: Decisions about the form and timing of the privatisation of British Coal will be taken after the election.

Mr. Strang: Is not it clear from the Rothschilds studies that the re-election of a Conservative Government would sound the death knell of this country's coal industry? Does not the Secretary of State recognise that to close more than two thirds of the pits to facilitate privatisation—as envisaged by Rothschilds—would mean subjecting electricity supplies and prices in the long run to the vagaries of international markets, do enormous and permanent damage to our balance of payments, wipe out billions of pounds of productive investment and mean the loss of thousands of jobs? Is not that a policy of economic sabotage and one more reason why the country needs a Labour Government?

Mr. Wakeham: The privatisation of coal in Britain will not close one pit and Opposition Members had better face that fact. The real question that must be faced is how the coal industry can best become competitive, because, whether it is in public or private ownership, it will not be able to sell coal to the generators if it does not. I am optimistic about the coal industry's ability to adjust itself to the market that exists and to be a thriving and growing industry.

Mr. Andy Stewart: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the initiative of the Union of Democratic Mineworkers and its decision to instruct its bankers to prepare a bid for the British coal industry is the mark of a forward-looking trade union? Will my right hon. Friend's Department co-operate fully with the president of the UDM, Roy Lynk, and his bankers in preparing that bid?

Mr. Wakeham: Yes, Sir. I have already written to Mr. Roy Lynk inviting him to come to see me with his advisers so that I may give him all the information that I can. I am anxious that the UDM should play a part in the eventual privatisation of British Coal because I believe that that union and its members recognise that coal has a future, but only if it can be operated on a profitable and economic basis.

Mr. Dobson: Why will not the Minister publish the secret reports that he is receiving on the future of the coal industry from Tory merchant bankers Rothschilds, whose privatisation unit is headed by the Tory candidate for Hampstead and Highgate? Are not the 60,000 miners and their families and those living in the coalfield communities, whose lives, livelihoods and communities are at stake, entitled to know? Is the right hon. Gentleman ashamed of what is in the reports? Is he frightened of them? If not, why cannot he come clean? Or will we have to rely on my getting the reports in plain brown envelopes a week or two after he has received them?

Mr. Wakeham: If the hon. Gentleman gets something in a plain brown envelope, we can rely on him to issue a press release putting the worst possible complexion on the matter from the point of view of British coal. Those who seek to speak for British coal must recognise that they do the industry great damage by their Jeremiah, sour remarks. The advice that I am receiving from Rothchilds about the size of the coal industry is neither accepted or rejected by me. The size of the industry will be determined by the facts and will depend on the contracts that British Coal can obtain in the renegotiation of contracts with the generators which is due to start in April 1993.

Mr. Wilkinson: Will my right hon. Friend do everything in his power to encourage not just buy-outs by the UDM or by management, but employee buy-outs in the coal industry, as the long-term commitment of the work force is crucial for employment and for the industry's prosperity?

Mr. Wakeham: I agree very much with my hon. Friend, but I believe that we should address the problems in the proper way. The first step is to determine the best size for the coal industry and that will depend on the market that the industry can obtain in sales to generators. After that, questions of privatisation will be determined—after the next general election.

Electricity Generation

6. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what views his Department has on the limitation on use of natural gas for the generation of electricity.

Mr. Moynihan: My Department sees no general case for restricting the use of natural gas for electricity generation. Gas generation offers efficient primary energy conversion and significant environmental benefits and can lead to lower energy prices to final users.

Mr. Pike: Does the Minister accept that his answer shows why the Government need to be voted out of office? Is not it totally wrong to leave to the private sector, market forces and short-term profit motives matters connected with the use of energy which are so crucial to the nation's future? Should not the Government be making policy on energy supplies, which are essential to both domestic and industrial consumers?

Mr. Moynihan: No, Sir. My answer shows exactly why this Government will continue in office throughout the 1990s. The hon. Gentleman should know that to achieve lower prices and efficiency the gas market should be determined by prices in the marketplace and not by bureaucratic intervention.

Mr. Hannam: Does not the attitude of the Opposition show that they are not concerned with the care of the environment? Will my hon. Friend confirm that a combined cycle gas generating station produces half the amount of carbon dioxide that a coal-fired power station produces and none of the sulphur dioxide that causes acid rain?

Mr. Moynihan: My hon. Friend is correct and that is why gas is excellent for the environment.

Mr. Doran: I am pleased that the Minister is still wearing his Kincardine and Deeside by-election tie. At least some Tories got something out of it.

The Minister will be aware that there is a price for gas over and above the economic. Has he had an opportunity to study the findings of Sheriff Principal Ireland in the fatal accident inquiry into the death of Timothy Williams on the Ocean Odyssey? In view of the sheriff's expression of regret that the terms of the inquiry were not wide enough to take into account all the evidence of the risks involved in deep sea drilling, what steps will the Minister take to examine the matter further? In the light of the sheriff principal's report, is the Minister satisfied that deep drilling in the North sea is safe? Will he confirm whether, in the award of licences to explore in the North sea, he takes into account the safety record of the oil companies involved?

Mr. Moynihan: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that we have just received that important and significant report. I give him an undertaking that I will reply to the important issues that he has raised in the House this afternoon.

Energy Efficiency

7. **Mr. Gerald Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will report on the progress of the ministerial committee on energy efficiency.

Mr. Wakeham: Good progress has been made by the ministerial group during the past year. The group's annual report, published on 16 October, outlines the main initiatives being taken forward by the Government to promote energy efficiency in all sectors of the economy. Copies of the report were placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Bowden: Is my right hon. Friend satisfied that the resources available to promote energy efficiency are adequate to do the job?

Mr. Wakeham: Yes, Sir. The autumn statement confirmed that the Energy Efficiency Office budget for 1992-93 is £59 million, which is a 40 per cent. increase in resources for EEO programmes. Further increases are planned—to £70 million in 1993-94 and to £75 million in 1994-95.

Mr. Flynn: Is the Minister aware that there was a great pall of smoke over my constituency yesterday which came from a tyre fire? Is he aware that that is one of the great unused sources of energy? There is a pilot programme in Birmingham to develop tyre incineration as an energy source. Will the Secretary of State introduce a full-scale national programme to use the 1 million surplus tyres that are created every year?

Mr. Wakeham: I am pleased to tell the hon. Gentleman that part of our research programme includes research into the use of tyres in that way. I will send him the details.

Sir Ian Lloyd: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the excellent document that I received this morning entitled "Making a Corporate Commitment"—on energy management—in which my right hon. Friend points out that the public sector could, if my arithmetic is correct, yield a saving of £560 million. He also suggests, properly, that all sectors should set performance improvement targets and he suggests a list of ministerial responsibilities. In setting a lead from the top, which is correct and proper, will that list include the Lord President of the Council and the House?

Mr. Wakeham: I am sure that the Lord President of the Council and his Department will be playing their part in trying to reduce energy bills. The Government have set a target of saving 15 per cent. of their energy bill over five years and 1990-91 forms the base year. We believe that the amount that can be saved is enormous. About 20 per cent. of all the energy that we use in this country could be saved with the best forms of energy efficiency.

Mr. Dobson: What progress have the Government made towards their 15 per cent. savings target? Did not the consumption of energy of the Secretary of State's Department increase by 60 per cent. last year? Is not it true that half the other Government Departments also increased their energy consumption, that the Department of the Environment got rid of its only post of energy manager and that half of Government Departments do not meet the Government's target of investing £1 in energy saving for every £10 spent on energy?

Mr. Wakeham: The one thing that one can rely upon is that the hon. Gentleman would not give up a point by being told the facts. He makes the point about the Department of Energy's bill and claims that it shows a 63 per cent. increase. He does not compare like with like. My Department has had its own energy bill only since it moved into its present headquarters in August 1989. Consequently, the hon. Gentleman is comparing the energy used in a 12-month period with the energy that was used in a seven-month period. If that is a sample of his research and logic, I wonder about the rest of it.

Frankly, I am not satisfied with the progress that the Government have been making over the years. That is why we set the targets. Also, 1990-91 forms the base year, so the first year under the new targets has not yet ended. All the reports that I have received show that we are making very good progress.

Mr. Michael Morris: May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the forward-looking report and, perhaps more importantly, on the financial commitment that goes with it? Is he aware that in the recent issue of *Building* there is a comment to the effect that house builders are resisting improving insulation standards in new homes? Should not there be some further consultation to ensure that they take on board the clear message?

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend may know that, last week, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and I launched a new campaign—energy in the home—to improve understanding of global warming and energy use and to encourage families to adopt energy efficiency measures. It is one of five recent initiatives. My hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Sir I. Lloyd) referred to one initiative—"Making a Corporate Commitment". Tomorrow, with the regional electricity companies, we will launch an energy labelling initiative so that those who buy refrigerators will see what is being used. There are many more, but I will not mention them all today.

Offshore Oil and Gas

8. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many contracts for the construction of offshore oil and gas structures and vessels were awarded to United Kingdom fabrication yards and shipyards in each of the past four years.

Mr. Moynihan: United Kingdom yards were awarded 55, 50, 51 and 71 contracts for the construction of structures or vessels for offshore production in the years 1987 to 1990.

Dr. Godman: Naturally, I am extremely pleased with the orders that were won in recent months by Scott Lithgow and other yards, but may I point out to the Minister that there is a massive skills shortage in the industry? Will he impress on his ministerial colleagues at the Department of Employment and the Scottish Office the need to encourage and finance relevant skills training courses that are run in technical colleges and other training places? The James Watt college in Greenock and other colleges are providing important training in, for instance, coded welding skills. They are precisely the skills that are in demand and are in short supply. Encouragement must be given to our colleges and other training centres in Scotland, and indeed south of the border.

Mr. Moynihan: The hon. Gentleman will no doubt be pleased to learn that addressing skill shortages is a major priority for all involved in offshore oil and gas, and particularly for those in the yards. However, the hon. Gentleman will realise that part of the success of Scott Lithgow in recent months and the support that it has had through intensive marketing efforts by Trafalgar House, building up its work force quite rapidly to 300 men, has been because of the quality of the men and because we have been addressing skill shortages and enhancing the ability of that yard to win important contracts.

Mr. Michael Brown: Is my hon. Friend aware that following the passage of the Associated British Ports Act 1990, it is now possible for the South Humberside Engineering and Fabrication Services company, which is based in my constituency and which I visited only last week, to build a bridge that will join that company to the docks, thus enabling it to export the offshore vessels that it has been manufacturing for several years? Will my hon. Friend take this opportunity to advise the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) that even if there is a skills shortage in Scotland, there is certainly not one in south Humberside and that any company that requires the type of vessel that is associated with the offshore oil and gas industry will find them available in south Humberside?

Mr. Moynihan: The yard to which my hon. Friend refers has in recent months demonstrated its productivity, its advanced capabilities, its excellence in terms of safety, its reliability and, above all, its technological edge. That is what we need if we are to have a package that will beat other countries' export potential in that market and if we are to keep the United Kingdom right at the forefront of export orders for United Kingdom oil and gas activity.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Given the importance of those orders to the fabrication yards and the communities in which they are based, has the Minister given any consideration to the position of the suppliers of the raw materials that are used in those yards? Is he aware, for example, that since the closure of part of the Lanarkshire steel mills, there has been a delay in delivering steel to the Ardersier yard, which I know that he has visited several times? Indeed, Ministers seem to be some of my constituency's main tourists. Does he agree that there is a cause for some concern and will he look into that matter in conjuction with the Department of Trade and Industry?

Mr. Moynihan: I hear what the hon. Lady says. It is always a pleasure to visit her constituency, not least because that gives me the opportunity to see why the value of the contracts that were won by United Kingdom yards last year amounted to £759 million, which is 36 per cent. up on the previous year's figure and five times the 1987 value.

Mining (South Wales)

9. **Mr. Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he intends to meet British Coal South Wales in the near future to discuss the future of coal mining in south Wales.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend and I meet the chairman of British Coal regularly to discuss all aspects of the coal industry.

Mr. Murphy: The Minister is no doubt aware that a fortnight ago the Penallta colliery in the Rhymney valley closed, meaning that there are now only three pits in the whole of south Wales. Bearing in mind the increasing use of heavily subsidised imports and the impending privatisation of the coal industry, what guarantee is the Minister prepared to give the House and the people of Wales about the future of the Welsh coal industry?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The future size and success of the Welsh coal industry depend on its ability to control costs and to continue to improve its productivity. If it can do that, it will win a large part of the market to supply the British electricity generating stations when the present contracts expire in 1993.

Mr. Barron: The Rothschild report, which is currently with the Department of Energy and which was paid for by the Government and produced by discussion with working groups in the Department of Energy and British Coal, envisages the end of deep mining in the south Wales coal field by 1993-94. Even if the Minister and the Secretary of State do not want to say whether they have accepted or rejected that report, if they truly believe in the market will they now reject it so that the British coal industry can continue to work towards improving its productivity as it has during the past six years?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The report to which the hon. Gentleman refers was advice to my right hon. Friend. We have already made it clear that no decisions on the way to privatise the British coal industry will be taken until after the next general election.

Energy Research

10. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his Department's expenditure on *(a)* renewable energy research and *(b)* fossil fuel energy research in 1990-91; and what is the equivalent figure for 1978-79.

Mr. Moynihan: Expenditure in 1990-91 on renewable energy research was £20·8 million, and on coal research £11·4 million. The equivalent figures for 1978-79 were £3·6 million and £1·2 million respectively.

Mr. Corbyn: Given that the Government have now launched a campaign to try to offset the effects of global warming by the use of non-fossil fuels and renewable energy sources, does the Minister accept that there should be a substantial increase in research into renewable energy sources, of which this country has many? Secondly, will he give us——

Mr. Speaker: One question, please.

Mr. Corbyn: This is part of the same question, Mr. Speaker. While the Minister is replying to the earlier part of my question, will he give the House the figures for the amount of money that is spent on nuclear research, which takes up 75 per cent. of his Department's research budget, is a deeply pollutive form of energy generation and which, frankly, is something which he should be more keen on phasing out, so that he can transfer those resources and invest them in research on renewable energy sources for the future?

Mr. Moynihan: I reject the hon. Gentleman's comment about nuclear power. There is absolutely no reason why expenditure on renewables research and development should bear any proportional relationship to nuclear expenditure. Each energy technology requires a different level of investment to carry out the necessary R and D and to develop it for commercial use. However, I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for asking this question, because it has provided the House with an opportunity to learn that we have record levels of R and D expenditure on renewables.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

11. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on progress of the home energy efficiency scheme.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Initial experience in operating the home energy efficiency scheme has confirmed that it meets a real need and is being well received. More than 95,000 insulation jobs were carried out under the scheme between 1 April and 30 September.

Mr. Evennett: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. How much more is being spent in the current financial year on the scheme? Are the Government on track for the target of implementing 200,000 schemes during the current year?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: This year, some £26 million has been allocated to the scheme and we are on target to do 200,000 insulation jobs. I am pleased to say that as a result of the autumn statement, the budget for the home energy efficiency scheme will increase by 50 per cent. next year.

THE ARTS

Women Employees

28. **Mrs. Heal:** To ask the Minister for the Arts how many women are employed in senior positions within the Office of Arts and Libraries.

The Minister for the Arts (Mr. Tim Renton): Four of the 15 staff employed in grades 2 to 7 in the Office of Arts and Libraries are women.

Mrs. Heal: What action does the Minister propose to take to improve the percentage of women in senior positions within his Department? Does not he feel that the Office of Arts and Libraries should set an example to the other arts bodies such as the Arts Council, only three of the 12 members of which are women, and the regional arts boards, all of which are directed by men? Does not he feel that he should take more positive action than making optimistic speeches, if women are to improve their representation in the arts?

Mr. Renton: The hon. Lady is not right in saying that it is simply a question of making optimistic speeches. As she will know, I am also responsible, as the Minister for the Civil Service, for ensuring that there are proper opportunities for women and that women are encouraged to take them throughout the civil service. We issued a report on the matter just a few weeks ago at the same time as Oppportunity 2000 was launched. As more than 25 per cent. of the senior staff in my office are women, we are showing something of a lead to the rest of the civil service. I am delighted that that is so and I wish to continue it. Two thirds of my private office staff are women, the hon. Lady will be pleased to know, and two thirds of the support staff are women.

Mr. Evennett: While I welcome what my right hon. Friend has said, will he confirm that we should encourage more women into senior positions, but that they must be appointed on the basis of their ability, not just on the basis of their sex?

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): The Minister for the Arts should be a woman.

Mr. Renton: Yes, of course it must be on the basis of equality of talent for the jobs available. The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) says that the Minister for the Arts should be a woman. I wonder what his hon. Friend on the Front Bench thinks about that.

Mr. Fisher: The Minister's figures are at odds with the claims made in his policy document for the Government generally and, indeed, with the Prime Minister's remarks last week. Is not the Minister ashamed of the appalling record of the Office of Arts and Libraries in that respect? Does he personally believe that the skills and talents of women in the arts and media are undervalued and under-promoted? What does he intend to do about it? Is it not the case that the attempts made through his document,

and the Prime Minister's speech last week, cover up the Government's lack of policies and are about as effective as lipstick on the face of a gorilla?

Mr. Renton: I fear that if Eve were to offer the hon. Gentleman a golden apple in the Garden of Eden he would immediately start to look for a maggot in it. The Office of Arts and Libraries has a good record in that field. It is not for me to tell the arts performing companies precisely how many women should be artistic or general directors. The hon. Gentleman will know—if he travels round the country as I do—the degree to which women hold top jobs in artistic companies and I am delighted that they are doing so.

Tourism

29. **Mr. Jessel:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what information he has as to the extent visitors to Britain are attracted by the arts.

Mr. Renton: In a sample poll of visitors to museums and galleries nationwide taken in 1990, 22 per cent. were from overseas. That figure rises to 44 per cent. in London. In addition, around 32 per cent. of overseas visitors to London in 1990-91 cited a trip to the theatre as their main reason for coming.

Mr. Jessel: As spending by overseas visitors on hotels, restaurants, shopping, travelling and the arts generates employment, income and a tax yield to the Government, does that not abundantly justify the excellent settlement obtained by my right hon. Friend in the negotiations for the autumn statement, and is it not time that the Opposition showed a bit more enthusiasm?

Mr. Renton: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind support for the good settlement that I was able to obtain for the performing and visual arts last week. It is satisfactory. In the broad strategy discussions that I have had with the Arts Council, it was my wish that a good proportion of the money should assist touring round the country and should help the new regional arts boards. In that way, we shall be helping the best to get the most. Given that the shadow Minister for the Arts came to see me in the spring to say what difficulties he thought the performing companies were in, I agree that it would be nice if the Opposition were to welcome this generous settlement.

Mr. Sheldon: Although the growth in that traffic and the need to maintain an increase in the numbers of people coming to this country to enjoy the arts is not the main purpose of the Minister's job, it has the most attractions for the Treasury. Given that fact, will he continue to press the Government and the Treasury for extra money to meet the demand for help for overseas visitors who come here and the demand for increasing availability of the various facilities that he tries to obtain?

Mr. Renton: I am not certain whether the right hon. Gentleman's remark about attraction to the Treasury was a promise or a threat, but I agree that the invisible earnings brought to this country by overseas tourists are an important factor. There is a tourism co-ordination committee which is headed by the Secretary of State for Employment. I attended one of its meetings last week. One of the matters that I stressed to the national tourist boards was that there is a great deal to be done to ensure that arts programmes—what is happening in local galleries and museums—are more widely known to overseas tourists through the tourist boards.

Public Libraries

30. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will make a statement about the future of the public library service; and what steps he is taking to assist its development.

Mr. Renton: I have recently ordered a review of the public library service in order to set out options on how it may operate into the next century. That will be a major follow-up to the last Government review, "The Libraries' Choice", which set the way for change in the 1980s, and will be completed by 1993.

Mr. Mitchell: In paying tribute to the six public libraries in my constituency, especially Arnold library where I hold one of my regular monthly surgeries——

Mr. Tony Banks: Only one a month?

Mr. Mitchell: Just one of my monthly surgeries. May I say that my right hon. Friend's review will be a great success if it succeeds in spreading library services ever wider to a larger number of people in a modern and effective manner?

Mr. Renton: I agree with my hon. Friend. The important thing is for libraries to look ahead over the next five to 10 years and to decide what nature of library services will be required, how local authorities can ensure that libraries are built in the most suitable places and what they can do to get the balance right between the lending of books and of tapes and records. I am delighted to hear that my hon. Friend regularly holds an advice surgery in a library, and I am sure that it is extremely well attended.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Is the Minister aware that during the past decade changes in relation to the library service have been almost entirely negative and that it is far more difficult for people on shift work or with small children to obtain access to libraries? There are far fewer library budgets capable of replacing and expanding the numbers of books. Far from the libraries needing to look forward to changes, they need some straightforward financial support and an understanding of the role of women librarians who form the majority of library workers at the lower echelons of the service if not in the Minister's Department.

Mr. Renton: The Library Association has made it abundantly plain that the problem for libraries over the next few years is not money but choice. It is making the service available to the average family which may not necessarily have the library habit. Parents and children must be attracted to libraries. At the heart of the review that I have asked to be undertaken is how to make certain that the libraries continue to provide the service that the community needs.

Arts Provision, Wales

32. **Sir Anthony Meyer:** To ask the Minister for the Arts when he next proposes to visit Wales to discuss provision for the arts.

Mr. Renton: I visited south Wales on 3 and 4 October and hope to visit north and central Wales when convenient opportunities arise.

Sir Anthony Meyer: Is my right hon. Friend aware that he could enjoy the superlative Welsh National Opera without going to Wales, but that if he visits north Wales he will find nowhere for that wonderful company to perform? Will he discuss with the Secretary of State for Wales the possibility of a scheme to provide a home for the Welsh National Opera in north Wales?

Mr. Renton: This is ground upon which an Englishman almost fears to tread. A few days ago in Cardiff I saw an excellent performance of Rigoletto by the Welsh National Opera. It was extremely enjoyable. Cardiff bay development corporation has future plans to build premises for the Welsh National Opera at Cardiff Bay. Welsh men may have to decide among themselves whether they want an opera centre in Cardiff and in north Wales as well. If they do I shall be delighted to attend performances at both.

CIVIL SERVICE

Political Advisers

38. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what plans the Government have to expand the numbers of political advisers employed in the civil service.

The Minister of State, Privy Council Office (Mr. Tim Renton): The Government have no plans to increase the total number of special advisers. The appointment of a special adviser is a matter for each Minister in consultation with the Prime Minister as necessary.

Mr. Shaw: Has my right hon. Friend seen press reports that Labour Front-Bench spokesmen are proposing that Governments should set up within each Department a large cabinet——

Mr. Speaker: Order. What has this to do with Government responsibility?

Mr. Shaw: They propose that the Government should set up in each Department cabinets with large numbers of staff to monitor and control the civil service. Has my right hon. Friend any idea of the sort of people who would be chosen to fill those posts?

Mr. Renton: My hon. Friend asks an extremely important question. I saw the comment by the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) about the setting up of special kitchen cabinets under a possible Labour Government. As the hon. Gentleman's hobbies are listed in Dod's as "eating, cooking and wine" I can see his interest in kitchen cabinets. It would be helpful to know who the Opposition would appoint to such kitchen cabinets. For example, would Derek Hatton be special adviser to the Department of the Environment and would Bruce Kent get a job with the Ministry of Defence?

Mr. Rees: The Minister answered the question about special advisers. What is the difference between a special adviser and a political adviser? What part does the Civil Service Commission play in determining their salary levels? Who are these special advisers and which part of the documents are they allowed to see? Should not the House be given more details about them under any Government?

Mr. Renton: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has already answered that question, and the right hon. Gentleman will find it in *Hansard* last week. In that answer, my right hon. Friend lists the names of all 39 specialist advisers, all but five of whom are political advisers, with those five being special advisers—*[Interruption.]* The right hon. Gentleman should wait a minute. Those five special advisers offer specific technical advice on subjects such as economics on which they are expert.

As the right hon. Gentleman will know from his wide experience, over the years the Labour party has tended to bring many so-called special advisers into local government. I hope that it would not dream of doing so in Whitehall.

Opportunity 2000

39. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he will make a statement on the implications of Opportunity 2000 on the recruitment and promotion policies of the civil service.

Mr. Renton: My Department has joined Opportunity 2000 as the umbrella organisation for the whole civil service. We have had a specific programme of action to achieve equal opportunities for women since 1984. Considerable progress has been made, and further impetus will be given next year when I launch a new programme for action.

Mr. Coombs: Will my right hon. Friend make a start by reading the recruitment literature of the civil service and then reading a sample of the recruitment brochures of large private companies? He could then compare the women-friendliness of the two products. I think that he may realise that there is a substantial difference between the two, and that considerable improvement could be made in civil service literature in the hope that more women would be encouraged to make an initial application to enter the civil service.

Mr. Renton: My hon. Friend is making a serious point. I shall certainly suggest to my advisers in the Office of the Minister for the Civil Service—and through them to the Departments concerned—that they look at the recruitment literature of senior companies in the private sector to determine whether that is more attractive than the civil service literature. We emphasise in much of our literature that it is now easier for women to take career breaks, and that when they return from them they can have further management training.

I am delighted to tell the House—and this is a most significant statistic—that women are now doing very much better in the fast stream competition. The proportion of women recommended for appointment under the fast stream in 1984 was 28 per cent., but in 1991 the figure will be more than 40 per cent. Those women will be the high fliers in the civil service in years to come.

Dr. Marek: About 10 minutes ago, the Minister said that two thirds of the staff in his office were women. He must know that well over two thirds of women in the civil service are stuck in the lowest paid grades, with no chance of moving elsewhere. Is not that partly because of the Government's appalling record on childcare? The Minister chooses not to say anything about that. If the public who

listen to his words are to regard them as anything more than sheer waffle, what tangible targets has he set himself in that area?

Mr. Renton: I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's suggestion that we are not moving forward. I have just quoted statistics showing that many more women are succeeding in the fast stream competition. More than 40 per cent. of those recommended for appointment in the fast stream are now women, compared with less than 30 per cent. 10 years ago. Those women will be the high fliers, the grades 1, 2 and 3, in future years.

On the question of childcare, the hon. Gentleman must know that we now have 85 holiday play schemes and 19 pre-school nurseries, six of them in partnership with other employers. The civil service is rightly moving forward on all those fronts. Of course, there is more to be done, but we are making progress.

Racial Discrimination

40. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he will make a statement on his proposals to counter racial discrimination in the civil service.

Mr. Renton: We shall continue to implement the programme for action on race that was introduced last year. Good progress is being made in a wide range of areas, including selection, promotion and training to make staff aware of their responsibilities. A report will be published in December and copies will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Hind: My right hon. Friend knows that I recently wrote to him about this matter. Will he reassure the House that it is his policy to encourage an increase in the number of ethnic minority civil servants, that they will be welcome within the civil service, and that equal opportunity will be extended to them?

Mr. Renton: Welcome? Yes. Equal opportunity extended to them? Yes, certainly. I am not one who believes in positive discrimination in this or in other fields, but certainly I very much hope to see the number from the ethnic minority who are employed not only in my Departments but the civil service generally continue—I stress the word continue—to increase over the years ahead.

Mr. Tony Banks: I may say to the Minister that the best way of judging how far he is succeeding is for him to tell the House the name of the most senior black civil servant within the civil service and that of the most senior woman civil servant. Then we can decide whether or not the Minister is just flannelling us or giving us something of substance. Who is the most senior black civil servant? How far up the grade?

Mr. Renton: I really do not think that is a helpful approach, although I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that my own political adviser is drawn from the ethnic minority. I am delighted to have him, and he is a very helpful member of my staff. It is the wish of us all to see that the proportion of the ethnic minorities increases. I do not think that it is high enough. As the hon. Gentleman will realise, it was only recently that we started to ask staff to tell us their ethnic origin. In the early days, a great many did not wish to answer that question. A higher proportion are now doing so as they become more convinced of our determination to give equality of opportunity.

Working Conditions, London

42. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service when he last met representatives of the civil service unions to discuss working conditions in London.

Mr. Renton: I meet civil service trade union representatives from time to time to discuss a variety of issues.

Mr. Hughes: Is the Minister aware that the greatest grievance of civil servants working in London is that the London weighting allowance has been frozen since 1988? With a retail prices index last year of 13·9 per cent., they have now fallen 23 per cent. behind. Whereas people in the private sector are getting £3,000 or £4,000 London weighting, civil servants have been granted neither an increase nor a referral to arbitration. Will the Minister right that injustice in the very near future?

Mr. Renton: No, I do not believe that there is an injustice in that situation. There is no general retention or recruitment problem in London at present. It is true that the London weighting mechanism has been ruled out for the time being, but it could be ruled in again. Meanwhile, London pay issues are being addressed by London spine points and, where appropriate, local pay additions—and they are meeting all the necessary requirements.

Mrs. Gorman: Will my right hon. Friend enlighten me as to whether the civil service unions have had anything to do with removing a portrait of Her Majesty the Queen from the foyer facing Parliament square and relegating it to the back staircase, where it is hardly——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think that is an appropriate question, but I will allow the hon. Lady to go on.

Mrs. Gorman: Can my right hon. Friend the Minister give an assurance that he will look into that matter?

Mr. Renton: I am not sure whether I should look into it wearing my hat as Minister of State with responsibilities for the civil service or as Minister for the Arts. Either way, I will gladly look into that matter.

Mr. Cormack: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I may point out that the question my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) was based on total misinformation.

Mr. Speaker: I just did not regard the hon. Lady's question as being particularly appropriate for the Minister when answering questions on the civil service, though it might have been more appropriate for the Minister for the Arts. Anyway, the hon. Lady asked it.

BILLS PRESENTED

Prison Security

Mr. Secretary Baker, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Secretary Heseltine, Mr. Secretary King, Mr. Secretary Hunt, the Attorney-General and Mrs. Angela Rumbold, presented a Bill to make provision for an offence of prison mutiny and for a new offence and new

penalties in connection with escapes from prison: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Tuesday 12 November and to be printed. [Bill 9.]

TRANSPORT AND WORKS

Mr. Secretary Rifkind, supported by Mr. Secretary Baker, Mr. Secretary Heseltine, Mr. John MacGregor, Mr. Secretary Wakeham, Mr. Secretary Hunt, Mr. Secretary Lang and Mr. Patrick McLoughlin, presented a Bill to provide for the making of orders relating to, or to matters ancillary to, the construction, operation or use of railways, tramways, trolley vehicle systems, other guided transport systems and inland waterways, and orders relating to, or to matters ancillary to, works interfering with rights of navigation; to make further provision in relation to railways, tramways, trolley vehicle systems and other guided transport systems; to amend certain enactments relating to harbours; and for connected purposes; And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Tuesday 12 November and to be printed. [Bill 10.]

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Mr. Speaker: With the leave of the House, I will put together the Questions on the five motions on the Order Paper relating to statutory instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

That the draft Scottish Seed Potato Development Council (Amendment) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Companies Act 1985 (Bank Accounts) Regulations 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Bank Accounts Directive (Miscellaneous Banks) Regulations 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Waltham Forest Housing Action Trust (Area and Constitution) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Income Support (General) Amendment [illegible]. 4 Regulations 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 1559) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Greg Knight.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Local Government Finance Bill

[FIRST DAY]

Order for Second Reading read.

3.33 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Michael Heseltine): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I hope that the House will not lose sight of the fact that a debate on what Labour has claimed to be a deeply controversial and retrograde step has managed to attract only 20 Labour Members. If anything can be said to justify our belief that the Bill to abolish the poll tax is deeply unpopular with Labour, it is the fact that Labour Members are not even prepared to come here and discuss it today, and to listen to what we have to say.

The Bill will abolish the poll tax and replace it with——

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West) *rose——*

Mr. Heseltine: No, I will not give way. The hon. Gentleman would do better to go off, as he did last week, and whip in a few more hon. Members from the Corridors of the House so that they can hear what I have to say.

The Bill will abolish the poll tax and replace it with the council tax. The council tax is a fair and straightforward method of raising local government revenue. It is based on the market value of property; it takes account of the number of people in households; it provides generous rebates for those on low incomes; it offers special protection for students, student nurses, those on youth training schemes and apprentices. The tax requires no register, and the discount and rebate provisions are simple and straightforward.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that he constantly refers to the poll tax, while all his predecessors—and every other Minister—have used a different phrase? While he is at it, will he apologise, on behalf of the Government, for the poll tax and the devastation that it has caused throughout the country? As a Back Bencher, the right hon. Gentleman spoke against the poll tax, but what about the Government whom he represents? They voted for it, including the Prime Minister.

Mr. Heseltine: The only apology that is required is one from the Labour party, which is frustrating our attempts to get rid of the poll tax. *[Interruption.]* The longer that Labour Members keep up this unnecessary barracking, the longer it will take to get rid of the poll tax. We will not tolerate that. The poll tax is going, and nothing that Opposition Members can do will deter us from doing what we intend to do.

Part 1 of the Bill provides for authorities to levy and collect council tax to replace community charges. Let me describe the main provisions. Clause 3 defines the dwellings on which the tax will be levied. They include most domestic properties, including caravans and houseboats. Clause 4 allows certain dwellings to be exempt. We have already announced that student hostels and halls of residence will be exempt, as will households containing only students. Other dwellings, including those classes of empty dwellings whose owners currently pay no standard community charge, will also be exempt.

Clause 5 sets out the value bands for England and Wales, and the tax rates associated with them.

Sir Rhodes Boyson (Brent, North): I am sure that my right hon. Friend is aware of the overwhelming support on this side of the House that has been expressed for the council tax—as opposed to Labour's so-called "fair rates". Some hon. Members who represent constituencies containing high-value properties, however, feel that a fourth set of bands should be provided for properties in London and the south-east, and in other areas containing properties of a similar value. It is felt that that would be equitable. The Conservative-controlled London Boroughs Association has prepared a new set of bands. Would my right hon. Friend be prepared to consider inserting that proposal in the Bill?

Mr. Heseltine: I welcome my right hon. Friend's support. I appreciate that few right hon. and hon. Members know more than he does about the ramifications of these complex matters. I do not think, however, that my right hon. Friend is giving himself full credit. In response to the pressures brought to bear on the Government by him, and by many of my right hon. and hon. Friends—especially those representing constituencies in the south-east—we have already introduced a new band, band H. My right hon. Friend will also be aware that we propose a limit representing a factor of one to three between the top and the lower bands to protect those in the circumstances to which he has drawn our attention.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Will my right hon. Friend look again at the question of regional banding? Is he aware that, in East Anglia, 44 per cent. of homes are in bands A and B; in the north-west 56 per cent.; in the north, 65 per cent.; in the west midlands, 51 per cent.; and in the London borough of Barnet, 1 per cent?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend draws attention to one of the local authorities that contains a significantly higher concentration of high-value properties. There is a relationship in our proposals between the level of tax paid to the council and the circumstances of the household, including the value of their property. It so happens that my hon. Friend represents a part of the country in which that applies particularly. I am sure that my hon. Friend recognises that the politics of envy, which so characterise the Labour party, have been specifically excluded from our fair proposals. We have limited the range of difference between what people pay by a factor of one to three. That was done deliberately in order to respond to such feelings as my hon. Friend holds.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): My right hon. Friend referred to the circumstances of the household. May I draw once more to his attention the fact that in my part of the world, and in other rural areas, many people live in houses that are far bigger than they normally would live in because they are in tied occupations. They may be estate workers, forestry workers or clergymen. The value of their houses bears no relationship to their incomes. Could not there be a special category for people who live in tied houses?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend makes a most important point. When she studies the admittedly complex arrangements in the Bill, she will find that many of her concerns have already been addressed. My hon. Friend was right to raise that point. I am glad to be able to confirm that we have taken that point into account.

Dr. Michael Clark (Rochford): I know that my right hon. Friend takes great pride in presenting to the House the council tax, which he considers to be fair. However, does he accept that by category school teachers, civil servants, policemen, nurses and others receive the same salary, by and large, regardless of where they live and that those who live in the south-east have less disposable income due to large mortgages brought about by the high price of housing? Why, therefore, should those people be penalised a second time by having to pay a council tax that is based on house prices?

Mr. Heseltine: When my hon. Friend studies the legislation and examines the reports of the deliberations in Committee, he will recognise, when all these things are added to the considerable additional resources provided by the Chancellor of the Exchequer for lowering the overall contribution by local citizens and when he considers the figures for the various bands and the various evaluations of property, that we have taken the necessary steps in our system to protect people who fall into one category or another. Of course there are differences in income and variations between one part of the country and another. If, however, my hon. Friend looks at the exemplifications we have produced, he will recognise that we have met his concern. It is also the case, as I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) a few moments ago, that in many of the valuations we take account of the fact that they are tied in one way or another to a specific occupation.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I accept that the Secretary of State has rejected, as have the Government, our proposals for a local income tax, but will he explain how it is more fair for people to pay for local government services on the basis of the value of their property, which may bear no relationship to their incomes, than on the basis of the income that they receive in the year in question? To take a constituency such as mine that contains very few people on high incomes but where property values are very high, how can there be any argument but that a local income tax is fairer for places such as inner London, including Bermondsey, than the council tax?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman is right. His party came to us and fairly put to my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities the argument for a local income tax. We had to ask whether we thought that it would be in the widest interests of the country that the income tax rates of those who will pay towards local government services should be in the hands of the Labour party. The hon. Gentleman must address that question. Does he believe that allowing Labour local authorities to push up income tax even faster than the Labour party would if it ever took office would serve the interests of this country?

We were not trying to create a local income tax. We were considering a tax that was based on two factors—the number of people living in the property, and its value. Those were the ingredients that we had in mind when designing the council tax. When one considers the revenue that will be raised by the council tax and the differences between the bandings, it is apparent that we have found a system of damping the process that is broadly fair across the country.

Mr. Ralph Howell (Norfolk, North): I am delighted to hear the enthusiasm with which my right hon. Friend is announcing the end of the poll tax. Bearing in mind that it was half ended by adding 2·5 per cent. to VAT, why on earth are we going through all the pain and problems that this wretched tax will engender? Why not solve the whole problem by adding a further 2·5 per cent. to VAT?

Mr. Heseltine: There were many ways in which we could have made progress, but we determined that that was not one that we wished to adopt, because the inevitable conclusion on my hon. Friend's proposals—I know how strongly he feels about this point—is that every authority's spending is fixed precisely. Authorities have no capacity to raise additional revenue, and, to the most minute detail, central Government fix their expenditure. That would not be the right way to progress.

The second argument that I must put to my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North (Mr. Howell) is that societies that are broadly equivalent to ours have some form of property-based tax. We have introduced a property—based tax that, by and large, reflects the number of people living in a property. That is a sensible and practical way forward that maintains the width of the tax base, which has desirable qualities.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): I am going to test the right hon. Gentleman's memory. In that period when he was swinging the Mace around his head—when he was in opposition—does he remember saying that there should be less central control? He is now proposing more central control. Why?

Mr. Heseltine: I remember the occasion vividly. Labour Members were standing singing "The Red Flag". If the hon. Gentleman wants to know why they were singing it, let me point out that it was because they had cheated to get a piece of nationalisation legislation through the House. At least I apologised to the House, which they never did. They went on to lose general election after general election as a consequence, and that was a very good thing. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. It would be a good idea if we returned to the debate.

Mr. Heseltine: I have explained to you, Mr. Speaker, and it is manifestly true, that the Labour party will do all in its power to keep the poll tax on the statute book. Even now, it is seeking to delay the proceedings of the House with irrelevant interruptions. Interruptions from this side of the House are constructive; interruptions from the other side are destructive.

I wish to proceed with my analysis of clause 5, which sets out the value bands for England, as I said to my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) —at least he understood what I was talking about. As the House knows, there are eight bands. The tax rates are arranged so that a property in the highest band pays three times as much as a property in the lowest. This limited range of tax bills ensures that the high-value properties do

not face excessive tax bills and it damps the effect of regional variations in house prices. They ensure that regional bands—which would bring many anomalies—are not therefore necessary.

Clause 6 sets out those who will be liable to pay the tax. The principles are based on common sense. In owner-occupied property, it will be the owner. In rented property, it will be the tenant. In other occupied property, it will be the resident. In unoccupied property, it will be the owner. Where two or more people fall into the liable category, they will be jointly liable. Spouses or partners will also be jointly liable for the household bill.

Clause 11 provides for discounts of 25 per cent. where there is one adult resident and 50 per cent. where there is none. It also provides that certain groups of people, who are described in schedule 1, are not counted when assessing the number of residents. Therefore, a single parent whose student daughter lives with her will still receive a 25 per cent. discount. The discount is set at 25 per cent. because the basic bill is half the property and half the personal element. It assumes two people, so that where there is only one adult resident he or she gets a discount equivalent to half the personal element, or 25 per cent.

Clause 13 provides for reductions in council tax and will enable a scheme of transitional relief during the change to the new tax to ensure that no household faces an excessive year-on-year increase in its bill.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): This point is crucial. As my right hon. Friend knows, most of the students of Leeds live in my constituency. There is some confusion as to whether they will get only a percentage discount or whether they will be exempt across the board. Will my right hon. Friend say whether, unlike under the old rating system, students will not pay a rateable tax and that universities will not pay for the buildings even if the students are exempt?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend raises an important point. We have exempted students from payment of this tax. Their presence in a house does not give rise to a liability. If my hon. Friend studies the Bill with care—I know that he will—he will discover the way in which we have ensured that that happens.

Mr. Chris Butler (Warrington, South): My right hon. Friend issued illustrative figures showing what the charges are likely to be on the basis of this year's community charge. As he presumably knows how capping will work, will he publish illustrative figures showing what the maximum charges are likely to be when the council tax is implemented?

Mr. Heseltine: As my hon. Friend knows, we have taken the existing budgets of local authorities and, on the assumption that we have moved through the transitional period, we have extrapolated what the equivalent figures would be under the council tax based on the best information available to us. We cannot look forward to budgets in two years' time which local authorities have not yet prepared and extrapolate on the basis of such hypotheses. That is not possible. The fact that one cannot do that shows why the Labour party attempted to follow the same methodology as we followed, although it left out a significant number of the costs involved.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Will the right hon. Gentleman clarify the position of students? His Department's press release states:

> "Students, student nurses, apprentices and those on YT schemes will also be eligible for discounts. Student halls of residence and other dwellings where all the adult residents are students will be exempt from council tax."

Will some students be exempt and will others be eligible only for discounts and therefore have to pay a proportion of the bill? How does the right hon. Gentleman justify that disparity?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman is broadly right. On the last part of his question, he must take into account that, in the normal course of events, student nurses would be eligible for rebates whereas students would not. When the hon. Gentleman looks at the detailed drafting of the Bill, he will find that the Government's broad intentions have been carried out.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Heseltine: If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I shall not give way.

Clause 13 provides for reductions in council tax and will enable a scheme of transitional help during the change to the new tax.

Clause 15 provides for valuation tribunals to hear appeals in connection with the council tax. These tribunals will adjudicate on issues of property banding and liability for the tax.

Chapter II of part I concerns valuation lists. Such lists, which will show property details only, will be compiled for each authority. The allocation of properties to bands is now being carried out under the auspices of the Inland Revenue Valuation Office.

Clause 24 provides for the alteration of lists. We intend to provide that a dwelling may be rebanded upwards only when it changes hands and then only if a material increase in its value results from work done to the house. However, we shall provide that a property may be rebanded at any time if there has been a material reduction in its value, whether caused by partial demolition, a change in the nature of the locality or adaptation of the dwelling to make it suitable for a disabled person. There is provision for appeals on these matters.

Chapter III of part I is technical and deals with the setting of the council tax each year from April 1993. Chapter IV of part I deals with the issue of precepts by major precepting authorities such as county councils and local precepting authorities such as parishes.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: How will my right hon. Friend ensure that the revenue support grant received by councils in the south-east will not be reduced as our constituents already pay more for the housing in which they live?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend makes an important point and I shall deal with that specifically.

Part II of the Bill contains similar provisions for Scotland. Part III abolishes the community charge from 1 April 1993. Part IV contains a number of miscellaneous but important provisions. Clause 101 amends social security legislation to provide for council tax benefit. The relevant legislation is being consolidated this Session and the references are to the consolidation Acts. They were

[Mr. Heseltine]

introduced in another place a week ago. The rebate system will provide rebates of up to 100 per cent. There is no minimum contribution to the council tax.

Those are the main provisions of the Bill. The schedules provide more detail on the groups who will qualify for discounts, on the billing——

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way as I have tried hard without success to get an answer from his colleague in Scotland. As I understand it, there is now no dispute about the fact that the 20 per cent. rule is indefensible and must go in April 1993. Why can it not go in April 1992?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman knows the answer. As we have said many times, the 20 per cent. that is collected from people on low incomes is covered in the additional payments that they receive. Therefore, it is appropriate to consider the matter, not in two bites—one this year and one next year—but in the introduction of the new system.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray) *rose——*

Mr. Heseltine: I hope that the hon. Lady will forgive me but I must get on.

I have covered the main provisions of the Bill. The schedules provide more detail on those groups who will qualify for discounts, on the billing and recovery procedures, on rebates, non-domestic rating, grants and funds. The council tax is, therefore, based on straightforward common-sense principles. It will provide a fair and stable basis for local government finance. It avoids the obvious faults of the old rating system.

Under the rating system, the valuation based on notional rateable values was difficult to understand. The council tax uses market values which everyone understands and for which there is plenty of evidence. Under the rating system, small improvements to properties led to higher bills. Under the council tax, small improvements will have no effect on the bands and larger ones will be taken into account only when a property changes hands.

Under the rates, each property had an exact valuation, and there was a large range of bills, from the lowest to the highest. The council tax limits the range, protecting households from disproportionately high bills. The rates took no account of the number of people in a household. The council tax will ensure that single adult households pay less. It will also maintain accountability. Thirty-eight million of the 42 million adults in Great Britain—that is, more than 90 per cent.—will be directly taken into account by the council tax. Many of the remainder will be eligible for discount even if they were counted provisionally.

Property is a sensible basis for a local tax—I think that even the Labour party would agree with that—but property does not pay tax. It is people who have to pay tax, and the council tax recognises the fact that, although there is not a perfect correlation between people's circumstances and the value of the property in which they live, there is a relationship.

In place of our straightforward banding system, the Labur party would introduce individual valuations of properties, and it is interesting to consider how it would do that. We know about generalisations of rental values, but will they be arrived at on the basis of the old rating system, or will the Opposition use capital values, which they would argue are easier to understand, or rebuilding costs, or repair costs? Which of those factors will account for what proportion of the valuation process? We have seen no evidence to suggest that the Labour party has done any work whatever on the subject, and the reason for that is perfectly clear: the Opposition do not want to have to answer any of the specific questions that anybody responsible for preparing the legislation would have to answer.

We are left with the concept of fair rates, from a party whose leader, as we have said many times, said as recently as September 1980—*[Laughter]*:

"Rates are the most unjust of all taxes, which take most from those who can least afford it."

Those were the words used by the leader of the Labour party to describe the basis of the system to which his party now wishes to return.

It is worth asking how quickly the Opposition think they can go back. Opposition Members have made it absolutely clear that they would like to return to the system as quickly as they possibly can. In an interview on "Frost on Sunday" on 27 October, the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) said——

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): Was that 1991 or 1980?

Mr. Heseltine: On 27 October 1991, the hon. Member for Dagenham said of the community charge:

"We would . . . repeal it in almost all circumstances because we still believe, even if there were an election in June"—

June 1992, that is—

"we would still believe that the quickest and most sure way of getting rid of the poll tax by the following 1 April would be to pick up our fair rates proposals."

When asked on "Any Questions" on 5 October how the Labour party would move forward, the shadow Chief Secretary had this to say:

"There is absolutely no question that if the Government have got the council tax in place . . . we would replace it with our system of fair rates, which is infinitely superior."

But the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) said just 12 days later that Labour would

"amend the council tax to bring it in line with what we want to do."

Not wanting to be left behind, the hon. Member for Dagenham said, on 27 October, "We would repeal it." So Labour Members do not actually know what they are going to do, and they do not have the valuations on the basis of which to do it. That did not stop the hon. Member for Brightside saying, on 17 October:

"The full scale revaluation for the eventual introduction of fair rates might take two or three years."

Now let us put the pieces of the jigsaw into place. Let us start with the unhappy assumption that the Labour party does, indeed, win an election in June 1992. The Labour Government start the process on day one and work all through the long recess. According to the hon. Member for Brightside, three years later, in June 1995, they will have come up with the revaluation. They introduce the legislation in November 1995.

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I have heard nothing out of order.

Mr. Evans: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Can you ascertain from the Secretary of State whether he has finished talking about the Bill which is supposed to be having its Second Reading? If he has, we may as well go and get a cup of tea and stop listening to the appalling waffle and rhetoric——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State is not out of order.

Mr. Evans: He is not talking about the Bill.

Mr. Speaker: He is introducing the Bill in his own way.

Mr. Heseltine: I believe that it is completely legitimate for me to discuss on Second Reading the amendments that the Opposition claim that they want to make to the Bill.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): My right hon. Friend has been most generous in giving way and I am grateful to him for giving way once more. As there is support for the replacement of the community charge with the new council tax, will he explain to many people who would like to see it operating from this coming May why there are difficulties in achieving that? It is necessary to have the answer to that on the record.

Mr. Heseltine: Because—in spite of the obstruction of the Labour party—one must legislate to take the proposals through the House and conduct a revaluation process, and the local authorities must introduce the software to send out the bills. There is no quicker way of achieving what we intend to achieve than the way we are proposing now.

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): If that is so, why did not the Secretary of State take up our offer on 11 and 12 June when he introduced the paving Bill and offered to abolish the poll tax by 1 April 1992?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman refused to come and talk to me when I asked him to in January of this year. Labour's proposals are founded on nothing but their desire to obscure the issue and not to reveal their proposals.

According to the hon. Member for Dagenham, there will be a valuation in three years. There will be legislation in November 1995 and Royal Assent in 1996. If we are lucky, and with a fair wind, Labour's new proposals would be introduced in 1997, but the hon. Member for Brightside still thinks that he could have achieved it in 1992. Labour has no conceivable or practical alternative other than to allow us to put our proposals on the statute book. The Opposition know that they would seek to make only some minor changes to what we have designed and carried out.

There are a number of aspects to the Bill which the House will want to consider. The first is that part of the legislation that introduces the consequential and procedural implementations for capping. The House and a wider electorate will want to understand Labour's views on capping. I cannot fully comprehend exactly where the Labour party is on capping. There have been many Opposition views about what they would do.

At first there was an outcry and the Labour party was against capping. That was until the hon. Member for Dagenham appeared on the "Today" programme—I think that was the programme—and said that he was against capping except in extremis. We have tried on many occasions in this House to explore what in extremis means and where it would apply. Would it apply in high-spending Labour local authorities? If so, how high spending? Would there be capping in Kirklees, Barnsley, Greenwich, Lambeth and Haringey, or would it only apply in extremis? Is the real distinction that one would not actually have it anywhere except in some academic concept designed by the hon. Gentleman?

The fact of the matter is that, as we all know, unless one has capping, the one thing that one can be sure about today is that the £140 that was put in by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will, in practice, be consumed by Labour authorities pushing up their expenditure. We having made adjustments to bring down the level of contribution of local people to 15 per cent., and having committed ourselves to doing so, I see no argument for local authorities under Labour control then pushing up expenditure on the assumption that the local people will not have to pay it.

Mr. Tony Banks: I realise that it is difficult for the right hon. Gentleman, as a millionaire, to understand the problems of Labour local authorities in, for example, my part of east London. However, is he aware that the so-called high-spending authorities are those that provide nursery education and home helps? The top 20 are all Labour authorities. Why does not he rely on the judgment of the electorate in those local authority areas to decide whether a local authority is efficient, high spending or low spending? Trust the people.

Mr. Heseltine: I remember what the hon. Gentleman's constituency and the area around it was like in 1979. It was a desert of dereliction which had been ignored by the Labour party in power. The area has now been transformed into one of the most successful urban renewal areas anywhere in the world because of what our party is doing.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) has helpfully brought me on to the issue of the cuts —the suggestion that, over the course of the decade, there is a pattern of cuts in local authorities. Consumption—expenditure—in local government in the recent decade has risen by 20 per cent. in real terms. That is the fact of the matter. That is why, if we look at local authorities service by service, we find in, for example, education that pupil-teacher ratios have improved from 19:1 to 17:1. There were certainly no cuts there. That is why we discover that one in four of our 18-year-olds are now going on to higher education, and soon it will be one in three. There were no cuts there. We find that standards in education are rising, so there were no cuts there. If we look at services on a service-by-service basis, we see that there are 40,000 extra people in social services, 18,000 extra people in housing, 2,500 extra people in planning, and 15,000 extra people in the police force. All those figures represent increases over the decade.

There is no issue about cuts in those services; it is simply that, as a Government, we have had to constrain local authorities' appetites so that they do not get out of control. Even then, without capping, one finds that they often run seriously ahead of the rate of budgets which are acceptable in the national interest.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heseltine: No, I will not give way.

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves (Birmingham, Hall Green): My right hon. Friend illustrates a point that is well met in my constituency. On various occasions, Birmingham council has increased either its rates or its community charge from 30 per cent. to 42 per cent. In particular, I refer my right hon. Friend to the elements of capping. Is he prepared to give the community charge payers and future council tax payers of Birmingham an assurance that, other than the section that would come from the council's ability or inability to raise that tax, he will cap any excess expenditure over and above inflation? Can he give them that guarantee?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend is as concerned as I am about the levels of increase in local government expenditure, but I ask him to bear with us until we publish the details of our capping proposals, which we expect to do relatively shortly.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Heseltine: I should be grateful if I could make progress.

The next aspect of this legislation that will be of concern to the House is that which deprives councillors of the right to vote if they have not paid their community charge or council tax. That issue has been seriously ventilated in this House and before a wider audience. What I found most extraordinary about our debate on this subject last week was that, when I asked the hon. Member for Dagenham whether he would oppose the legislative proposal to take the right to vote away from councillors who had not paid, he was on his feet as quick as lightning saying, "No, we will not oppose it".

Therefore, I ask the hon. Gentleman the same question today: by what conceivable justification could the Labour party tolerate non-paying councillors standing and campaigning in its name and how could it tolerate having Members of Parliament who do not pay their council tax, yet the moment the Tories do something about it the Labour party climbs on the bandwagon as though it has always supported our action? I find that extraordinary. It gives the clearest possible indication of the Labour party's rule—that it leaves the difficult decisions to us and hides behind the responsibility that we deploy.

Opposition Members never protest within their own party. They campaign on behalf of their non-paying councillors and their non-paying Members of Parliament. They welcome them into their deliberative process and tolerate them until we do something about it and then they capitulate, like the windbags that they are.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington) *rose*——

Mr. Heseltine *rose*——

Hon. Members: Give way.

Mr. Heseltine: Anybody who is interested in the effect that the lack of control and the lack of capping would have —that is what the Labour party has threatened our entire community with if it was returned to power—must be interested to learn that the Opposition have ambitions to extend the scope of municipal activity into yet a further area of extravagance. Doubtless the hon. Member for Dagenham will want the House to read today's interesting interview in the *Financial Times*. When Andrew Adonis and Ian Hargreaves asked the hon. Gentleman why he now feels that he can take a relaxed view of local government, its councillors and the Labour party, when compared to previous years, he said:

> "Local government today is very much more aware of its responsibilities in restraining expenditure than a decade ago. They all understand very clearly that the sky is not going to be the limit."

That will be a reassurance to all those who pay the community charge and who will pay the council tax.

Perhaps I can ask the hon. Gentleman which Government, which party, brought about the discipline. Who made local government realise all that? Who finished the job that the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) had to begin in 1977, with the International Monetary Fund at his back? Who had to take that on? Who came to the local government scene determined to change its attitudes? And which party, through its council work, the activities of its Members of Parliament and in the press and the media campaigned, in partnership with its friends in the trade unions, to perpetuate that attitude of irresponsibility? It was the Labour party.

Anybody who thinks that that game is over should return to that article in the *Financial Times*. When talking about the benefits of competition and about how this Government are always seeking to extend competition in the private sector, the hon. Member for Dagenham said:

> "Ministers are fond of saying there should be no 'no-go' areas for the private sector. I would reverse that and say that in principle, there should be no 'no-go' areas for the public sector either."

—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] Yes, ah. Not only is the cap coming off, not only are the unions to get their pay-off, but the local authorities will be enabled to indulge in municipal enterprise—what a contradiction in terms—in any area without let or hindrance.

Just to help the hon. Member for Dagenham to argue his case, I refer him to the *Evening Standard* of 8 November, from which we discover that Lambeth is in the dark and £11 million in the red. So great is the confidence in that bulwark of municipal enterprise that London Electricity wants cash up front before it will fit any more street lamps in Lambeth. No constituent in the country is safe from the marauding instincts of the Lambeth direct labour organisation which will compete in every constituency in every county of the land, given the restraints which the hon. Gentleman intends to remove.

Last of all I want to come to the Bill. I was not referring to this excellent piece of legislation introduced in my name and that of my right hon. Friends. I was referring to the piece of legislation produced by the Labour party to get rid of the poll tax. Within it we have one interesting question. It has been at the forefront of the Labour party's campaign that in order to collect the council tax we shall need a register. We have pointed out to the Labour party that there are no powers in our legislation to give local authorities the right to form a register. That power does not exist. But the argument goes on, "Ah, but you will need so much information about individuals that local authorities will need a register."

Of course, local authorities have a great deal of information about people. That is perfectly true. I dare say that that information may be relevant. That is likely. Before Labour Members get carried away with mirth at the curious concept that local authorities may take a little trouble to find out whether people who claim discounts are entitled to them, I draw my right hon. and hon. Friend's

attention to the Bill produced by the hon. Member for Brightside. No one would expect the hon. Member for Dagenham to get as far as producing a Bill, but the hon. Member for Brightside brings an integrity to the Opposition Benches for which I commend him.

Clause 10 of the Bill of the hon. Member for Brightside enables the Secretary of State, after consulting various people,

"to provide for rebates of, and special help with, fair rates up to the full amount that would otherwise be payable by persons, including the following:

(a) single retired people who live alone;"

How will councils know who they are? Who will find them out? Will there be a list, a register, a snoopers' charter? Where will the information come from?

Mr. Blunkett: It is on record.

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman says from a sedentary position that it is on record. If it is on record, a register already exists. We go on. Pensioner couples, persons and families on low incomes and persons with disabilities will also be eligible for discounts. All those people will be eligible for discounts, regardless of their income. The richest single retired people who live alone? The millionaire's widow? Eligible, eligible, eligible?

The revelation is totally clear. Opposition Members have made it clear by their own admission that one does not need a register. They say that they can achieve many of these things without a register. We have made exactly the same point. It is not necessary to have a register, so local authorities will not have the power to create a register.

Our tax, the new council tax, will replace the community charge by April 1993. We shall see it on the statute book at the earliest possible opportunity. It will be fair and it will be welcomed. It will be cheap to administer and easier to collect. I commend it to the House.

4.23 pm

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): I propose to introduce a novel element into the debate by speaking about the Bill. When the Secretary of State could bring himself to talk about his own legislation, we heard from him in effect an admission that the Government who brought us the poll tax are now bringing us a new poll tax. Just when we thought it was safe to dip a toe into the poll tax water, we are faced with a poll tax mark II. No wonder the right hon. Gentleman did not want to talk about the Bill. All the familiar features, the problems and the objectionable unfairnesses of the poll tax are there, but this time combined with the further complications of a totally new and untried property tax. In other words, it is the poll tax crossed with a capital value tax—a roof tax crossed with a head tax—a cross-bred monster which gives us the worst of all worlds.

The Secretary of State seems to think that we should be so grateful that the Government have promised that the poll tax will go that we should not look too closely at what will replace it. The reverse is true. The poll tax disaster should surely put us on our guard. We must ensure that that terrible mistake is not repeated. The British people will not forgive a Government or a Parliament that make another comparable mistake.

As the *Local Government Chronicle* put it in its leading article of 1 November:

"To introduce poll tax is a mistake, to bring in council tax is a disaster."

The omens are far from promising. The new tax is bred out of panic coupled with cowardice. All its problems arise directly from the political situation from which it springs, from the urgent need felt by the Government to distance themselves from the poll tax and the equal need to placate those internal supporters of the poll tax who will choke over any support for a property tax.

The first motivating factor was the overriding need to be seen to get rid of the poll tax before the next general election. No matter that the poll tax bills will still arrive, bigger and nastier than ever next year and probably the year afterwards. All that matters to the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister is that they should be able to face the electorate with the commitment to replace the poll tax enshrined in legislation. The nature of the replacement and whether it would work hardly matter. As so often with the Government, the illusion and not the reality is what really counts.

That is why haste is everything. The Prime Minister may have complained that under former management the poll tax was bounced through, but he will gladly ram through the new poll tax. The years taken to prepare the poll tax look like a model of wise and thoughtful government by comparison with the pretence at consultation and the shockingly truncated parliamentary timetable with which we are now confronted.

The unseemly haste is dictated not merely by the Government's electoral timetable, but by the fear that if the measure is given proper time for debate there will also be time for the real, but as yet nascent, concerns of Tory Back Benchers and their constituents to grow and mature. A Government seeking to minimise awkward questions will try to railroad the the Bill through, hoping that by the time that Back Benchers have woken up to what is happening and their constituents have understood the dangers it will again be too late.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): How does the hon. Gentleman reconcile this carefully rehearsed diatribe with his oft-stated desire to abolish the poll tax as quickly as possible?

Mr. Gould: Because our course for abolishing the poll tax provides a guarantee that it can be done, because we shall pick up an existing system that we know will work.

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gould: I shall make some progress first and give way again in a moment. As the hon. Gentleman knows, I usually do.

It is not merely we parliamentarians who are the victims of that haste; local government is again caught up in a hopeless struggle against the odds. The poll tax has been a nightmare which shows no sign of ending. Non-collection will total £1·5 billion by the end of this year and 7·5 million summonses will have been issued. The courts and the police will be unable to cope.

Against that background, local authorities are now required to prepare for a totally new tax—requiring a new valuation, a new banding system, new discounts and new registers. As Mr. Ron Lord, Wakefield's assistant chief financial officer, points out in the *Municipal Journal*, they could at least introduce the poll tax

[Mr. Gould]

"against a background of a stable rating system which managers were able to put on automatic pilot while diverting their attention to the multitude of practical problems that were to arise with the new system. There is no such luxury available with the implementation of council tax."

Mr. Squire: As I expected, the hon. Gentleman responded to the last intervention by saying that a Labour Government would simply reintroduce rates. He knows that that would not only cause a major upheaval in local government but would be followed shortly afterwards by other proposals. The hon. Gentleman must recognise that the Labour proposal would cause a double upheaval and a return to a system which the Opposition Front Bench has criticised many times.

Mr. Gould: I am disappointed in the hon. Gentleman, who usually follows these matters quite closely. He will know that we propose for the sake of speed and practicality to use an existing valuation register, which everyone agrees exists and can be used. To the great relief of local government, we would then abolish the 20 per cent. contribution rule and extend the rebate system to help those special groups which might otherwise be disadvantaged. We would then be able to do what Conservatives should have done from the outset—pick up and operate a tried and trusted system and concentrate on dealing over time and in proper order with imperfections that had developed. That is what we propose to do, and in his heart of hearts the hon. Gentleman and many other Conservative Members know that that is the right course.

No wonder that independent experts and local authority treasurers are in despair about the timetable that is being forced upon them. As Mr. Lord warns, there is no room for mistakes or changes. It will have to be right first time. Most experts agree that it cannot be done and that the poll tax will live on until 1994.

Sir Peter Emery: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gould: No. The hon. Gentleman is having a good try. I shall give way when I am ready.

I appeal to the Secretary of State, his Ministers and the House not to inflict chaos yet again on local government. Please do not posture and pretend that these problems do not exist. We have been warned in the most solemn terms, and a Government who were responsible for the poll tax should surely this time show some humility, some willingness to listen and learn.

Of course the Government could have avoided these difficulties. They could have done what we suggested. They could have accepted our offer of co-operation on a short Bill to return to the rating system as a first step towards a more general reform. But, again, the politics got in the way. No doubt it was hard enough to accept the volte face involved in embracing an element of property tax. A return to the reviled rates would presumably have been too much to take.

All the denunciations of a property tax could just about be accommodated, but how were the Government to overcome the whole rationale of the ill-fated poll tax experiment, the supposed unacceptability of the rates? The country is asked to pay the price of the Government's overriding concern that they should not lose face.

Sir Peter Emery: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gould: No. I shall continue with my speech and will allow the hon. Gentleman to intervene later if he wishes to do so.

That overriding concern is why we have to have not just a property tax but a new and different property tax that is fraught with novel and unpredictable difficulties. That is why we have to have a new basis for valuation, a capital values tax. How is a totally new, totally comprehensive valuation of capital values—something that has never before been done in England and Wales—to be carried out within the dangerously tight timetable dictated by the Government's electoral concerns? That is where the banding proposal comes in, offering as it does, by virtue of its crudity, a short cut to a new register which poses the most horrific problems on the way.

Those problems were foreshadowed by the confusion that attended the production of the Government's banding proposals. No work was done. Figures were plucked out of the air. Guesses were made and 14, nine and seven bands were variously decided upon and then rejected. By some arbitrary and misleading reading of the entrails, it was apparently finally decided that eight bands should be the basis.

Banding is by necessity crude and regressive. Properties that are worth less than the mid point in the band must be overvalued, whereas those above the mid point are necessarily undervalued. We understand that no individual valuations will be done and that leaves unanswered questions about how individual properties —for example, those that have been adapted for disabled people—will be assessed. We heard today from RADAR that it remains far from convinced that it can rely on the Minister's assurances that benefits available under the Rating (Disabled Persons) Act 1978 will be restored.

The same panic-stricken drive for speed dictates that the valuation must be done on the cheap. There will be subcontracting to local estate agents, who will tender for cut-price job lots of up to 20,000 houses at a time. What confidence can the individual householder have in such a process? Surely it is storing up horrendous problems for the future. We can expect hundreds of thousands of appeals from irate householders, just at the time, in early 1993, when the new tax is supposed to be implemented.

Sir Peter Emery *rose*——

Mr. Gould: The hon. Gentleman is insistent, so it had better be good.

Sir Peter Emery: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way, and refer him to a part of his speech when I tried to gain his attention. He passed over—I might suggest even glibly—the fact that 1·5 million people have not paid their community charge. Will he, from that Dispatch Box, condemn that non-payment? Otherwise, he will be encouraging it.

Mr. Gould: The hon. Gentleman makes an entirely false point, because we have repeatedly condemned non-payment. He cannot even get the facts right. That was why —and I confess it to him quite freely——

Sir Peter Emery: I was right.

Mr. Gould: When the hon. Gentleman reads *Hansard*, he will understand my reluctance to give way to him. I somehow had the feeling that he was not properly

following the argument. As a consequence, he misunderstood—*[Interruption.]* I am happy to repeat the facts. By the end of the year, there will be a backlog of uncollected poll tax amounting to £1·5 billion. In case anyone rushes to say that that is the fault of local authorities, the point that I made, and which the hon. Gentleman failed to understand, was that by that point local authorities will have had to issue 7·5 million summonses—the biggest debt collection exercise in the history of the world.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre) *rose*——

Mr. Gould: I regret that I cannot give way. I am not encouraged to do so when interventions are based on such inaccuracies.

The real problem arises because of what the Secretary of State for Scotland, who has now left the Chamber, revealingly described last week as dampened banding—the artificial compression of the true range of property values into the eight bands defined by the Secretary of State for the Environment. It is that, together with the insistence on one national register for England, which causes so much distortion.

The need for a different range of property values in Scotland and Wales has been properly recognised, which makes it all the more baffling that, given that the most extreme variations in property values occur within England, the Government have blindly insisted on only one set of bands for England as a whole. The consequences are horrific. As the right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) said during last week's debate—and I am sorry that he, too, has left the Chamber:

"But the largest differences are not between Scotland, England and Wales but between the north and south of England, where the disparities in property prices are tremendous. Only 1 per cent. of houses in greater London are in the bottom band, whereas in the north 47 per cent. of houses are in the bottom band. In greater London, 31 per cent. of houses are in the top three bands, whereas in the north only 4 per cent. are in the top three bands. Those are not anomalies—they are great chasms."—*[Official Report,* 1 November 1991; Vol. 198, c. 142.]

I can only agree.

The consequences for many people will be that the new tax will be a form of property poll tax—a virtually flat-rate tax. Worse than that, for those in areas with high property values the flat-rate tax will be at or near the highest level, even though they live in ordinary, average houses. Because the dampening or flattening of the bands has the effect of reducing the bills for those at the top of the scale, the necessary consequence is that the bills for those lower down the scale will be higher than they should be.

How did the Government get into that position? It is bad enough to have a crude and regressive banding system in the first place, but why have a system that is deliberately distorted in that way? The answer again lies in politics and the tangle into which the Government have got in trying to extricate themselves from the poll tax mess. The poll tax was, and is, hated by the majority of people. It benefited a wealthy minority, who found that its deliberate unfairness meant that their bills were reduced. The majority of those beneficiaries were Tory supporters. Not surprisingly, they are reluctant to give up their windfall. The Secretary of State decided that they had to be protected—that it was politically too dangerous to create yet another set of losers.

The new tax, like the poll tax before it, is deliberately skewed to protect the better off and to excuse them from paying their fair share. That is why the bands are dampened—to enshrine the political principle of a poll tax, the principle of unfairness which so justifiably outraged the whole people.

I know that this is a bit too complicated for the Secretary of State—details and sums were never his strong point. In the debate on the Loyal Address last Wednesday, he revealed that he had not yet got to first base, when he asserted:

"If one does not raise more money from the top bands, one does not actually help the people in the lower bands."—[*Official Report,* 6 November 1991; Vol. 198, c. 533.]

That could be dismissed as a piece of charming naivete if it were not for the fact that this is the man who proposes to inflict that unfair system on the British people, and the man who will himself benefit—in the sense that his bill as a millionaire in the heart of London will be lower than that of most other bills in the country. Will the right hon. Gentleman admit that he did not understand, and perhaps still does not understand, the central feature of his own proposals? I believe that his own preferred phrase is, "Get off your butt."

The unfairness was not the only concession made to the devotees of the poll tax. A Government and a Secretary of State who belatedly tried to make a virtue of recognising and acting upon the obvious defects of the poll tax have simply lacked the political will and courage to make a decisive break.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, North-West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gould: No, I am dealing with the Secretary of State. When I have finished, I may give way.

As a result, we have a continuing head tax element, which adds to the complexities and difficulties of the new tax. That is the price which had to be paid to placate the remaining Thatcherites—the sop to Cerberus. Unfortunately, it was a very large and costly sop.

It is that notion of single person discounts that defies what should be the basic principle of any such tax in modern Britain—that it should reflect the ability to pay. Discounts for single-person households will offer reduced bills to 7 million taxpayers, or 33 per cent. of the total, but they will be wholly untargeted and unrelated to the income of the householders.

A millionaire living alone in a luxury penthouse will, as a result, have 25 per cent. knocked off his bill, while a family man struggling on a low income will not. The family man's bill will have to be higher than it would otherwise be to make up for the discount offered to the millionaire. Where is the fairness in that?

The position becomes even more complicated when account is taken of the status discounts. Those discounts are, in the case of people such as students, extremely welcome, but they immediately give rise to other anomalies. The Secretary of State was uncharacteristically uncertain when he attempted to draw distinctions between questions of exemption and eligibility for rebates and discounts.

The complications become nightmarish when one realises that the liability in each case is to be calculated on a daily basis, so that individual liability could change from day to day not only a result of the individual moving his or her address—which, as the Audit Commission

[Mr. Gould]

discovered, occurs on a massive scale—or status, but as a consequence of a move or change in status by others as well.

How are local authorities to keep track of all those moves and changes of status within households, and of the knock-on consequences for individuals who do not themselves change their address or status, but whose status is changed by the moves of others? The only answer is that they will have to keep a record of who lives where. That is the considered view of the local authority associations and of all those who have looked at the problem.

It does not matter much whether local authorities are or are not required by statute to keep something called a register. The practical needs of the situation will require them to have a point of reference and a database. If they do not keep a register themselves, they will no doubt make use of the one register that does exist—the electoral register, thereby prolonging and exacerbating that threat to civil rights already posed by the poll tax, which has induced hundreds of thousands of people to trade away their votes.

Few local authorities will be much comforted by the distinction attempted by the Secretary of State for Scotland last Wednesday:

> "There is all the difference in the world between a register and a list. A register is a statutory designated body that is a basis for designating liability, and a list is a source of administrative efficiency for the use of the local authority." —[*Official Report*, 6 November 1991; Vol. 198, c. 540.]

If he expects, on the basis of such unconvincing casuistry and gobbledegook that local authorities will say, "That's all right then," I fear that he will be sadly disappointed.

Dr. Hampson: That particular point is referred to in Labour's fair rates document, which makes it crystal clear that the only people in the Chamber calling for a register are Labour Members. That document calls for the computerisation of the Inland Revenue to be the basis of the calculation for liability of widowers, pensioners, the disabled, and other groups. The only people arguing for a register are Opposition Members. No register will be needed if people have to claim.

Mr. Gould: The hon. Gentleman has totally misinterpreted, to put it kindly, or has misreported what is in our document. The only proposals that we made in respect of the categories that he mentioned are for a long-overdue extension of the existing rebate scheme.

Again, the *Local Government Chronicle* gets it right. It said in the same leading article that I quoted earlier:

> "If the single person discount remains a feature of the tax, they will have to create a register—a point that Michael Heseltine will eventually have to acknowledge. The discount —the achilles heel of the system—would be better abandoned now rather than later."

I hope that the Secretary of State for the Environment heeds that advice, although on past form I am not optimistic.

Mr. Tony Banks: The Department of Social Security's internal working party's papers make it clear that local authorities will have to keep a register if they are to apply fairly the benefits that the Secretary of State did not spend much time talking about in his roustabout Second Reading speech.

Mr. Gould: My hon. Friend is right, and his advice coincides exactly with that of all the professional bodies.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): There is nothing inherently terrible about keeping registers. The problem with the Government's system is that the information that is required to gain benefits and discounts is so detailed and personal that it will be a terrible invasion of the individual's privacy.

Mr. Gould: I continue to believe that it is the civil rights implications of keeping a register of where people live that is the most worrying feature—of not only the poll tax but the proposed council tax.

The poll tax legacy continues to do its damage. The rules establishing joint and several liability are another survivor of the poll tax, causing as they do such difficulty, incomprehension and bitterness within families. The new tax will be costly to administer and complicated to collect. The collection level will be low and the collection costs will be high. The load lifted for those at the top of the scale and for the single millionaire will mean an extra burden borne by those less able to pay. For all those reasons, council tax bills will—on the Government's own figures—be much higher than they should be.

Other aspects of the Bill arouse almost equal concern, but I will mention them only briefly. The uniform business rate is to remain nationalised, narrowing local government's tax base and cranking up the gearing effect to an alarming extent. The grant system is to be calculated on the same distorted valuation base that will so unfairly penalise those districts that have high property values but low average incomes. The 20 per cent. contribution rule is to be done away with, but, the abandoning of the principle having been conceded, it is nevertheless to be retained for the remaining lifetime of the poll tax.

Why is the chance not being taken to abolish the rule —if not immediately, at least from 1 April 1992?. Why is the misery to be prolonged for millions of people? Why is the Audit Commission's advice to be ignored, and why is local government to be forced to go through the costly and futile business of trying to squeeze blood out of millions of stones?

This is an ill-starred Bill, conceived in haste out of the disaster of the poll tax and fathered by a Secretary of State who is more interested in gimmickry than in good government. It is a sort of poll-tax zombie which will stalk the land long after the poll tax has supposedly been laid to rest. There is only one chance for us to ensure that the worst mistakes of the poll tax are not repeated and magnified: we can take advantage of that chance if the House, for once, does its job properly, standing up for the constituents whom we represent and insisting that good government must not be prostituted to short-term electoral considerations. We, the Opposition, will do our duty; I appeal to Conservative Members to do theirs.

4.50 pm

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): I am delighted that I have been called before any other Conservative Back Bencher. As hon. Members on both sides of the House will know, Conservative Members who opposed the community charge at the time of its introduction have had a difficult few years. To the dismay of the then Ministers, my voting record in this regard was—probably—rather similar to that of the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr.

Gould). My reaction to today's news is, however, very different from his. I unreservedly welcome the Bill, for it is transparently obvious not only that the new system will be fairer than the present one, but that it will be delivered more quickly than could any of the options suggested by the hon. Member for Dagenham.

I feel—not least because of the experience of the past few years—that I should explain why I believe that the present tax should go. Some of my hon. Friends may regret the current lack of consensus, but there has always been a lack of consensus in regard to this tax. I remember saying in the House that it would be repealed by the first non-Conservative Government—or, quite probably, by a future Conservative Government. That is one of several predictions that I have made which are now proving correct.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): Did the hon. Gentleman vote against the Scottish legislation?

Mr. Squire: The hon. Gentleman—who has questioned me from a sedentary position—will be delighted to learn that I did not support the Scottish legislation at any stage.

Mr. Maxton: Unlike his right hon. Friend.

Mr. Squire: I suspect that I had better not reply to any more sedentary interruptions, or my hon. Friend the Whip will become increasingly upset with me—as will you, Madam Deputy Speaker; that is even more important.

One reason for the change is the difficulty of collecting the current tax, especially in the inner cities. Just as important is the fact that the tax is not perceived to be fair by a significant number of people, particularly those whose circumstances place them just above the rebate level. It must therefore be reformed. My right hon. Friend—whose speech has greatly heartened his Back Benchers—was right to present this Bill, and to stress the importance of passing it quickly. I am sure that it will be possible for us to debate the issues in depth, while also ensuring that the measure is sent on its way and the new tax is in place on 1 April 1993.

Having made my views on the community charge clear, let me add that I believe that there should be no question of an amnesty for non-payers. That would constitute an affront not only to hon. Members, but to the many law-abiding people all over the country who have met their responsibilities, and who rightly expect local authorities to continue to chase those who are not doing so.

Let me make a small suggestion, which I am sure can be tackled in Committee. I feel that local authorities should be expected to exercise some judgment with regard to very small sums that are outstanding—whether the tax concerned is the community charge or the old rating system—if it would clearly be unproductive and expensive to pursue them. There should, I think, be provision for authorities to write off such debts.

The main point about the new tax is the fact that it is property-based. Many of us consider that an advantage, and I hope that it will be given at least a qualified welcome on both sides of the House. The Labour party has been on an odyssey of a journey, with some 70 stops to date and more to come—especially after the speech made recently by the hon. Member for Dagenham. That applies not least to the question of valuation.

I am a reasonable person. I do not happen to believe that, come next spring or summer, when the valuations will all be in, the hon. Member for Dagenham—were he to become Secretary of State for the Environment, which I do not think he will—would ditch those valuations and return to the rates, and then to some four-part valuation system. That would not make sense. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) has already implied that there is a faint possibility of Labour's adopting the valuations. The stronger that possibility becomes, the more chance there is of a consensus. On issues such as this, consensus is desirable, and I feel that adopting professional valuations would be a good idea.

Let me tackle the question of regional banding head-on. As a London Member, I might be expected to think, instinctively and understandably, that regional banding makes sense. I have examined the matter in some detail, and I believe that regional banding would require justification; its adoption would certainly produce many more anomalies than would otherwise arise.

Let me give an example, however. Even if we agreed on the London boundaries—taking, presumably, the old GLC area—there would still be a major impact on Essex, Kent, Surrey, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire, all of which contain properties whose value has some correlation with that of properties immediately inside the GLC boundary. If those areas are included, what will be the position in the outer parts of the west midlands, for instance, or in the more prosperous parts of the Bristol area? Once we start, we find that no natural regional boundary can be drawn.

Apart from the practical problem, we encounter a moral principle here. Are we trying to suggest that, although this is to be a property tax, we should ignore property values and endeavour to ensure that people receive the same bills regardless of what their homes are worth? I do not think that that is a terribly moral argument. Surely someone whose property is worth three times as much as another property should be expected to pay more than the owner of that property, especially now that the property-tax element is so much smaller than it was under the old system.

Mr. Gould: I was confident that the hon. Gentleman would give way to me: we seem to have established the practice.

I have listened with considerable interest to what the hon. Gentleman has had to say. Does he not accept that the problem arises—a problem that both he and I, as well as some of his hon. Friends, wish to address—not just as a result of a national banding system for the whole of England, but because the system is dampened, according to the Secretary of State? That is what forces people living in some parts of London to be crowded into the top two or three bands, and thus to pay what is virtually a flat-rate tax at the top level. There is little differentiation between those living in properties of average value and those living in much more expensive properties. That is what is worrying people in London, and it is a function of dampening rather than of the banding principle.

Mr. Squire: I disagree with the hon. Gentleman. Had there been major steps in the bands—eight times, or whatever figure the hon. Gentleman might care to suggest—I should have sympathised with his point. Although the system that is to be introduced distinguishes between properties of considerably different values, it does not do so in such a way that one ends up with some of the anomalies that we found with the old rating system.

[Mr. Squire]

For example, a widow who had lived in a large property for 40 years might not want to move from that property for the last 10 years of her life. Under the old system, her rates bill was unlimited. The banding system ensures, above all, that the highest rate is related to the lowest rate. That being so, we are being fair to people who are in such a position and to people in general. We shall ensure that there is an upper limit and that what they pay will not go above it.

Mr. Cormack: Both my hon. Friend and I have taken the same line on the poll tax, from Scotland onwards. My hon: Friend's reference to a widow who had lived for 40 years in her home provoked me to intervene and to say that perhaps in Committee we ought to consider length of occupation of a property. A problem faced by some people is that they bought their house when it was not very dear. Now, however, having lived there for many years, they find that it is worth a very great deal of money. Their income, though, has not kept pace with property prices. I hope that that point can be addressed in Committee.

Mr. Squire: My hon. Friend makes a legitimate point that ought to be considered by the Committee. I am sure, however, that Ministers will be anxious not to create too many complexities within the system.

As for the single-person discount, if my earlier comments on valuation hold true, it is possible that the single-person discount will be one of the major differences between the two parties. I have always believed that the biggest, perhaps the only major drawback of the old rating system was the way in which single people inevitably lost out by comparison with two, three, four or more wage earners in similar if not adjacent properties. If the rates were to be reintroduced without such a charge, in whatever valuation form, the new system would stumble and fall at that hurdle. I believe that 25 per cent. is about right, though it would be foolish to suggest that 25 per cent. is the uniquely correct figure. Nevertheless, there is some correlation between the full charge, the 25 per cent. and the 50 per cent. off an empty property.

It is important to understand why. I do not know how many properties throughout the country contain only one person, but I am told that it is as high as 33 per cent. If we introduced a property tax that did not recognise the special position of the single person, which applies in one out of three homes, there would be a legitimate outcry. People would say, "We expected this system to be fairer. The only bit that we liked about the current system was that it recognised the single person, whereas the rates did not. In return for losing that—and we understand why—we expect our position to be recognised in the replacement system." They would be right to say that. I urge the Opposition to consider the impact of not recognising the position of people living alone, which would be the consequence of their proposals.

I welcome the abolition of the 20 per cent. rule. I do not intend to say too much about it. I suspect that it is welcomed in all parts of the House. That experiment began before the introduction of the community charge, although most people outside the House do not remember it. It led to an inordinate amount of local authority administration and attracted a limited amount of income compared with the expense of administering it.

I welcome also my right hon. Friend's treatment of students. I have two in my household. It is difficult for some of us to get used to the concept that students will be invisible. Even if they are invisible, they will certainly still be heard. Nevertheless, the principle of making students invisible is absolutely right. It is an improvement on the present position, as is the treatment of home improvements. When a property is improved, I understand that its valuation will reflect the improvement only on the sale of the property. That will provide a direct incentive to people to improve their property. Under the old rating system, property improvements led to a higher valuation and higher rates.

I reject the need for a personal register. There will be a 100 per cent. property register, but as 50 per cent. of those on the register will not be eligible for one or other of the discounts available, it is iniquitous to suggest that we also need a full-blown 100 per cent. personal register. I confidently expect that to be one of the gains of changing the system.

Like every Conservative Member—I understand that Opposition Members now agree with us—I welcome the proposal that councillors should be unable to vote on setting the local charge if they have not paid their community charge or council tax. That change is overdue. I understand that about 250 councillors throughout the country still refuse to pay. They are joined by six Members of Parliament—not, as some of my hon. Friends might think, by just two Members of Parliament.

A small point that is relevant to hon. Members in all parts of the House that continues regardless of the underlying system is the way in which standing spending assessments operate. Almost as I say it, I can feel those who sit on the Treasury Bench stiffening. The concept of how we distribute grants is one that never goes away. We are correctly changing the underlying basis of local government, but many local authorities, and the Members of Parliament who represent those areas, are convinced beyond argument that the present system does not fairly reflect their needs and the pressures upon them compared with the way in which it reflects the needs of and pressures on other authorities. There is no easy answer. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment—in his second coming, so to speak—is more aware of the problem than others may be. I urge my right hon. Friend and the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities constantly to keep in mind the deep dissatisfaction about aspects of the standard spending assessments and to remember that even small improvements can bring benefits out of all proportion to those who feel discriminated against.

I am conscious that I have been on my feet for some time. I do not wish to prevent others from speaking. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] When I was trying to make an equivalent speech against the community charge, Madam Deputy Speaker, the response from my hon. Friends was very different. It is strange how things change.

In his most seductive way the hon. Member for Dagenham sought to sell to us a return to the rates. It is important to underline why that is a foolish proposal. In an interjection I referred to the fact that any change is time consuming for local authorities. It involves additional work which they would rather avoid.

We must recognise the consequences of reverting to the rates system, the first of which is that the residents of properties in England and Wales that have been constructed since 1973 will feel unfairly treated.

The issue of single-adult households has returned, which cannot be to the advantage of the Labour party. Labour's proposal is merely a staging post for a further change, about which, blessedly, we were given limited information today. Labour proposes a return to the rates despite the fact that if I were to go through past copies of *Hansard* I suspect that I would find that the majority, if not all, of the shadow Cabinet had criticised the rates system without qualification. That does not seem to be much of a recommendation for the system.

If Labour's policy to return to the rates is looking a little shaky, its policy on expenditure is simply incredible. The cumulative impact of its proposals will be that local authorities will not be capped, there will be no compulsory competitive tendering and no Audit Commission. However one seeks to describe it, that must mean higher local authority spending. Labour wants no limit on bills for higher value properties and no transitional relief—all in all, a series of inadequate proposals.

This is a good day for those who have taken a long interest in local government finance and are looking forward to having a tax in place that will be seen to be fair and that will cause few of the problems that we have experienced in the past. I give it my unreserved support and look forward to the Bill emerging from Committee.

5.11 pm

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire). We went in the same Lobby when we were going through the tedium of trying to defeat the poll tax. Sadly, not enough Conservative Members shared the hon. Gentleman's view.

I must part company with the hon. Member for Hornchurch now, because we are discussing poll tax mark II. I cannot describe the council tax as anything other than a mish-mash of poll tax mark I. The poll tax will stay with us as long as people are still being dragged through the courts. I make no excuse for people who can pay but will not pay: I have no truck with such people, nor have my colleagues. I always took the view that whatever the origins of the tax, council services must be paid for. I came to this place to provide services to people who needed them. It did not seem fair not to pay the tax and then ask why home helps were not being paid. I hope that that point is out of the way; I do not want to hear more about it for the rest of the debate.

That does not alter the fact that many millions of people are still suffering. The tragedy is that, like mark I, poll tax mark II will be bulldozed through the House. Mark I was ill thought out; it was the then Prime Minister's prejudice being translated into legislation. Events are being repeated today to help the Tories' electoral chances. The baloney about the new Prime Minister having a different view because he is a different Prime Minister and altogether more wholesome than the previous one does not wash with me or with people outside.

The Bill has nothing to do with efficiency in local government. In the past 12 years, more than 100 measures designed to make the delivery of local government services more difficult have been passed. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) pointed out, it has nothing to do with fairness but everything to do with political expediency.

The motive for this change came during the Conservative party leadership campaign last November. The Bill is typical of the nervousness and panic of Conservative Members who have marginal seats in the north-west. It is the same as all the lunatic policies that they have slavishly followed. They voted in the Lobby night after night, but when they returned to their constituencies they found that the legislation militated against the interests of their constituents, so they turned tail, chased the new leadership, panicked about small houses in Ribble Valley and elsewhere in the north-west and here we have poll tax mark II.

I hope that some Conservative Members will reflect on and recall what happened last year and when we originally debated the poll tax. They should also speak to the hon. Member for Hornchurch, who argued strongly against the poll tax. They should recall what happened, because we shall be in the same position in a few months' time. In the 1987 election campaign, I concentrated on the poll tax.

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock): Are not the hon. Gentleman and his party panicking? After Labour's pathetic swing in the Langbaurgh by-election, its only way of opposing the Bill is to sloganise and to keep shouting "poll tax mark II" when it is nothing of the sort.

Mr. Lewis: The hon. Gentleman's constituency will be a Labour gain at the next election. What the country and this party needed last Thursday was not three by-elections but a general election. We did not get the general election because of panic here and in No. 10.

In the 1987 general election campaign, I ignored the literature from headquarters and concentrated specifically on the poll tax. I am glad that I did so, because my electors probably know a little more about the darn thing than most. That will be reflected in the election result in a few months' time.

Before Conservative Members allow history to repeat itself, I want them to find a little humility, which would help. I want them to consider the damage that has been done to people because those Members did not think and trooped through the Lobby blindfolded. I want Conservative Members to think of the human resources in town halls which were wasted by devotion to an inordinate amount of administration over the past few years and which could have gone into the delivery of services—*[Interruption.]* I was about to say that that happened in Tory as well as Labour town halls, but contributions like that make one doubt the case.

Conservative Members should consider the wastage of resources—the waste of money and of the time of civil servants and the effort that was demanded of the judicial system. My hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) recited the numbers of people who had to go through the courts. The hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), who intervened earlier and has now left his place, believes that all the people who have gone through the courts already will not pay this time. I do not agree.

Most of the people who have gone through the courts, most of those who have chosen to pay the poll tax rather than eat and most of those who are still in debt because of the poll tax are decent, honest, honourable people who were caught up by legislation introduced by selfish people.

[Mr. Lewis]

I should like Conservative Members to show a little humility before the debate finishes. I should like a Minister to say to those people, "We are sorry. We made a mistake. We recognise that you are paying for it." But to believe that that will happen is to live in cloud cuckoo land.

During the past few months, one of the most effective images on our television screens of victims of the infamous poll tax was the very sick lady who, with the help of ambulance people, bravely went to court to say why she could not pay her poll tax. She did not have the resources to pay it. She was in court with a car battery keeping her vital medical equipment going. That is what the Government put people through with poll tax mark I, and it will happen again.

More often than I care to remember, Conservative Members shout across the Chamber, "You are throwing money at problems. You cannot do that." I cannot think of any problem which has arisen during the time I have been involved in local government and in the House that has had as much money thrown at it as the Government have thrown at the poll tax—about £50 billion just to reduce the bills before the local elections a year or so ago.

The Government should be thoroughly ashamed of the 2·5 per cent. additional VAT. That is not for a week or a month but for ever. Through VAT, people will be paying for ever for the poll tax mistake. At the next election, the Government will not be allowed to get away with it.

What will poll tax mark II provide? The prospects are not good, and I want to put five questions to Conservative Members. First, will the council tax be fair? My hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham demolished that argument. It will be manifestly unfair and as unfair as poll tax mark I. Secondly, will there be less to pay? Judging by the predictions on almost every aspect of financial life, we have to say with regret that the council tax predictions will be as out of sync as all the others, and people will not pay less.

Thirdly, will the council tax provide more accountability? Under the Government's policy, accountability has been eroded in every aspect of human life. Current levels of Government grant and capping powers make it unlikely that the council tax bills will offer any more public choice than was offered under the original poll tax. I cannot say hand on heart that I am confident that there will be more accountability with this tax.

Fourthly, what about collection costs? One of the problems with the collection of the poll tax was the ridiculous 20 per cent. rule. From the beginning, it was argued in this place that that was a ludicrous concept, and events have proved us right. Like every Opposition Member, I am pleased to see it go. None the less, I am sure that the cost of collecting the council tax will be far higher than the cost of collecting any popular tax should be. The council tax will not pass that fourth test.

Fifthly, will a register be necessary? We have gone over that argument in detail today and, no doubt, we will do so in future. I intended quoting the comments last Wednesday by the Secretary of State for Scotland, but I was beaten to the punch by my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): Quote them again.

Mr. Lewis: I will not do so. No doubt, Madam Deputy Speaker, you will be bored by some of the contributions that we are likely to make during the next two days, and I do not want to bore you further.

Like all the professional bodies with an interest in this matter and which have reported ad infinitum on it, I am certain that, of necessity, there will be a register. I do not know whether it will be the list proposed by the Secretary of State for Scotland or the register about which my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham spoke.

I hope that Conservative Members find a little humility, that they are prepared to reflect on the mistakes of the past, that they will listen carefully to the debate over the next two days and that one or two will have the courage to vote in the right Lobby tomorrow night.

5.27 pm

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): I am sure that the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) is right when he says that we should look into the entrails of the community charge to see whether any lessons might be drawn from it. Whatever else I might disagree with him about, he is right on that point.

The hon. Member for Worsley is wrong about one aspect, although if I were in his position I would probably say the same as he did. He is wrong to present this tax as community charge mark II. In a sense, Labour Members have to say that because, if it is not community charge mark II, they have all sorts of problems. One could probably speak all evening and on into the early hours of the morning about ways of proving that it really is community charge mark I.

The hon. Member for Worsley paid a generous tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) for his able and sterling work over the years in being a thorn in the flesh of Ministers. My hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch said that climates change and that one man's villain can be translated, within weeks, into someone else's hero.

I put it rhetorically to the hon. Member for Worsley that, if my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch believes that it is community charge mark II, he is precisely the sort of person who is likely to vote against it. The hon. Member for Worsley might conceivably have doubts about me, but I shall say nothing more about that.

Mr. Lewis *rose*——

Mr. Nicholls: I thought that I would give the hon. Member for Worsley something on which he could feast and that I could record his comments for posterity. My hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch is not a man to take anything other than an independent view. He does not think that this is community charge mark II, and I suggest to the hon. Member for Worsley that my hon. Friend is probably correct.

Mr. Lewis: The hon. Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) and I worked on the Select Committee on the Environment and I also have great regard for his work. However, even he knows that the run-up to a general election might colour one or two attitudes.

Mr. Nicholls: If there is a man in the Conservative party who can take a fearless and independent view it is my hon.

Friend the Member for Hornchurch. Lest my praise embarrasses him as much as I hope that it embarrassed the hon. Member for Worsley a moment ago, I shall move on.

One cannot consider the council tax or the community charge in isolation from the old rating system. For a moment—but only a moment—I was almost overwhelmed by a sense of nostalgia when I heard the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) talk longingly and lovingly about the good old days when we had the good old rates system. When one hears such nonsense one has to pinch oneself to remind oneself who is in the real world. One dislikes—although frankly, not very much—treading on private internal grief, but we should bear it in mind that during the past four years the Labour party has had not one or two but 72 changes of heart about local government finance.

I should say to the hon. Member for Dagenham—if pressing commitments had not taken him elsewhere—that if it is so easy to return to the old rating system, it should not take 72 volte faces to do so. The hon. Member for Dagenham found that his route back to the obvious was blindingly tortuous. The reason was summed up in a phrase that was so pithy that one wonders whether he wrote it himself. The phrase was used by the Leader of the Opposition in 1980. He said that the rates were

"the most unjust of all taxes."

As a taxpayer I consider all rates unjust unless someone else is paying them. However, one must grant the Leader of the Opposition that he was probably right—rates probably were the unfairest of all taxes. The hon. Member for Dagenham said with his typically Antipodean casuistry that there may be imperfections in the system but they could be dealt with by the 72 steps, so that one ends up where one did not want to start.

If one can say that a tax is not merely unpopular but that it is the most unfair of all taxes, that tax is not riddled with imperfection—it is a tax that is intellectually dead from the neck up. It is a tax that must go. The Labour party cannot have it both ways. It was sad to hear the hilarity with which the Opposition greeted the quotation earlier in the debate. The point was made that the Leader of the Opposition made that statement 10 years ago and the Opposition started to laugh. What are 10 years? When talking about the Leader of the Opposition changing his policy, what are 10 minutes? The Opposition laughed at the idea that one should quote what the Leader of the Opposition said 10 years ago. They might have said, "Good gracious me, times change", and they did. The principles of the Leader of the Opposition may be as changeable as the weather in Britain or in New Zealand, but the Opposition knew how they felt about the rates then and they know how they feel about them now. It is not up to me to pass judgment on which view is correct, but it is clear that the two are fundamentally irreconcilable.

One thrust of the speech made by the hon. Member for Worsley which I back to the hilt was that he wished to look into the entrails of the community charge to discover what lessons might be learnt. That is a constructive viewpoint. When talking to people at the height of the debate on the community charge, I was struck time and again by the fact that their conversation always started with the words, "I agree with the principle of the community charge, but . . ." Those people once presented a very lengthy petition to me. They agreed that everyone should pay something, but that phrase was followed by many "buts".

We all have a list of things that we believe to be wrong with the community charge, but I believe that the principle was right. Everyone should pay something. Very few hon. Members—if they think for a moment before denying this proposition—would disagree with that idea. But, they ask, "What is 'something'?" and "Surely not everyone can pay?" In other words, one should take what seems to be a good idea and see how it works in practice.

During the consultation period and when the legislation was being passed, it was obvious—if not then, at least when the community charge was being put into practice—that the principle with which everyone agreed was being compromised because there were some ideas that people would not tolerate. The first was the amount, which many people felt was too high. Once that decision had been made, other ideas came thick and fast. Another such idea was that a 20 per cent. contribution was wrong. For what it is worth, I think that it probably was wrong that a member of the working poor had to pay 20 per cent. of the community charge. The principle that everyone should pay something was a good one, but 20 per cent. was too much. What about students? What about those with second homes?

Such problems were not foreseeable—that would have been asking too much. When the community charge was being put into practice it was relatively easy to see that there were particular issues which, if they were not dealt with, would so change the quality of the argument that in the end people would not merely preface their objections to the charge by pointing out that they were in favour of the principle, but would be so angered by the objections, or qualifications, that they would forget that they were originally in favour of the charge.

A Government or an Opposition who do not have the confidence to admit, "Sometimes we get it wrong" do not have the confidence or ability to say, "We can say that because most of the time we get it right." The Government said ultimately, "We should have listened." I have no doubt that if experience and the representations made to Members of Parliament and thus to Ministers had been taken into account, some aspects of the community charge could have been changed to ensure that it would be with us today. Although it would not have been the flagship, it would not have been the potential Titanic. The moral is that we should have listened earlier to save the community charge. We did not, but, in time, we listened.

One of my most amusing experiences—if one's sense of humour can stretch to it—is that 14 or 15 months ago—it seems so long ago—I wrote for Ministers at the Department of the Environment a carefully reasoned and extremely well-thought-out brief on how to save the community charge. I know that it was carefully reasoned and extremely well-thought-out, because I wrote it. In the light of experience, I put together detailed proposals of ways in which the principle of the community charge could be retained, although certainly not in a form acceptable to the Opposition. It was a good submission, but I should be breaching confidence if I revealed the exact nature of it.

However, three months later I found my own submission on my desk at the Department of the Environment. I was the Under-Secretary of State with the responsibility of replying to myself. That will give you, Madam Deputy Speaker, a flavour of what the reply would have been had I sent it, but in the end I decided not to write the letter. Suffice it to say that if some aspects of the community charge had been dealt with in time, it could have been saved.

[Mr. Nicholls]

Despite my brief acquaintance with local government finance during my time at the Department of the Environment, I could see what is obvious to many hon. Members: some aspects should have been dealt with. I see none of the potential difficulties with the council tax. I have no doubt that the council tax preserves the one essence of the community charge which almost everyone favoured—the basic proposition, subject to proper caveat and qualification, that everyone should pay something. It will never be everyone, only most people. If people cannot afford to pay, they should not have to pay. That principle is included in the council tax, and I welcome that.

Clearly there will be problems with banding. Some of my constituents will be winners and some will be losers in the transition from the community charge to the council tax. There is no doubt that nobody would gain from a return to the rating system. Certainly, if we went back to the rates, people in my constituency would be at risk in a way in which they could not conceivably be at risk from the council tax or the community charge.

Although I am confident that nothing in the council tax begins to give rise to the sort of unresolved difficulties that existed with the community charge, there is, nevertheless, a point to be made. I should like to think that, if during the passage of the Bill or once the tax has been implemented we find that it has certain adverse effects—which may be obvious only in the light of experience—the Government will say, "Fine. This is a well-reasoned case and we will listen to it." The fact that the Government can come to the House seeking to repeal their own legislation and put the council tax in its place shows that they are prepared to listen to such reasoned argument. There is nothing contradictory or humiliating in saying, "We think that we have the policy right, but we are told—and not just by mavericks or people trying to rock the boat—that its implementation is not going as well as we had hoped." Sometimes what the House hears from the electorate and what Ministers hear from Members of Parliament is worth taking on board—although, frankly, a lot of the time it is not. When it is, we ought at least to entertain it. I should like to think that, if, in due course, it appears that there are lessons to be learnt concerning the council tax, the Government will be prepared to listen to the arguments.

Will that make the council tax a popular tax? You bet it will not. There is no such thing as a popular tax—nor should there be. The only popular tax is a tax which somebody else pays but which benefits oneself. Will the tax be too high? Many will say so. Everybody knows what the correct rate of taxation is: it is the rate that bites on someone earning slightly more than oneself. In the end, however, in a British way—grumblingly, grudgingly and sometimes with tongue in cheek—people recognise that our basic tax system is usually fair. In the context of local government finance, the council tax brings us as close as we shall ever get to the unattainable and there will come a time when people will say, "This tax is about as fair as it can be."

My final point relates to the fact that the Government are again to have capping powers, and I am extremely pleased to see that that is so. I have always been of the view that the Government's capping powers should have been far more rigorous than they were initially and that they should be severe enough also to catch recalcitrant Conservative councils—or those who pass themselves off as such. I have no objections to, or difficulties with, capping. I say that for two reasons—the first constitutional and the other more pragmatic.

The pragmatic reason is that I do not see how Members of Parliament can stand by and watch people in an area having their money squandered. We all have examples of money being squandered: often, one man's squandering is another man's investment. Can we really stand idly by for example, and watch Derbyshire county council spend thousands of pounds on a party to celebrate the release of Nelson Mandela? Can we stand idly by knowing that, with taxpayers' money, Hackney council provided assistance to the "International Lesbian and Gay People of Colour Conference"? Somewhat later, Hackney's lesbian and gay men's sub-committee issued a report—it is dated 7 June 1990, should anyone wish to look it up—estimating that the council's lesbian and gay men's unit would cost £55,807. How on earth can such expenditure be justified?

Mr. Cohen: Will the hon. Gentleman tell us the amounts involved? Are not they peanuts by comparison with the budgets concerned? Are not such issues matters for local electorates? Are not such activities inconsequential compared with those of councils such as Tory Westminster, which sold cemeteries worth millions of pounds for 5p each? Was not that a chronic waste of money—and a waste about which the Government did nothing?

Mr. Nicholls: Peanuts can bring forth monkeys, but I would not describe the sums as peanuts. At least one Labour Member was prepared to go to prison rather than pay a sum substantially less significant. We cannot stand by and watch sums of money squandered in that way.

My constitutional point is at least as embarrassing for the Liberal party—represented in the Chamber at the moment by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) alone—as for the Labour party. Local government and national Government are not equal partners in government. Local government is the creature of national Government: it is set up in statute by central Government and central Government regulate and control it. It is unrealistic to expect national Government to say to local government that the two are equal partners in determining the fiscal policy of the nation. Central Government must make those decisions and, if they get them wrong, they have to face the consequences at a general election and are replaced.

To some extent, the Liberal Democrats want to dine à la carte and take the easiest bits of each party's policies. I find it astonishing that their policy—unless their position has changed in recent minutes—is that they will have no truck whatever with capping. In a recent local government debate, I asked the—temporary—hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) whether the Liberal party really opposed the principle of capping. So anxious and eager was he to get the message over that he was like a whippet on steroids bounding up and down. He said, "There is no question whatever about it: we are thoroughly against capping."

In considering the present local government reforms, the council tax and the possibility of a return to the rates, people should ask themselves which party is prepared to

say, "Central Government take responsibility. They will take the credit and the blame and they are not prepared to stand by and see councils fleecing their own electorates."

Over the years, the Liberal party has produced many sound ideas and some original ideas—although the sound ideas are never original and the original ideas are never sound—and I find it remarkable that the Liberal Democrats should not be able to see that capping is an absolutely essential safeguard. I suppose that the difficulty is that the Liberal Democrats, who have made it clear that the price that they will demand to keep a Labour Government in office is proportional representation, want to ally themselves with the party that never stops, and, when it comes to local government spending, we know which that party is.

5.46 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I shall deal in due course with the points raised by the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) in the latter part of his speech. I note in passing, however, that, when it comes to squandering the nation's money, I cannot think of a better example than the enormous amounts squandered by the Government in setting up the machinery for the administration of the poll tax, which is now to be totally unwound. I am sure that, if those on the Treasury Bench had been in local government, they would soon be facing surcharges for the abuse of public funds.

The Second Reading of a Bill usually deals with the principles that underlie it. The hon. Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) and the Secretary of State made it perfectly clear that the Government believe that the fairest and best means of raising local government finance is through a property tax. That principle is also supported by the official Opposition, and that explains the difficulty that the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) experienced in the debate. We may have had from him an attempt at Opposition fury, but, on occasion, he experienced pretty heavy weather in trying to make distinctions between his party and the Government on an issue on which, in essence, they agree. Both parties accept the central principle—no matter how it is dressed up—that local government finance should be based on a property tax.

A review of debates over the past two or three years reveals another unusual aspect. Not only are the two major parties united in favouring a property tax; in the past, they were united in fiercely opposing such a tax. It is to their obvious embarrassment that they are again together.

Many hon. Members on both sides of the House must be embarrassed about some of the comments that they have made in the past. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) once described the rates as

"an irrational, inefficient, highly resented form of taxation. If a thing does not make sense—and the rating system makes no sense whatever—the right thing to do is to abolish it."

I shall not dwell on the comments made by the Leader of the Opposition in 1980, as they have also been referred to. In 1990, however, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) said:

"What isn't right is the disparity between someone living alone, living next to three or four earners."

That disparity lies at the heart of our opposition to a property tax. The disparity is acknowledged in the Bill with an attempt at a discount scheme, but that disparity has not been overcome.

Although the Labour party opposes the discount scheme, it does not attempt to address the unfairness inherent in a property tax. The poll tax was introduced because rates as a property tax were seen to be becoming increasingly unfair and undefendable. Not unnaturally, Ministers have savaged the workings of a property tax ever since rates were abolished. In March 1990, the Secretary of State for Wales vehemently denounced rates and said:

"If there is one thing which unites Conservatives everywhere it is our deep and abiding abhorrence of the rating system. It is no wonder we hate it so. It is at the heart such a socialist system. How much more abominable than a tax on widows? But that is what the rating system is."

I submit that that is what the council tax is as well, 25 per cent. discount notwithstanding. Everything the Labour party said about the unfairness of rates was right and everything that the Conservative party said about the unfairness of rates is right. Property taxes cannot be fair because property cannot be an absolute guide to people's income or wealth. The hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) made that point eloquently when she intervened during the Secretary of State's speech.

People acquire their homes at different times and in different circumstances. A family home in an up-and-coming area like the south-east or London can rise rapidly in value. My hon. Friend the Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) has already said that people in central London on relatively low incomes may live in high-value houses. The income of inhabitants does not change in the same proportion if they start off in equal housing. The housing may rise in value, but people's relative incomes may not necessarily rise by the same amount.

Many people have exercised their right to buy homes that they previously tenanted from local authorities. They bought them at a substantial discount. Under the council tax they will be charged according to the full capital value of those homes. An identical range of people might live on a newly built Barratt estate. Those people may have roughly the same income and circumstances and they may all be able to bear the same burden. However, there are few communities like that.

In many streets, although the houses may appear similar to the estate agent who drives along valuing them, they are often far from uniform. Some may have been divided into flats while others may have been newly modernised or renovated. Some may need modernising. Some may be long-standing family homes, while others may be just a step on the housing ladder. They are all vulnerable to property prices and the need for valuation regardless of individual circumstances. However, all the inhabitants will be expected to pay roughly the same regardless of their income.

The Government acknowledge that a property tax is essentially unfair and not linked to income and that is why the Bill includes banding and discounts and why student halls of residents are rightly excluded. However, those exemptions and discounts merely reinforce the fundamental flaw at the centre of the council tax. A property tax is essentially unfair unless so many qualifications are built into it that it becomes complicated and expensive to administer.

[Mr. James Wallace]

We have already heard the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) suggest that there should be a further element which would take into account the length of time that someone has lived in a house. That only underlines how complicated property taxes can be in an effort to make them fair. In his reference to the poll tax, the hon. Member for Teignbridge referred to the many things that had to be built on to it and the many anomalies that had to be addressed. Many of those anomalies were identified by my colleagues at the very outset of the poll tax escapade. Experience has shown that anomalies arose and had to be addressed and that caused massive administrative complications.

Mr. Nicholls: I actually said that there were relatively few anomalies and that if they had been addressed the tax would have found favour. However, is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that a system of local income tax would not create economic ghettos and areas in which the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the local Labour authority would have carte blanche without capping—something which he will not allow and which will have to be dealt with through exemptions?

Mr. Wallace: The hon. Gentleman is not suggesting that a system of local government finance would be without a method of equalisation. Every system of local government finance has possessed such a system.

We believe that the council tax is already hovering between being unfair and being unworkable. The concession on students and the way in which the Secretary of State for the Environment struggled to answer my question underline that point. Institutions do not provide enough student accommodation. Some students have no choice but to live out. Some students will be completely exempt from the tax and some will qualify for discounts. Others will have to pay a proportion of the tax, and in London and Aberdeen that proportion could well be high. If it has been conceded that students should not pay the tax, the Government should accept the logic and exempt students altogether.

Dr. Hampson: It seems that virtually all students will be exempt. The only category in which that will not apply is when a student is living with or married to someone who is not a student. In that case, there will be a bill for the property and the non-student will have to pay while the other person contributes 25 per cent.

Mr. Wallace: The hon. Gentleman accepts my point that there will be a distinction between students. I can think of another example. A student who is forced to live out may be lodging with the old lady who seems to feature regularly in local government finance debates. In that case, the discount provision will apply, but the student will still have to pay some proportion when other students pay nothing. It would be welcome to hear that all students are to be exempt.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. David Hunt): I had hoped that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment had dealt with that point very effectively. The student living in lodgings is invisible in terms of qualifying for the council tax and does not add one jot to the amount that the widow or anyone else would have to pay. They are disregarded.

Mr. Wallace: If that means that all students are exempt, it would have been better if the Department of the Environment press releases had stated that expressly. I suspect that that is not so, and we can probe it in more detail in Standing Committee.

The 25 per cent. discount is another concession that exposes flaws in the tax. It is an attempt to meet what the Secretary of State for Wales described as the widow factor. However, it does not go far enough. A widow in a modest terrace house on a low income, with—for the sake of argument—a council tax of £200, will be liable for £150. In a modernised house next door, a two-earning couple will be liable to only £100 each. A single merchant banker in the next house might qualify for his discount on a salary that could be far higher than any other salary in the street.

We cannot support the Bill because it bears no relation to people's income. It will penalise people on low incomes who do not qualify for discounts, and through the banding system it tends to benefit the rich. If we listen on the one hand to the Secretary of State for the Environment and on the other hand to the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities, it seems that the DOE has something like Dr. Doolittle's "Push-me—pull-you." The Secretary of State is anxious to concentrate on rebates to do something for those who will by hit be the property tax, but the Minister has scorned property taxes and is determined to weight the tax in favour of the better-off. That internal contradiction means that the council tax will not survive. As a result, the Bill will not be the last word on local government finance. It will be an interim attempt to be seen to be doing something to replace the discredited poll tax.

The real tragedy is that there is an alternative which, unlike the poll tax or any property tax, has been tried and tested in many countries in Europe and in America. It is fair and easy to administer. We have supported that alternative—a local income tax—since our submission to the Layfield inquiry into local government finance in 1976. That inquiry, the most authoritative ever carried out, favoured a local income tax. The details of our proposals have been well documented.

We accepted the Secretary of State's invitation to engage in the consultation process which he initiated. Not only can we point to the success of such a tax abroad, but at no stage in recent negotiations or since have we been told that a local income tax would not work. It is important that that point is understood. It would appear that the objection to local income tax is political rather than practical.

Having listened to Government spokesmen, it appears that their political objections are twofold. First, they wish to be seen to be reducing personal taxation. It does not matter whether the overall burden of tax increases, as long as they are seen to be reducing personal taxation. Secondly, and perhaps most important, they have claimed that they do not want to hand over control of an income tax to what they perceive to be extremist Labour local authorities.

The lack of accountability was the reason which drove the Government to introduce the poll tax. The poll tax has wasted £14 billion of taxpayers' money, led to cuts in services and jobs, caused great hardship for thousands of people, and has led to a general breakdown in law and order. It is now being replaced by a highly complicated tax that will take two years to value and will be a burden to those on low incomes in high-cost areas.

That is happening because the Government will not make local councils representative of and accountable to their electorates. A fair voting system, which we would also like to see in local government, would mean that it would be unlikely that there would ever be extremist Labour councils. There would be no reason to have introduced the poll tax and no reason for another arbitrary and unfair property tax. Capping would be done by the electorate, which, in a democracy, is where power should lie. The electorate would determine whether the local authority was getting out of hand and penalise accordingly.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman has told the House that, if we had proportional representation for councils, we would not have extreme Labour councils and that, somehow, the more widespread distribution of seats would stop that happening. If that is the case, when Brent council was at its most extreme, when it was spending enormous sums of ratepayers' money and destroying services, why, at every turn, did the hon. Gentleman's party support the Labour party through thick and thin? It would not have made any difference in that borough. We would still have had an extremist council—not Labour, but Labour and Liberal combined.

Mr. Wallace: If one had properly representative councils—for example, in Liverpool, where the minority within the Labour group managed to take control and impose extremist policies—that would not be possible. In any event, the views of the electorate would be much more fairly represented at the next local elections. I have no detail of what individual Liberal Democrat councillors in Brent did, but, if it was perceived by the electorate to have been wrong, they would have undoubtedly paid the political consequences at the following election. That is where the real power of capping should be—with people in the electorate, not with the heavy hand of central Government. We could then allow local communities to decide more of their own priorities and allow councils to justify to the electorate the cost of the various policies that they put into practice. We should put the concept of community back into local government. Fair votes, a reformed structure and a local income tax will provide representative and accountable councils with sufficient finance, raised fairly and efficiently, to meet the community's needs.

We are faced with a Government who are determined to get the Bill on to the statute book before an election. I do not believe that the tax will ever be implemented. Nevertheless, in Committee we will consider the Bill seriously to try to highlight anomalies and alleviate some of the flaws in the detail. The Government are making a mistake unduly to curtail debate. If they had faith in their own proposals, they would be happy to see them discussed in detail.

During consideration of the Local Government Finance Bill, 218 Government amendments were tabled in Committee and 135 were tabled on Report. In the House of Lords, 196 Government amendments were tabled in Committee, and 286 were tabled on Report. It was clear that the Government were not able to get their legislation right at the first attempt. That will be the case in respect of this legislation, and a host of anomalies will come to light. Guillotining the Bill at this early stage shows that Ministers are frightened to come to grips with the legislation and face scrutiny of the details of their own Bill.

We all want the poll tax to be abolished as soon as possible. A large number of people seem to share the Prime Minister's belief that the poll tax is already abolished. Collection, particularly in areas such as Strathclyde, is becoming ever more difficult. Cuts in services and jobs will follow. The anger of those who pay the poll tax will mount as they find out the additional amount that they must pay because their local authorities are unable to collect outstanding poll tax. A member of one local authority in England—I will not name it for obvious reasons—told me that the police in that area have said that following up poll tax debts and warrants is not a high priority. When that matter was put to the Home Office and the Department of the Environment, we were told that it was for the local authority to sort out the matter with the local police force.

Local Government is in a state of low morale and near collapse because of the poll tax. Thousands are still facing the burden of a 20 per cent. contribution, even though it is costing up to two and a half times more to collect than the revenue raised. If the Government increased funding to local authorities in need and abolished the 20 per cent. contribution, they would take the sting out of what remains of the poll tax and we might then be able to have a proper debate on what should replace it.

The council tax could be the shortest-lived tax in recent history—even shorter than the poll tax. We will campaign for its abolition and vote against it, because it is a property tax, and property taxes have been shown to be unfair and expensive to administer. Our relief at the abolition of the poll tax does not mean that we will accept its cobbled-together, ill-thought-out and deeply flawed replacement. Only a local income tax is a practical, efficient, simple, easily introduced and, above all, fair means of raising local revenue. Some time in the next six months Ministers will have to justify to the electorate why they forced the untried poll tax and now the council tax on to the British people and, above all, why they have rejected a local income tax which not only meets every sound principle of local finance but has been proved to work in many other countries.

6.6 pm

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) has described the proposed council tax and any property-based tax as difficult and expensive to administer. That is rather rich, coming from a party that is putting forward a local income tax. I am reassured by the fact that the Liberal Democrats stick to the idea of a local income tax, because a local income tax is everything that we would expect from that party. It sounds absolutely marvellous. It sounds like the simple solution for which everyone has been looking. However, it does not stand up to examination. That is true of much of what the hon. Gentleman's party says. The Liberal Democrats think that they can get away with skating over the surface of problems.

The hon. Gentleman thinks that the council tax, or any other property tax, is difficult and expensive to administer. How does he square that with a proposal that would have everybody inside a council area paying a lump sum to the council and later receiving a rebate because they had paid

[Mr. Robert G. Hughes]

too much? That is in the hon. Gentleman's party's proposal. It is no good the hon. Gentleman shaking his head. If he was putting forward a serious proposal, he would have explained it. The hon. Gentleman has sat down now—he has had his chance. He should have explained his proposal when he was on his feet. If his proposal is not expensive and difficult to administer, I should like to know what is.

Mr. Wallace: The hon. Gentleman needs to ask why, in all our discussions with Ministers and Secretaries of State—the Scottish National party also put forward a local income tax—it was never argued that what we were proposing was impractical or difficult to administer. The objections have been narrow political ones, never ones of practicability. We still await practical objections from Ministers who examined our proposal.

Mr. Hughes: I had always thought that Orkney and Shetland was a fairly realistic constituency, but I now recognise that the hon. Gentleman lives in a dream world. He need only examine the speeches made by my right hon. and hon. Friends either from the Front Bench or at venues outside the House to know that they have specifically described the Liberal party's proposals as difficult, complex and unworkable.

My second objection to the Liberal party's scheme is that people would vote with their feet. If people in a particular area were to be charged a substantial amount in income tax, does the hon. Gentleman seriously think that young, mobile and professional people would choose to live in that place? My understanding of the Liberal party's proposals is that, on current spending, the London borough of Camden would have to levy a local income tax in excess of the standard rate of income tax—somewhere near 30p in the pound. Does the hon. Gentleman really think that, on that basis, anyone who could move would keep a house in the London borough of Camden or anywhere else where they would have to pay so much? I repeat that that is a typical Liberal party solution. It sounds good when it is discussed for five seconds, but it starts to fall to pieces when it is discussed for half a minute or longer.

In one sense, today's debate is a repeat of last week's debate on the Queen's Speech. I find it odd in the extreme that the Labour party should have taken up a whole precious day's debate in our response to the Gracious Speech to discuss the council tax when Opposition Members must have known—everybody else knew this, including the newspapers—that we were due to have a two-day debate on that subject this week. Looking at the Labour Benches, it seems that they have shot their own fox. Labour Members have not turned up and I understand that they did not turn up for the other debate.

Mr. McCartney: What about Conservative Members?

Mr. Hughes: We do not necessarily have to come along on such occasions. Although it does not do so with much conviction, the Labour party says that it is angry about our proposal. It says that the council tax is the poll tax mark II, but you could have fooled me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, given the heat generated from the Opposition and the number of them present.

I should like to rehearse the history of how we arrived at the council tax. It is important to remember what people objected to in the old rating system. First, people objected to the complicated system of valuations. When my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) spoke about reforming the rating system and about the community charge, which she ushered in, she always returned to the same basic point, asking whether people in England were to be saddled with a revaluation of their property after 17 years. She took the view strongly—and I agree with her——

Mr. Janman: They would be saddled with it under Labour's proposals.

Mr. Hughes: My hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman) is absolutely right to point out one of our basic objections to the Labour party's proposals, although I suspect that that is something that the Opposition will skate over in their normal way.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley was right in saying that the people of this country would have regarded an enormous difference in their rating bills as a result of the revaluation of their property unacceptable when that property might not have changed in any material sense. The problems of the rating system were focused when people made any minor change to their property. If, for example, someone put in a downstairs loo, up went the rates bill. It was right to say that that system must go. Indeed, at that time there was cross-party consensus that the rating system was wrong, unfair and had to go.

Mr. Janman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way again, especially since I share an office with him. Does he agree that not only does the Labour party not want to discuss this Bill, but it does not want to discuss the bills that will land on people's mats if its system is put into practice?

Mr. Hughes: That is absolutely right. The fact that my hon. Friend makes such a good point leads me to understand why he keeps such massive quantities of paper around his desk in our office.

The second reason why people objected to the old rating system was that it was unfair to people living alone. Again, the Opposition parties always skate over that argument. The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland talked with some hilarity about the mythical widow living by herself next door to several wage earners who occupied an identical house. However, we all know as Members of Parliament—and many of us were councillors before being elected to this House—that that situation did and does exist. That problem had to be addressed, and that is what the community charge did.

The third problem with the rating system was the ability of Labour councils—or of councils in which the Labour party was kept in power by the Liberal party—to overspend and to hide the results from the voters. Because of the way in which council rents were collected, many people did not realise that they were paying rates to the local authority. When I was a Conservative candidate in the London borough of Tower Hamlets, people there thought that it was marvellous that the local Labour council had frozen the rents for several years. However, because of the way in which they were billed, they did not necessarily realise that their rates bill had overtaken their

rent bill. They were paying far more in rates than in rent, but the Labour party hid that from people, pretending that the rates somehow did not apply to them——

Mr. Blunkett: To clarify that point—we might as well have a sensible debate if we are to have one at all on this Bill——

Mr. Janman: Sit down then.

Mr. Blunkett: That is about the level of debate that we have come to expect from Conservative Members, and especially from the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman).

Perhaps the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) will explain how the tenants in Tower Hamlets did not understand that their rates had increased despite the fact that they had to be billed each year for the rates increase when he believes that they understood that their rents had not increased because they had been frozen. If they were billed for rates and rents combined and their rates had increased, their bills must have increased even if their rent had been frozen. Therefore, because of the frozen rents, they should have known that their rates had increased. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will explain how the tenants, whom he believes were so ignorant that they did not understand that their rates had increased, managed to miss that fact when their bills as a whole had increased.

Mr. Hughes: It is not I who believe that council tenants are ignorant. Indeed, at that time my wife and my in-laws were council tenants in that borough and I am certainly not saying that they were ignorant. I am saying that the billing system and the fact that it was not possible to prosecute tenants for non-payment of the rates either led them to believe in some cases that paying the rates was something that they could get out of or they were persuaded by the Labour council that it was the Government's fault. The fact is that the Labour party managed to hide behind the old system and anyone who is a former leader of a Labour council, such as the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), knows that that is true.

Fourthly, it is clear that the tax base of the rating system was too narrow. Given that very few people believed that they were responsible for the rates, something had to be done about the system. Again, that was a matter of consensus.

Given that there were all those objections to the rating system, why did people object so strongly—as clearly they did—to the community charge or poll tax? I put it down to two things. The first is the size of the bills. It is inevitable that people's view of a tax is directly linked to the size of the bill that they have to pay. The figures that were projected by my right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) were not exactly those on the bills with which we ended up. That was one of the major factors that contributed to people losing confidence in that system—*[Interruption.]* My right hon. Friend goes from strength to strength and from interesting statement to interesting statement, but we shall leave that for another debate on another day.

Secondly, and probably more importantly, people of different wealth, at least as judged by the size of their home, appeared to pay exactly the same. We had stories about people living in a small rented flat paying the same as someone in the stockbroker belt up the road. On the face of it, that appeared to be true but everyone in the House knows that in reality the tax paid by the individuals in the two examples that I cited could differ by a ratio of as much as 25:1. However, principally for the reason that I gave, the poll tax did not match up to the British sense of fair play, which runs deep in our society, so the poll tax, rightly, had to go.

The Labour party has blamed the poll tax for almost all ills. First, it has blamed the poll tax for most of what has happened in local government for the past few years. It did so to hide its embarrassment about Labour's record in local government. Let us take Birmingham as an example of a Labour authority. We are told that there are many services which it would fund if it were not for the poll tax. Such services, perhaps more nursery education, housing and so on, could have been funded if the authority had not paid for 149 trips to 31 countries in the past year or so. *[Interruption.]* I will give way to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) if he is prepared to speak on his feet. Opposition Members may think that that was a good use of public money. They may think that the councillor and top officials who went to Italy to see the preparations for England's match in the world cup was a good use of chargepayers' money. I do not. Perhaps the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central would like to justify it.

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that some of those trips may well have brought some of the inward investment which Department of Trade and Industry Ministers have been asking to attract for a considerable period? If the hon. Gentleman criticises areas such as Birmingham, he could also criticise areas such as Sheffield, which ran the world student games. We went and looked at some of the best sports facilities in the world and now the Ponds Forge swimming complex in Sheffield is bringing a tremendous amount of activity to Sheffield and a tremendous amount of kudos to British sport. In 1993 we will stage the European swimming championships. That is the vision of Labour authorities. It is unfortunate that the Conservative party is so negative.

Mr. Hughes: Nevertheless, I wonder whether the advantages to Sheffield will amount to enough to justify the £1·5 million spent on renovating 700 flats to house the athletes and the £250,000 spent on attracting the student games in the first place.

Mr. Caborn: It brought investment.

Mr. Hughes: That may be true. That is a judgment which Labour councils have to make. They must face the chargepayers with that. However, it is doubtful that they will be able to do so logically.

Mr. Mans: Does my hon. Friend agree that the money spent by Sheffield city council on renovating those flats for the athletes could have been better spent on renovating other flats for people really in need of housing? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Hughes: Opposition Members are asking from a sedentary position who is in those flats now. The interesting question is whether the council would have renovated the flats otherwise. We see Labour spending priorities here.

Perhaps international relations are catching in the west midlands. Coventry is twinned with so many places that its council has had to set up a department of international

[Mr. Hughes]

relations. Will Opposition Members tell me that that is peanuts, to use their word in earlier interventions? Will they tell us that the department was set up without full backup? If Opposition Members are so confident that that was money well spent, can they tell me what the bill was?

The Labour party has blamed the community charge for many things, including the inability of Labour councils to spend money in priority areas. The Labour party's own priorities have led to that. It also sought to divert the debate from the level of spending that its policies entail. That is why we hear repeatedly from the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) the assertion that it would be easy to implement Labour's plans. Labour Members want to make people assume that it would be easy and cheap to introduce another system and that the billions of pounds which need to be raised can be raised easily.

Any system of raising local government finance is subject to councils' spending plans. Councils must take responsibility for what happens in their area. The hon. Member for Dagenham would not give way when I sought to intervene in his speech. He compared what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State would pay in Westminster—£273 on current estimates—with the average bill in Middlesbrough of £447. He described the system as surcharge that families would have to pay for the continued life of a Tory Government. High bills are a surcharge not for the continued life of the Tory Government but for having a Labour council. Rotten services and high bills: that is the double surcharge that people pay. It is not for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to apologise for paying a lower bill than people in other parts of the country. It is for the Labour party to look at who is controlling those councils.

The Labour party pretends that the council tax is unduly complex and difficult to administer but that Labour's scheme is simple and easy. Any suggestion that a change in the system of raising local taxation can be simple and easy lacks credibility. If the Labour party really believes that its system will be simple, it must come forward with the figures. I notice that it is reluctant to come up with specific figures to show what its spending plans would mean. It said that it would produce such figures during the Queen's Speech debate. It has not done so. I know that the Labour party does not like to get into specifics, but it will have to learn that between now and election day it will have to come up with specifics if it is to be taken seriously.

The new tax combines the ease of collection and the property base of the rating system with a new simplified system of valuations which people will see as fair, reasonable and just. People will accept that the broad value of the property should be used rather than the specific valuation, based on a notional rented value, to which the Labour party wants to return.

The Labour party is floundering in this broad debate because it knows that the council tax is widely regarded as fair and reasonable.

Mr. Maxton: Did the hon. Gentleman vote for the poll tax?

Mr. Hughes: If the hon. Gentleman has not been following my speech, I am happy to start again for his benefit. If he had followed it, he would understand.

The Labour party must take on board the important point that any change in the system of local taxation means that some people will pay less and some will pay more. But the Labour party wants to sell its scheme as one which has only winners. Such a scheme does not exist. If it laid out the details, people would know that that was the case. They will understand that that is the case even though the Labour party hopes to hide it from them. That simply is not possible and the Labour party knows it.

Regional banding has been raised by some of my parliamentary neighbours. I fundamentally agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) that a regional banding system would not be practicable. There are areas in Britain where property prices are akin to those in London. Therefore, a regional system of banding would create more difficulties than it would solve.

I hope that the Ministers who wind up the debate tonight or open it tomorrow will take into account the fact that some councillors in London are worried that, because of the value of properties in the city, some money will flow out of London as a result of the grant settlement. When the grant for the coming year is announced, and also for the first year of the council tax, we want the Government to ensure that money does not flow out of London and that the £200 million that has been suggested by the London Boroughs Association is taken into account and kept within boroughs for them to use.

It has been suggested that introducing the council tax is so difficult that authorities will not be able to do it in time. That is an attack on the local authorities concerned by the Labour party which does not do them justice. We should take fully into account the fact that it will be difficult for local authorities to implement the council tax but also that it would be difficult to implement any change. We should understand that. Rather than listen to the words of the Labour party, saying that it would be impossible to introduce the council tax by 1993, I would prefer to take the word of the Audit Commission. Although in paragraph 13 of its response to the Government it said that the

"government's proposed timetable is extremely tight",

it recommends an April 1993 introduction and believes that that will be possible.

I urge the Labour party to take a more positive attitude towards helping local authorities with the obvious difficulties that they will face.

As regards the London boroughs grant scheme in clause 103 of the Bill, I welcome the reserve scheme—as Conservative-controlled boroughs will certainly welcome it. Year after year there have been difficulties with the grant scheme. The problem has been that Labour adventurism has put worthwhile and important projects in danger, while Labour and Liberal members seek to blackmail morally Conservative Members on the scheme to agree an excessive level of funding. Some areas which should not be are funded by the grants scheme.

I welcome the reserve scheme in the Bill, but I ask my hon. Friends to consider one change. It is not adequate for one of the criteria for the grants scheme to be that any scheme funded by it should apply to two or more boroughs. That definitely leads to abuse. Some schemes are deliberately pushed across to a neighbouring borough, whether it needs the scheme or not, so that they qualify for funding, unless someone notices and pounces on it. I suggest that either four or six should be the minimum number before a scheme receives funding.

If my reading of schedule 3 of the Bill is correct, I think that the penalty for wrongful claim of discount, would be a £50 fine. If people wrongfully claim a discount, a relatively substantial amount is involved and the penalty should more equally fit the crime. There should be a range of penalties to fit the intent of the person who makes a wrongful claim, which is undoubtedly theft. People should understand that it is not merely a technical matter but theft from neighbours and local friends.

Lastly, I welcome clauses 104 to 110 which restrict voting for non-payers. In one way or another, most members of the Labour party have at least gone along with the tactics of non-payers. They have made a mistake as they have underestimated the feelings of the people that they represent. The law breaking involved makes most people utterly sick and they have no respect for those who urge non-payment or who tacitly go along with it.

Most people will welcome those clauses and I look forward to hearing what the Labour party has to say.

Finally—I am sure that Opposition Members will be delighted to hear that I have only one more thing to say. In the debate on the Queen's Speech the hon. Member for Dagenham was looking for support from Conservatives to ensure that the Bill receives proper scrutiny. I can give him and his hon. Friends one assurance: I want the Bill to receive proper scrutiny in Committee because that will reveal the hollowness of the Labour party's opposition. It will reveal the holes and the threadbare nature of the Opposition's proposal. I want to ensure that the Bill gets proper scrutiny because by so doing we shall dish the Labour party's proposals.

6.35 pm

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): The hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) has uttered more "finallys" than Frank Sinatra.

Since it seems to be fashionable to quote party leaders tonight, Conservative Members may find it useful to hear the Prime Minister's words. On 1 July 1988, when speaking on the poll tax at the annual conference of the Association of District Councils, he said:

"Once implemented and through the transition, I believe the new system will prove enduring and a vast improvement on the status quo."

A year ago, on 24 November, when he was the victor in the coup within the Conservative party, he said in the *Daily Mail*:

"I'll tell you about the poll tax. We were bounced into it quickly because there was such a fuss about rates in Scotland and we were bounced without thinking because of the political fuss."

That is what we have for a Prime Minister—someone who gets bounced into something without thinking, who imposes it on Scotland a year ahead of the rest of Britain and then, still unthinking, imposes it on the rest of the United Kingdom.

I am sorry that the Secretary of State for the Environment gave up listening to the debate a few hours ago. Perhaps when he reads it tomorrow he will recall that the poll tax was imposed in Scotland against our will. He did not oppose it. He became conscious of the poll tax and its defects only when it became applicable to England and Wales.

Now the Government are trying to impose the council tax against our will. How many Kincardines does it take to tell them? When are they going to listen? Do they have to lose every seat in Scotland before they start to pay attention to the views of the electorate in Scotland?

I notice that some of the more right-wing Conservative Members have already given up on Scotland and could not care less if they never won another seat there because they hope to gain permanent government of England. However, if they will not listen to the people of Scotland perhaps they will listen to the people of Langbaurgh, because it is clear from last week that they have not restored their support there. With all the promises of a change from poll tax to council tax, there was hardly an overwhelming response in support of the Conservatives.

The estimated cost of collecting the new council tax would be £185 million, we have been told, but I am not clear exactly who estimated that. Could it possibly have been the same people who assured us that the poll tax would be only slightly dearer to collect than the rates, when the Government were told by every authority in the land—by all those people with expertise in such matters—that it would be far dearer to collect and so it proved? It has cost hundreds of millions of pounds. The money that the Government have wasted in setting up and collecting the poll tax makes the Western Isles council look like models of sound financial management.

As regards valuation bands, while the Government have decided on eight bands for different parts of the United Kingdom, so far in the debate there has been no discussion of the fact that in Scotland properties in band A will be worth up to £27,000. That may not seem a substantial sum—to people paying yuppie prices in London it will seem like nothing at all—but in the remoter areas of Scotland, including the isles, some properties can be worth considerably less than £27,000, perhaps about £20,000 or even less. Thus a gross unfairness is being perpetrated against people who live in rural properties which are so much less valuable. I hope that, even at this stage, the Government will take account of that fact. They should take account of that possible injustice. It seems that caravans and boats will be included in band A if they are worth less than £27,000. Some of the boats moored in Loch Lomond are not worth tuppence, and it is remarkable that the Government propose to levy any tax at all on them.

Conservative Members have spent more time criticising the old rating system and Labour local authorities than they have spent debating the Bill. There were some advantages in the rating system. A council could decide how much it needed and add together the total value of its domestic properties and calculate the rate poundage. That meant that householders paid exactly their fair proportion. The problem with bands is that people who fall on the wrong side of a band will pay far more than someone whose house is worth very little less. The Government do not seem to have addressed that problem. Under rate poundage, the amount that people paid was in direct proportion to the value of their house and that could allow for fine differences in house values. Under the council tax, a person who falls into another band by only a few pounds will end up paying much more money. That is bound to cause resentment.

Another flaw in the system is the Government's plan to use estate agents to carry out a massive valuation. A few years ago, when I wanted to sell my flat, I decided to ask three estate agents in the neighbourhood to value it in order to get a good idea of the price it would fetch.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Alan Stewart): The hon. Lady will be aware that in Scotland the valuation will be carried out by assessors.

Mrs. Fyfe: I am speaking not only about Scotland. I am sorry if I did not make that clear. I am making the general point about estate agents being brought in. The Minister says that assessors will be used in Scotland. Why not use assessors throughout the United Kingdom? *[Interruption.]* The three estate agents that I called in arrived at three different valuations for the flat in the same week. How do the Government propose to solve that problem?

Mr. Wallace: There are different bands.

Mrs. Fyfe: That is not the point. One estate agent might place a property in band B while another could put it in band C. How is the owner supposed to know the true valuation of his house? Have the Government addressed that question?

Dr. Hampson: They must be pretty crummy estate agents if there is a difference of £40,000 in their valuations. The hon. Lady does not seem to understand what is proposed, which is that houses will not have a specific valuation. There is no question of people feeling that they are on the edge and should be in another band. They will be in a broad category and will not have a precise value.

Mrs. Fyfe: One can be in a broad category and still fall into a different band because of a few pounds. The hon. Gentleman says that they must be pretty crummy estate agents. We know that there are many crummy estate agents. That is why we objected to the whole idea in the first place. Will there be quality control of estate agents and, if so, may we have more details? Will they have to pass a test of competence in valuation?

There are only eight bands, and those on the top band will pay three times the amount paid by those on the lowest band. However, their incomes may be considerably more than three times the incomes of those on the lowest band. Conservative Members have expended a great deal of energy on attacking us for daring to propose a national minimum wage of £3·40 per hour. Many people whose houses are likely to fall into band H should be in bands —if we must have bands—well beyond that. Their incomes may not be merely three times £3·40 an hour but perhaps 30 times that amount, or more. That is another fundamental objection to banding. At the top end some wealthy people will pay nothing like their fair share of the council tax. It is only a slight move from the basic injustice of the poll tax, which was that, with few exceptions, the duke and the dustman paid the same amount.

Some hon. Members have talked about single people and widows. I am a widow, but on my salary I do not think that it would be right for me to receive special treatment. It should be a case of paying according to ability to pay. Not all widows or single people are poor. Wealthy single people should pay their fair share and there is no reason for any discount. Obviously for people who are poor it is an entirely different matter.

Mr. Wallace: The hon. Lady says that people should pay according to their ability. May we sign her up for local income tax?

Mrs. Fyfe: No. Tory Members dodged the problem of a local income tax, which is the difficulty of collecting it. A company with branches across the United Kingdom would be expected to collect different local income taxes for people in towns and cities throughout the United Kingdom. Why should that firm bother? What is in it for the company? If such firms are paid to carry out the job, how could we be sure that they were doing it correctly? The money may be paid to central Government, but I would not trust this Government to dispense it fairly to local authorities. It is a fair idea in principle, but it is not practical.

Unlike Conservative Members, I do not intend to filibuster. It has been said that there will be no need for a register for the council tax. Thousands of people evaded being registered because they could not afford to pay the poll tax and came off the electoral roll. They deprived themselves of the right to vote because of a tax that they could not afford. Will the Government spend some money on advertising to tell people that they should have no fears about this tax? If the Government are sure that it is a fair tax, they should be prepared to encourage people to get back on the electoral roll. Of course it is still an unfair tax, and many people will still feel that they cannot afford what is proposed and will deprive themselves of the right to vote.

As I have said, there has been deliberate filibustering and time wasting. The Government hope to get the Bill through by Christmas, but Conservative Members have wasted time by criticising Labour local authorities or quoting what people have said about Labour's proposals, instead of discussing their Bill. If they carry on in the same way in Committee, I hope that the Chairman will make vigorous efforts to stop them. If the Government hope to succeed in their aim of getting the Bill through in a few weeks, they had better make sure that the debate is about the Bill and is not time-wasting nonsense.

6.48 pm

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): One of the main reasons for the Bill is that the rates system that existed for many decades was totally discredited in the 1970s and early 1980s. I speak from a certain amount of experience, having been a deputy leader of a district council. I saw what went on across the country, particularly in areas controlled by the Labour party and especially in inner-city areas. A remark by the former Labour leader of Liverpool city council makes the point much better than I could. He said:

"Frankly, we have put the interests of the providers of the service, the workforce, above the interests of the tenants."

That sums up a great deal of what went wrong with the old rating system. The Labour party turned a system of a consensus into a system of overtaxation for a minority of people within a borough. As a result, the system became untenable.

All that contributed greatly to a lack of good services in our inner-city areas, where there was a lack of accountability, too much bureaucracy, too many new departments being set up to do questionable things, and a low collection rate for both rates and rent. It is sometimes forgotten that in Labour boroughs not only has the community charge not been collected over the past two years, but the rates were not collected over many decades. That is one of the problems in many large cities such as Liverpool.

Fewer and fewer good services were being provided in those Labour boroughs. It is interesting to note that in Liverpool, the only time in living memory that the rubbish has been collected on time has been during the past four months, when the city council decided to put out the refuse collection to tender. Previously, it had been costing that council £16 million to collect the rubbish. The council's direct labour force decided that it could do the job for £8 million. In fact, the contract went to a private contractor for £4 million. The rubbish in that city is being collected much more efficiently for £4 million than it ever was for £16 million under the direct labour force. That is just one example of what happened in inner-city areas controlled by the Labour party, and continued for years, if not decades. It is one reason why the old rating system became discredited and had to be changed.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): If the hon. Gentleman is so convinced that the old rating system was untenable and unworkable, can he explain why his Government, as late as October 1983—only 15 months before they introduced the idea of a poll tax—said in a White Paper that rates were a fair system of local taxation and would be the local tax system in place for the foreseeable future? Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it was the blind panic in the Tory party over revaluation in Scotland in 1985 that led to the end of the old rating system, and that it had nothing to do with what the Government thought about the system in England and Wales?

Mr. Mans: I agree with the hon. Gentleman to the extent that if the old rating system was fair at all, it was fair in those areas controlled by the Conservative party, where there were not excessive increases in rates. The hon. Gentleman knows that for a number of decades the Tory party has been committed to producing a better system for financing local government. Indeed, the hon. Gentleman put his finger on an important point: one reason why the rating system became discredited was the difficulty of carrying out a revaluation exercise. I must point out that that exercise was skipped over again and again by the Labour party when it was in government. It refused to carry out a revaluation because it understood that there would be difficulties with the electorate when it was put into practice. In many ways, it was unfortunate that the old rating system became discredited and we had to come up with a new system.

All that I want to say about the community charge is that while I do not fully agree that the principle was wrong, its implementation undoubtedly caused a number of complications.

Mr. McCartney: Excuses.

Mr. Mans: The hon. Gentleman may think that they are excuses, but the way that the implementation of the community charge was used by Labour councils to increase considerably the amount of money that individuals had to pay to their local authorities meant that the system had to be modified, if not changed. One of the most disreputable actions during the past few years was that of a number of councils—notably Labour, and especially Labour county councils such as Lancashire—which deliberately increased the amount of the community charge for those on slender means. They hoped that they could push them into believing that the Labour party had the right solution in wanting to return to the old rating system and that it was the fault of the Conservative Government that they had to pay considerably more to local councils.

Dr. Hampson: I accept everything that my hon. Friend has said about Labour councils, but is it not about time that some of us stopped saying, rather defensively, that the principle of the community charge was correct—that principle being that everybody should pay the same amount? We acknowledged that that was wrong when we started to introduce rebate scheme after rebate scheme and reduction scheme after reduction scheme, which meant that the majority of people were not paying the same amount.

Dr. Mans: I have considerable sympathy with what my hon. Friend says. The main point is that simply because of the size of the charge and because a number of councils increased it—and not just Labour, in this case—well above that originally intended, it appeared to be most unequal. In that respect, I agree that because of the number of rebates that had to be introduced it became clear that the system needed to be changed. The new tax at least takes into account our experience of the community charge and, indeed, our experience of the old rating system—which, despite all its faults, was a simple tax, whereas the community charge was a complicated tax. I agree with my hon. Friend that the community charge became increasingly difficult to operate properly.

Although it is a pity that, once again, we are having to change the system of local government finance, I am having great difficulty coming to terms with the Labour party's idea that the best way forward for the 1990s is to return to the discredited system of the 1970s and 1980s. I cannot imagine many people, including many Labour supporters, going along with a system that goes back to the sort of inequalities that I have mentioned. We must learn from the experience of the past few years—both in trying a system that should have been fairer and from a system that clearly was not fair—to produce a system that takes the best of both previous systems and is also simpler.

In debating the new tax, both now and in Committee, we must look closely at some of the major problems with the community charge and try to iron them out before the Bill becomes law. The problems that need to be sorted out now, rather than later, are those associated with people who move around a great deal. Perhaps they work abroad, are in the armed services or the merchant marine, or are fishermen. People in my constituency have found themselves in difficulty both with the old rating system and, more specifically, the community charge. I hope that we will consider those whose occupations mean that they do not stay in one place for very long or move around at regular intervals, and ensure that they are not penalised as against those who stay in one place for a long time.

One lesson that has been learnt during the past few years is that people expect the Government to protect them against high-spending local councils. It is therefore important that there are stringent capping mechanisms, not only for this April, but for the next few years under the new council tax system. Ultimately, people at local level still believe that the Government have an obligation to stop high-spending councils taxing them too heavily. Unlike Labour, we understand the need to prevent over-taxation and over-spending by local councils, using

[Dr. Mans]

the capping mechanisms in the Bill. We understand also the need to give some kind of rebate to people living on their own. Again, that was a particular inequality with the old rating system. Many widows living in the houses that they occupied when their spouses were alive ended up paying the same amount to the local council, despite the fact that they were living on reduced incomes. I am pleased that the Bill recognises and deals with that particular problem.

Most important of all, we have devised a simpler and fairer system of raising local finance. I believe that we must give councils some method of raising finance locally, and that the council tax will provide the fairest method of doing so.

7 pm

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): At the end of yesterday's Remembrance Day parade in Neath, I enjoyed the hospitality of the Royal British Legion. One of the ex-service men present asked me about the council tax, and I sought his own view. He was quite blunt. He said, "The Government are on the fiddle again." I have to agree with him.

Although the Bill says that it will abolish the community charge—more accurately the poll tax—it will be with us until at least 1993, and even then there is some doubt about whether the Government will be able to introduce their new tax, assuming of course that they are re-elected.

Over the past 18 months, there has been an incredible waste of literally billions of pounds, which have been poured down the drain as a result of the poll tax. The Local Government Information Unit calculates on current figures that the cost to the country will be £19 billion by the end of the year 1992-93. The LGIU estimates that every week the extra cost of continuing the poll tax amounts to £170 million. Every week, money is being poured down the drain.

Imagine what could be done with £19 billion, which is being wasted with such reckless abandon. Imagine what could be done in terms of investing in new housing, schools and hospitals, and in industry and jobs that could put the country back to work and prepare it for the threat of 1992 and economic integration with Europe.

We have seen under the poll tax, and will see under the council tax, the rich freeloading off the rest. There is the classic example of the Duke of Westminster, whose old rates bill was £10,400. His inititial poll tax bill fell to £400—the same as his chauffeur, butler or gardener. With the £140 rebate announced by the Secretary of State for the Environment earlier this year, presumably the Duke of Westminster's poll tax bill is now just below £300. Under the council tax, he may have to pay between £500 and £600. How can that collapse in the Duke of Westminster's payment, from more than £10,000 to £500 or £600, be justified?

Mr. Mans: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that he retains a home in Wandsworth—the home of many champagne socialists—for which he pays nothing?

Mr. Hain: I am happy to confirm that I continue to retain a home in Putney in addition to my main residence in Neath. I am happy to confirm also that I continue to pay community charge in Putney, in addition to the full charge that I pay in Neath—though what that has to do with the debate, nobody knows.

I spoke of the monumental waste that has occurred under the poll tax, and I shall now refer to its monumental incompetence. There are £1·5 billion in uncollected arrears, requiring 7·5 million summonses by the end of the year. With crime soaring and the courts clogged up with criminal cases as a consequence of the Government's incompetence in other areas of their policy responsibilities, it is an incredible diversion of resources and effort to allow the courts to be clogged up with poll tax cases. Instead of concentrating on the real criminals, the Government are prosecuting people as a result of their own incompetence and failure to deliver a proper local authority finance system.

Over the years, the Conservatives have claimed to be the party combating waste and inefficiency, but the Government were responsible for the most wasteful and inefficient system of local tax collection possible to devise. If the Government intend to abolish the 20 per cent. rule in respect of the council tax, why not abolish it now in respect of the community charge? Such a measure could be introduced immediately as part of the Bill and would relieve a great deal of repression and injustice for some of the poorest members of our communities. It would also relieve local authorities, for whom the expense of collecting the tiny revenue that they enjoy under the 20 per cent. rule exceeds the income that it produces. The Audit Commission estimated that for every £15 spent by local authorities collecting the poll tax under the 20 per cent. rule, they receive only £6 in return.

Mr. Janman: The hon. Gentleman urges the Government to introduce the council tax even more quickly, yet the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) accused the Government of being too hasty. Which does the hon. Gentleman want?

Mr. Hain: The hon. Gentleman did not listen. I said that if there is to be any consistency in the Government's actions, they should abolish the 20 per cent. rule in respect of the poll tax immediately. That could be done today or tomorrow, if the Secretary of State were willing.

The legacy of the poll tax still hangs over, for example, the constituents whom I represent and affects them in a punitive and discriminatory fashion. The latest twist in this sorry saga is that the poorest and often oldest members of that community pay the same as those of us who have a decent income. One of my constituents is a retired person on income support who has a home overlooking the Gnoll, which is the home of Neath rugby club. He wrote to me asking why he had not received the full £140 reduction promised by the Government when they tried to sugar the bitter poll tax pill earlier this year.

It transpires that, whereas a full charge payer such as myself living in the valley of Resolven was levied an average rate of £229·54 last year, this year we are paying an average of £79·17—£140 less. However, someone receiving benefits, such as the retired resident on income support who wrote to me, who was paying £65·18 last year, received only a £20 reduction this year and is now paying £45·18. In other words, he is paying just £34 less than the richest charge payer in Neath, compared with £164 less last year. How can that be just and equitable?

I want the Secretary of State for Wales to justify the way in which that discriminatory system is penalising my constituents—many of whom are least able to bear the brunt of ever-increasing costs as a result of the Government's incompetence. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members may shout and scream, but let them come and explain to my constituents how the situation I described can be justified.

My constituents know that if they vote Labour—as they will in their tens of thousands—and if a Labour Government are elected, as I am confident will happen next year, we will have a fair rates system that ensures that the poorest members of the community will pay no community charge at all, and that those who can afford to pay towards local government finance will be levied at a fair and just rate.

In preparing to implement the council tax, the Government are still starving local authorities in Wales of the finance that they need. Their standard spending assessments are ridiculously out of line with local needs, and are a figment of the imagination of the Welsh Office, and of the Department of the Environment in respect of the rest of the United Kingdom.

Mr. David Hunt: That has nothing whatever to do with the Department of the Environment. Standard spending assessments are worked out after close consultation with the Council of Welsh Districts and the Assembly of Welsh Counties. The SSAs to which the hon. Gentleman has referred were suggested and agreed by those bodies. He should acknowledge that, as I do, for they have done some fine work in reaching such agreements.

Mr. Hain: The Secretary of State is right to clarify that technical issue. My point is that—as I am sure the right hon. Gentleman will be ready to concede—the assessments are set following his imposition of financial disciplines and restrictions on local authorities. It is those restrictions that are causing the cuts that are being made in local services, thus placing local provision with local needs.

On 25 July, I raised the problem of West Glamorgan county council with the Minister of State, Welsh Office, but nothing has been done. The council's net revenue budget for the current year stands at £242 million. Education accounts for £138 million of that, social services for £28 million and environment and highways for £15 million. As the Secretary of State will doubtless acknowledge, the county council is renowned for providing a better standard of nursery education than almost every other authority for 90 per cent. of three-year-olds; it is almost famed for its provision of music and drama in schools.

Although the council has a reputation for financial prudence, the Government's financial restrictions are causing it to run into a brick wall. Moreover, next year it will need to spend an additional 6 per cent.—£11 million—just to meet the additional statutory obligations that the Government are placing on it. These are not optional spending measures proposed by a profligate council; they are obligations required by the Government, and requiring 6 per cent. real growth.

The demographic changes resulting from the fact that school rolls are beginning to rise again, together with increased student participation in higher education, will add an extra £1·5 million to West Glamorgan's spending. National curriculum support measures will require an extra £500,000. Local management of schools and colleges, the provision of extra computer systems, administrative support and training for staff and governors will require an additional £400,000. Special educational needs identifed by the Education Act 1981—the provision is not discretionary—will require an extra £500,000, which the county will have to find from its local charge payers.

I am informed that the maintenance of school buildings will require an additional £1·5 million, against a maintenance backlog of £20 million. Clearly, the full demand is not being met. As for social service provision, the Children Act 1989—introduced by the present Government—requires additional support for families, which means that an additional £500,000 will be needed.

The Government have unceremoniously dumped on local authorities such as West Glamorgan a variety of community care responsibilities, which will require an additional £750,000 or so. Mental handicap and mental illness provision will require an extra £300,000. The Government have imposed many other obligations on the council; it must, for instance, spend an extra £5 million on upgrading highways. If there is no change in the existing financial provision, West Glamorgan will be unable to meet the Government's requirements without making savage cuts.

This year, the council has been allocated an increase of just 6 per cent. Of that, 1 per cent. has already been committed for the full-year effects of this year's pay award to staff, principally teaching staff. The Secretary of State has assumed that some 4·5 per cent. will cover price and pay rises. In other words, 5·5 per cent. of that 6 per cent. has already been swallowed up, leaving just 0·5 per cent. to cover any additional award above the 4·5 per cent. that teachers may receive.

Against that background, how can the introduction of the council tax possibly be just? This is a charter for the rich. The banding system is deeply unfair. The Prime Minister himself told the *Financial Times* on 27 November 1990, "Banding does not work." I agree with that assessment.

Dr. Hampson: The Prime Minister was referring to income banding, which was then the subject of debate. He was not talking about banding in relation to property values.

Mr. Hain: The Prime Minister was referring to banding in the context of the circumstances. [HON. MEMBERS: "Withdraw."]

Let us look at the way in which the Secretary of State has applied the banding system to Wales. The top band covers properties valued at £240,000 and above. I can tell the House that there are not many such properties in Neath; they can be counted on one hand. Although such properties are worth at least eight times as much as those in the lowest band, their occupants will pay only three times more than the owners of those properties. The Secretary of State, who owns a property in Westminster, will pay a little more than twice what will be paid by the average charge payer in Neath; yet his property is worth 10 times as much. How can that possibly be just? How can the right hon. Gentleman possibly defend such an inequity to my constituents?

Mr. Janman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hain: No, I will not.

The Secretary of State's salary is now about £1,200 a week, 10 times the average income of a couple of pensioners living in the average property in Neath. Many people in my constituency will feel that they are subsidising rich residents in England and elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Moreover, the system centralises financial provision to such an extent that just 8 per cent. is raised locally in Wales. If my local authorities wish to raise their expenditure by 1 per cent., they must increase council tax by 12 per cent.

Mr. Janman *rose*——

Mr. Hain: I have given way plenty of times; I will not do so again.

The council tax is hugely complicated. According to Neath borough council, it will be just as difficult to administer as the existing poll tax system. It will cause chaos: bills will arrive literally weeks before payment is due, and people will have only a few weeks in which to appeal against the bandings applied to them. This is a Heath Robinson proposal; it has simply been cobbled together.

I sympathise with the Secretary of State for Wales. He is a decent man fallen among knaves, trying to do an honest job on behalf of the people of Wales. He is far too sensible to have thought of this proposal off his own bat. He is steamrollering it through, knowing that it is nonsense. He has been very unlucky: his first Prime Minister dumped the poll tax on him and the second has burdened him with the council tax, which will be just as unpopular as its predecessor. It is a schizophrenic tax, unable to decide whether it is a head tax or a roof tax. That is one of the reasons why I believe that the people of Wales will reject it, and vote in a Labour Government next time.

7.18 pm

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): When I tried to raise some of the education issues with the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), he refused to let me intervene. I wished to make the simple point that the Labour party's "Fair Rates" document makes no reference to students, and to add that, in my view, our proposals offer students the best deal that they have been offered by any system of local finance.

It does not embarrass me at all to say that I did not approve of the principle of the community charge. I opposed it from the very beginning. My opposition goes back to 1979 and to the work done in the Department of the Environment when I was in it on the production of the 1981 Green Paper. It stated clearly that a flat rate charge could not cope with the scale of local authority expenditure and that it could not do so fairly. Experience has proved that to be the case.

When we considered the impact that such a system would have on my city of Leeds, when it was thought that it would be about £187 per head, we realised that that in itself would be disastrous. On that basis, about 80 per cent. of my constituents would have been worse off. However, the Leeds charge came out at about double that figure. It was therefore a disaster for towns in the north, particularly those that contained a high proportion of terraced property built around the turn of the century. I do not weep over its loss.

Although one can say good riddance to it, I do not wish there to be a return to the past, as the Opposition propose. The community charge system became more and more discredited. Some of my colleagues have accepted that it became discredited, but they are still trying to a certain degree to defend it. The reason that it became discredited on the scale and at the speed that it did was due to the efforts of the gentleman who introduced it, the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley).

Due to the way in which he handled its introduction, it did not have a cat in hell's chance of succeeding. Not only was there no capping of the excessive expenditure that Labour councils were bound to indulge in, but my right hon. Friend insisted that it should be introduced not as a phased tax but all in one year. Above all, he insisted on reducing the revenue support grant rather than increasing it, which is what all of us said was necessary to soften the blow.

The effect of those actions devastated the tax and meant that in no circumstances could the level be low enough to make it justifiable and acceptable. What happened reflects upon the competence and judgment of my right hon. Friend, as has been demonstrated again recently.

The Labour party document states that there should be a return to the old system and to the valuation of properties that was carried out in 1973. How can the Labour party believe that it is fair to value properties on the basis of the 1973 valuation? Do not the Opposition remember what happened in Scotland when properties there were revalued? Do they not realise what would happen to a young couple who bought a terraced cottage that had a traditionally low rateable value? Under the Labour party's proposal, that property would be revalued, which would have a devastating effect on the finances of that young couple. There would be the same backlash and bitterness as happened in Scotland.

If the people of Leeds want a Labour Government to be returned to power, they can be sure that property in Leeds, particularly that sought by young people, will have devastatingly raised valuations. Their bills will be higher than this year's community charge bills. Under our scheme, the bill for the average property in my constituency will be approximately halved compared with what people are expected to pay under the community charge. The headline bill—in Leeds about £400 per person—will instead be about £400 per house.

The Opposition have totally failed to grasp the banding concept. It is possible to have a relatively speedy valuation because no attempt will be made to place a specific value on every house. However, that is what the Labour party would do. After having introduced the outdated 1973 valuations, at some stage it would have a nationwide revaluation. A specific value would be placed on every house. There would be a return to all the anomalies that the old rating system caused. It would take a very long time to implement and would be very costly.

Moreover, the Labour party's system is guaranteed to penalise property improvement. If changes were made to a house that increased its value, the valuation would be increased; hence, one would pay more tax. It would be a major disincentive to property improvement. The value of banding is that it can be done speedily and quickly. It might even be possible for Members of Parliament to walk down the street and assess the approximate value of

property in one street compared with property in another. Moreover, if the bands are sufficiently wide, they will cope with any alterations and improvements to property.

My only hesitation is whether the two middle bands are wide enough. I argued passionately for a top higher band. But if a new kitchen were needed in an older property, it would cost about £10,000. The difference between the two bands in the middle is about £10,000. A slight extension of those bands could ease the extra cost that might be brought about by improvements.

The hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) said that there will be chaos when everyone appeals. I do not believe that that will happen. The difference between the sums of money in the different bands that people will have to pay is relatively small. It is probably not worth appealing about a difference of approximately £40. It is also conceivable that if one strays across a band because a property has been improved to the tune of approximately £10,000, one will not have to pay much extra.

Mrs. Fyfe: The hon. Gentleman believes that because there will be broad bands whole streets will be assessed in one go, not individually. If, however, an estate agent in England says, "I think that this street of properties is worth £35,000, or £45,000 or £58,000" and it is just on the borderline between bands, who will get the benefit of the doubt? Will it be the council, on the ground that the upper band would provide it with more money, or will it be the householder?

Dr. Hampson: I do not believe that there would be any complication. People will be told that their property comes within a certain band which ranges, say, from £52,000 to £68,000. They will not complain if they believe that their property is worth more than the band in which it has been allocated. If, however, they want to say that their property should be in the band below, it will be a simple matter of testing it on appeal. There will be a great deal of evidence, from the valuation office and market prices in the area, upon which to test it.

Opposition Members are desperately struggling to find every conceivable thing to carp at, because they know that the scheme will be relatively speedy to introduce and that it will work effectively. Compared with anything that they have dreamed up, it is a clear-cut, simple scheme. Their solution is to return to an outdated system and then to try to improve it. The consequent revaluations would cause mayhem, chaos and huge bills for those on the receiving end. The Opposition have not found a way round that problem.

The Labour party's document makes no reference to students. It preaches the virtues of helping all hardship cases, but the old rating system to which the Opposition wish to return would impose considerable costs on students, as it did before. University halls of residence had to pay for students. If students were in digs, they had to pay their share of the rates. Under this measure, universities will not be charged for halls of residence and students will not be liable to a council tax charge in the rent that they pay. The only problem relates to those students who are married to someone who is not a student, in which case there is a 25 per cent. discount.

Furthermore, we have not dealt clearly enough with the position of those students who may be living in the same property as their landlord. Landlords will have a 25 per cent. discount because they take in students, but will they pass on the full tax to the students? We must make it clear to students that they can appeal against their rent to a tribunal so that the tribunal can decide whether the landlord is overcharging them on the council tax element.

We must make our argument clear. Only today I received a document from the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals that shows that it does not understand. It fears that universities will have to pick up the tab, and it draws a sharp distinction between those who will be non-payers and those who will get 25 per cent. I should like to believe—we must make this clear—that only a very small proportion of students will contribute. The concept of the poll tax was that the more people there were in a property the more they paid, whereas under the council tax students will not add to but will deduct from the bill.

Of the 42·5 million adults in this country, only about 3 million are from households with more than two people. I never understood why we got in the tangled bureaucratic mess of the community charge to pick up the tiny amount of 3 million out of 42·5 million people. The council tax is related to the number of people in a house, but it offers more generous treatment for people such as students, who will not add to the household bill.

Have Ministers considered taxing people who accommodate students as a business the universal business rate rather than the property rate, and whether that might be a way of avoiding any burden falling on students? I raise that as an off-the-cuff thought.

We must also make it crystal clear how much shopkeepers, who gave us so much flak when we introduced the business rate and the community charge, will now be paying. They will still pay the universal business rate, but what will they contribute to the new council tax? The council bill must clearly show not only the precept for each level of local government but itemise what they are paying for street cleaning, for dustbin collection, for the police and for the various local government services.

The Labour party attacks us for not operating a fair system, yet the old rating system offered relief in the form of rebates. Labour now realises that that system of relief was not adequate. It therefore proposes a register of those who are eligible for relief. Its document says that it is against rebates.

"for which application has to be made."

Therefore, it proposes that as a result of computerisation at the Inland Revenue a local authority register will be established so that authorities are aware of the pensioners, those with disabilities and those on low incomes. Relief will then be offered to such people. That is a register-based system. Our system is not register based but claimant based.

The Labour party cannot have it both ways: it attacks the system either because it expects people to claim or because it requires a register. Of course it is a claimant-based system—no one has ever hidden that fact. People who can be eligible for up to 100 per cent. will claim for it, and then, as under the old system that worked simply and cheaply, it will be on the records. That is the system, with extensions, that we are now returning to.

The single person discount will not apply equally to the rich millionaire and to the poor elderly widow. The male millionaire will not get any rebates, whereas the single older widow will be eligible for substantial rebates, and a single unmarried mother with several children who is on

[Dr. Hampson]

income support will pay nothing. The reality that the Opposition overlook is that the combination of the single person discount and rebates of up to 100 per cent. make the council tax far fairer than the old rates, certainly fairer than the poll tax, and much fairer than the Labour party's proposals. For the elderly, and especially for students, it is a better deal than was offered by any previous alternative system of local government finance, and it is much fairer and is a better deal than what would be imposed by the Labour party.

7.35 pm

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Although we have gone over ground that we have gone over many times in the House, the debate has been extremely interesting. I make no apology for going over some of the ground again.

I recall the reform of local government—not local government finance—in the 1970s. By trying to reform finance without simultaneously considering local government's powers, boundaries and responsibilities we are making the same mistake as we made then.

We have two Bills—one for England and Wales and one for Scotland. Separate Bills were introduced for the poll tax. A Scottish Bill was introduced in 1986-87 because the Government panicked about local authority finance for Scotland.

We have heard much in the past weekend, if not before, about the concept of the mandate. Labour Members from Scotland—some of them at least—have raised that concept. The Liberal Democrats, particularly their leader, have suggested that the Government have no moral authority in Scotland. It is strange that that point is being made because of a shift of about 1,000 votes in a constituency. But the Government had no moral authority in Scotland in 1987. The Scottish people overwhelmingly rejected their policy.

We must consider the mandate not in party terms but in personal terms. I sought a mandate from my constituents to oppose the poll tax and made it plain exactly what I would do.

Mr. McCartney: Seek a fresh one.

Mr. Douglas: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, for whom I have some affection, or to any other Labour Member who can tell me what part of that mandate I have reneged on.

Mr. McCartney: I shall contribute later. The point is clear: if the hon. Gentleman feels that he is totally committed to his mandate and that he has not changed his opinion, he should ask the electors of Dunfermline, not me.

Mr. Douglas: I meet the electors of Dunfermline regularly, not just once a month. They can come to me at any time.

What part of the 1987 manifesto is still in place? The commitment to Trident, which is particularly important to us in Scotland, is not. It is evident that the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) does not rest his case on opposition to the poll tax. At the next election, he will seek to enhance the so-called sovereignty of Parliament. I reject the sovereignty of Parliament. We have the poll tax because there is no such thing as the sovereignty of Parliament. There is the sovereignty of the majority party and its Whips.

We all know that the poll tax does not have a friend in 1991, so why did that tax have so many friends in 1987 and afterwards? Conservative Members—with a few honourable exceptions—were dragooned through the Division Lobby by the Government Whips. They did not consider what was happening. We have had the example of Scotland, where we have suffered from the poll tax for a year longer than people in England and Wales, and much grief and sorrow have resulted.

People say to me, "You did not pay the poll tax and could afford to pay it." I did not pay the poll tax. Before I took that stand, I made it plain what I was going to do. I still feel justified in taking that stance, especially as the people of Scotland, aided by the Scottish National party, were partly instrumental in ensuring the downfall of that tax.

We have all talked about finding a fair local government taxation system. Front Benchers and Back Benchers have been going through the hoops, trying to devise a system that is fair and is always related to ability to pay. That was suggested by the Labour party in "Fair Rates" and by the Conservative party in their so-called council tax—somehow, mysteriously, the system has to be related to ability to pay.

I cannot envisage a system related to ability to pay that does not approximate to income flows. I repeat what I have said many times: I do not know of any person who pays taxes out of anything other than income. That is why we and the Scottish National party have suggested a local income tax.

Conservative Members have said that there would be many difficulties with such a system. It might be unfair because of different earning capacities in different areas —I think in particular of Scotland. Under the present arrangements, we would expect to raise from local income tax about 14 per cent. of local revenue. I estimate—although I would not go into the trenches on it—that that could be achieved in Scotland with a tax of 3½p or 4p in the pound.

People say that that would cause local authorities to be profligate. The Government castigate the Labour party for wanting to raise taxes—particularly, I suggest, income tax. The Government claim credit for tax reductions, albeit only 1p or 2p in the pound at the standard rate. Local income tax would provide a salutary device to bring about local accountability. Why have all this paraphernalia?

The Secretary of State for Wales is in the Chamber, so he can confirm or deny my comments. In Wales, all this administrative machinery will be erected to get 8 per cent. of the revenue. That is farcical. In England, it will result in between 15 and 20 per cent.

Mr. David Hunt: It will be 14 per cent.

Mr. Douglas: It will be 14 per cent. That will happen because we will not allow local authorities to administer a local income tax. One could argue that, if central Government were so magnificent at controlling finances, we could castigate local authorities for being profligate. But the Government expanded the public sector borrowing requirement overnight, going from a PSBR of

almost zero to one of £20 billion—and that is not supposed to be profligate. Why not? It is not profligate because the Conservative party wants to win the election.

If local authorities want to raise revenue for essential services which the Government have said they must provide, it is supposed to be dastardly. If someone from Mars were considering what has happened, he would think it weird and wonderful that so-called intelligent people oppose a local income tax on other than economic grounds. The grounds are political.

We met Ministers to discuss our proposals. I said that we could abolish the poll tax and, within three months, introduce a local income tax in Scotland. I am willing to debate that case in any forum. We would also look into a system to reform local government in Scotland and, as others have suggested, to have a much fairer electoral system.

We are discussing a band and hope tax—properties will be banded together; the assessors, the Government hope, will get the job done by 1993; and some of the anomalies will be ironed out, for example, in relation to students. The council tax will not provide a buoyant source of local revenue and will not give direct local accountability.

What does the council tax do in Scottish terms? I have been on demonstrations with Labour Members who are not here in the Chamber—*[Interruption.]* I apologise to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Dunnachie), who is here. Those Labour Members said no to warrant sales and poinding. We have not heard anything about that today from the Labour Front Bench. Schedule 8 perpetuates that system in Scotland. Surely, in this day and age, we can devise a system of getting people to pay. We need a fair tax that avoids the noisome 19th century practices of breaking down the doors of people's houses and poinding and selling their furniture. I plead with the House: if we are trying to get 8, 9 or 15 per cent. of local revenue, surely we can at least achieve a much more satisfactory system, based on ability to pay.

The 20 per cent. rule bears heavily on some sections of the population and should be abolished forthwith. Because I was on the court of Stirling university and have had direct association with many students, I know that students are in dire circumstances now. In fairness to them, the Government should not wait until 1993. If I have understood correctly, when the Secretary of State for Social Security introduced the new measures—many of which are welcome—he suggested that, although benefits have been upgraded, they were not related to a continuation of the 20 per cent. rule. A precedent has been set. The Government should not continue the farce of believing that they can extract the 20 per cent. contribution from local electorates and poll tax payers in Scotland. They should take steps immediately which would not be very costly. The Minister may contradict me, but I believe that it would cost £120 million to write off that contribution for three years. If the Government do not do that they are behaving stupidly because it is extremely unfair to ask local authorities to pursue people who cannot pay and thus to perpetuate the system.

We take cognisance of the Bill and, naturally, we welcome the abolition of the poll tax but we shall oppose many aspects of the council tax. I hope that I have made it plain that I am extremely proud of the stance that I took in opposing the poll tax. I am not by nature a law breaker but I am proud of the stance that I took to stand by the people who would be humiliated because they could not pay. I have nothing to be ashamed of. I would have sought my personal mandate at any time and I made my stance clear to the electorate at large.

7.51 pm

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): I believe that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) is an extremely honourable man, but he is misguided in his stance on the poll tax. However, I unite with him on one issue—I also fought for a personal mandate at the previous general election. I did not support the introduction of the poll tax in Scotland and would have nothing to do with it. I said that I should oppose it consistently if the Government were misguided enough to introduce it in England.

This evening I feel as if I have come in from the cold——

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): Only two minutes ago.

Mr. Cormack: In answer to my hon. Friend, I did hear the opening speeches. I feel that I have come in from the cold and can support the Government wholeheartedly and without any major reservation. We have at last got rid of one of the most misconceived pieces of legislation that any Government have introduced for a long time and we have now replaced it with something eminently sensible and fair. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on his courage in recognising that a mistake had been made and in introducing new legislation. Some people fail to appreciate the fact that it takes great courage to say, "I was wrong" and that the higher one's position, the greater the courage that is called for. The Prime Minister has shown enormous courage which deserves to be rewarded.

Some years ago, I introduced on three occasions a rating reform Bill and on one of those occasions I was supported by my right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley), who has strayed since those days. That Bill had two main objectives. The first was to remove the ridiculous anomaly whereby a householder was penalised for improving his property, and the second was to introduce a head count so that the amount paid would to some extent reflect the number of people in the household. Those of us who attended ratepayers meetings in the 1970s—and I attended many—know that two criticisms in particular were always voiced. The first was that any improvement to a property was penalised and the second was that which has been quoted so often—the fact that a single person, very often an elderly widowed lady who lived next to a family of three or four wage earners, paid the same as that family.

It seems that the Government have tackled three issues—the two anomalies that I outlined and the manifest unfairness of the poll tax. They have introduced a new tax which we believe is infinitely preferable to the Labour party's proposals. I concede that I should have preferred to return to the rates rather than to stick with the poll tax, and I make no apology for that. I have never sought to disguise my views. However, what is now proposed is better than the Labour party's proposals, and I had hoped that we could approach the issue in a spirit of consensus. I regret that the Labour party did not accept the invitation of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to participate in the talks earlier this year.

[Mr. Cormack]

Had it done so, we might have had an even better Bill. I believe that when the shouting has died down and the controversy of the next few days is over, the Labour party will think again and will realise that there is great merit in a mutually agreed system of local government finance. We do not want to enter another general election while people still feel uncertain.

The new proposals are sensible and fair, but, of course, they are not perfect. No system will ever be perfect and various issues will need tidying up in Committee. However, if there is a spirit of consensus, there is more chance of sensible and suitable amendments being passed in Committee. I sincerely hope that that will be the case.

I intervened on my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) to say that I was especially concerned—and I know that he is also concerned as, I believe is my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—about people who have lived in a house for a long time. The value of their property may have increased enormously but the income of the occupants may not have increased. In some cases, the occupants are not the owners but merely tenants. In Committee we should devise a mechanism to take account of that fact, because such people may not be eligible for any rebate but could still be badly hit by the new tax. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales, who is a sensitive man and who thinks deeply about these issues, will discuss with the Secretary of State for the Environment whether something can be done to deal with the problem. In my constituency it causes heartache and anxiety.

We are all delighted with the return of the 100 per cent. rebate and the abolition of the 20 per centers. That is a sensible move. I join all hon. Members who wish that the 20 per cent. contribution could be abolished before 1993. I hope that even now we can think again.

Other issues have been raised by the bodies that must administer the tax. I have the honour of being a vice-president of the Association of District Councils which has submitted a paper that I know my right hon. Friends have seen. However, I draw to the House's attention two points in that paper that deserve careful consideration. The paper states:

"The Association does not accept that the long-term health of local government can be sustained on the basis of one locally variable tax yielding only 15 per cent. on average of the spending needs of local authorities. The Association believes that the national non-domestic rate should be returned to local control".

I understand why we introduced the uniform business rate, but, as we are reforming the structure and finance of local government, it would be wrong for us to say that we shall not consider the issue again. The points made by the ADC are worthy of careful consideration. It would not be appropriate to incorporate such reforms in the Bill, but I hope that after we have won the next general election we shall reconsider the matter seriously and do something about it.

The other point made by the ADC is, I know, contentious and I do not suppose that I shall carry my right hon. Friend with me. The ADC's paper states:

"The Association thoroughly opposes the principle and practice of capping local authority expenditure."

I must say that I have always felt unhappy about it myself. If we are talking about accountability, we must give local authorities greater freedom and flexibility and call them to account.

Mr. Janman: They have abused it.

Mr. Cormack: My hon. Friend says that they abuse it, and they frequently do; I accept that. It is an entirely reasonable point to make, and I fully understand why we have indulged in capping and why it is written into the Bill. Frankly, however, capping does not sit easily with a belief in local government or the freedom of local government.

We shall have to keep the matter carefully under review. The ADC is not a body led by the extreme left. It is a highly responsible body, which has reached a considered consensus view on the matter. I know that that view will not be entirely popular with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State but I commend it to him for further consideration. I am not unrealistic enough to suppose that the argument will be accepted during the passage of the Bill, but capping is both crude and unsatisfactory and I hope that we shall not have to live with it indefinitely.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) referred to the paper circulated to a number of us by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals. I saw my copy this morning. If people as erudite and eminent as the vice-chancellors can be under such misapprehensions, it is important that we should clarify the matter for them. I hope that, during the debate and in personal correspondence, my right hon. Friend will be able to do that, because it seems to me that we have moved a long way, and the right way, on the position of students.

I am glad to have had the opportunity to participate in the debate. The Bill is extremely important. I believe that it represents a milestone that we should all be glad to have reached, and I congratulate my right hon. Friends on having had the courage to introduce it. It will be widely welcomed in the country at large. It is an enormous improvement on what has gone before and an improvement, too, on the rating system that preceded that. We now have the possibility of a really sensible stable system of local government finance, and I wish the Bill well.

8.1 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I shall be brief, because I know that many hon. Members wish to speak.

The Secretary of State's speech consisted mainly of an account of the article in the *Financial Times* rather than an explanation of the details of the Bill. It sounded very much like the speech made by the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) when he introduced the poll tax Bill—the Local Government Finance Bill 1987—on 16 December 1987. It is all on record: the right hon. Gentleman told us that the poll tax would be a fairer, simpler tax which would give rise to greater accountability. He claimed for the poll tax precisely the same advantages as the present Secretary of State now claims for the council tax. How can anyone in the House—particularly any Opposition Member—or anyone outside it believe a word that the Secretary of State says? It is clear that the present Bill will be rushed through the House because the Government decided that the poll

tax is an electoral liability which must be replaced as fast as possible. It is all part of the general style that the Conservatives have adopted in dealing with local government ever since they were elected in 1979, and even earlier than that.

I have been going through some of the major changes in local authority structure and procedures that have taken place in recent years, all of which have been introduced by Conservative Governments. In 1963, we had the abolition of the London county council and the setting up of the GLC. In 1972, we had the creation of the metropolitan county councils which nearly mirrored the GLC. Then, in 1986, we had the abolition of the GLC and the metropolitan county councils. After that, we had rate capping, to which the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) referred, and the poll tax. Now we have another proposal for further changes in local authority structures and the institution of unitary authorities outside London.

How on earth can anyone in the country say that the Government know how to organise local government structure or finance? Theirs is a record of interference, mess and confusion. Now they come back to the House not with an apology but seeking credit for clearing up the mess that they previously created. They will get no thanks from the Opposition and no thanks from anyone in the country. We know what all this is about. It is not really about finance but about politics and the Tory party's view of politics.

I did not hear the sedentary intervention of the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman) in the speech of the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South, who was referring to rate capping, but I gather that the hon. Gentleman said that local authorities abused the system. The hon. Gentleman, in his directness and honesty, sums up the Tory party. The Tories do not trust local democracy. They do not trust local electors to get rid of local authorities if they do not like them and to support them if they do. They want local authorities to reflect precisely the views of the Tory party in government. Many Conservative Members have no respect for local democracy or any other form of democracy. They merely want local authorities to do what the Tory party would have it do.

Mr. Janman: What I actually said was that local authorities have abused the system. I was talking not about a theoretical position but about historical fact. Personally, I should like to see the implementation of a referendum system at local level on a non-party basis, because that would provide a mechanism to ensure local accountability. In the absence of that, however, we need a capping mechanism such as that proposed in the Bill.

Mr. Banks: I still do not agree with the hon. Gentleman, although I am glad to hear that he agrees that there should be some local control over the local decision-making process. That seems right, but, of course, we already have such mechanisms in place: they are called local elections and local democracy. Local government has thrived in Britain and, in many ways, our system is the envy of the world. The hon. Member for Thurrock may laugh, but I repeat that we have one of the finest local government systems in the world. It is as simple as that.

Mr. Janman: Lambeth?

Mr. Banks: It is no good the hon. Gentleman picking an authority that he does not like and trying to use it to knock every other aspect of local democracy. What worries me is that the Government have been totally cavalier in their attitude to the whole process of local democracy and accountability—indeed, they have used parliamentary sovereignty to destroy local accountability and, in the final analysis, such actions undermine democracy.

I had hoped that, with a gentler, kinder, more responsible and responsive Prime Minister in control, we would move away from all this, but it seems that the Government cannot get it out of their system: if they do not like what local authorities are doing—and they do not like what a lot of them are doing—they interfere. In the end, they will abolish them.

We all know what sort of local authority the Government would like. They would like them all to be Tory authorities. The City of London, for instance, is so totally Tory that its members can say that it is non-political. What they mean is, "It is Tory right the way through." When they say, "We are going to keep politics out of the City of London and out of this local authority," what they mean is, "We are going to keep your politics out of this local authority." That is what it is all about and the Bill is just another stage in the dismantling of local accountability and local sovereignty.

The shadow that hangs over debates such as these is the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher)—the Finchley whinger. It was the right hon. Lady who said that the poll tax was the Government's flagship. Like a captain, she went down—temporarily—with her flagship. Unfortunately for the Conservative party, however, she keeps bobbing up again: her head keeps appearing above the waves. We therefore now have the ridiculous image of the new Secretary of State in his new lifeboat rowing away from the disaster and cracking the right hon. Lady on the head every time she emerges and tries to get into the lifeboat with him. The Tories do not want her in the lifeboat because they know that as soon as she gets on board it will overturn. The right hon. Lady will ruin the Tories' chances at the general election—it will not now be on the poll tax but, I suspect, on Europe. The former Prime Minister sends letters to Bruce Gyngell, of TV-am, saying "Dear Bruce, I am sorry. (Sob, sob.) I never thought it would end like this." She should send a letter to every single person in the country, apologising for the poll tax. That is the kind of task that she should be given. That is the punishment that should be inflicted on her. I would like to see her chained down and made to write out by hand a letter to every poll tax payer. That would undoubtedly give her writer's cramp.

We did not hear much about the Bill from the Secretary of State for the Environment. In his knockabout speech, he did not seem fully to understand the problems that he is going to create. The council tax is a rerun of the poll tax. Once again, it is being done in haste. When legislation is passed in haste, it is always repented at leisure. However, there is not much leisure time left to the Government betwen now and the general election.

The Bill will throw up just as many anomalies and problems as the poll tax Bill and we have less than 17 months before the tax is due to come into operation. Unfortunately, a Labour Government will have to clear up the mess. That is what really worries me. There should be poetic justice in letting the Tories clear up their own mess,

[Mr. Banks]

but we cannot allow them to do that because we will then undoubtedly have poll tax mark III. That is what will happen if the Conservatives are re-elected.

The local authorities are confused about the proposals in the Bill and that is not surprising because we will not see much of the detail until the spring of 1992. The Bill proposes that only 50 per cent. of the tax will be paid for second homes and for properties with low residence. That is grossly unfair. Why will local authorities in Wales be able to charge the full 100 per cent. for second homes while only 50 per cent. can be charged in England? Does that have something to do with the problems that second-home owners in Wales are experiencing with the Welsh Language Society? Why cannot local authorities in England charge the full 100 per cent? If people are lucky enough and rich enough to have two homes, they should be prepared to pay two taxes because they will undoubtedly require services in both the areas where their residences are located.

The discount system and the benefits are very complex. Local authorities are not looking forward to the administrative nightmare that will be created if the Bill becomes law.

In Newham nearly 20 per cent. of the households are occupied by single people among whom there is a high turnover rate. Experience in compiling the poll tax register bears this out. In addition, the multiple occupancy nature of many Newham properties means that discount administration will be very complex as household structures change. The council tax is based on the Tory utopia of two persons, preferably married, households. The reality in Newham, as in most other London boroughs——

Mr. Janman: Who wrote that?

Mr. Banks: One of the Newham officers wrote it and I want to ensure that the views of the Newham officers who have to administer the scheme are made clear in the House.

The Newham officers also wrote:

"Newham expects over 30 per cent. of council tax payers to be eligible for benefits. When this is combined with the 20 per cent. of single person households, high turnover and multiple occupancy, it is clear that by any stretch of the imagination, this is not a tax which will be simple and cheap to collect."

That is another problem that we will have to face in Newham. The system of discounts and benefits will be administratively complex. The vagaries of the property bands mean that the highest council tax payers will pay only three times more than the lowest, even though their property could be worth eight times as much.

In Newham, as little as 9 per cent. of overall income will be raised by the tax. That is the second lowest in the country. Our next door borough, Tower Hamlets, is the lowest—excluding the City of London. It is clear that a total catastrophe is to be replaced by chaos. That is what we are being asked to examine tonight.

There will be a guillotine motion tomorrow and the Bill will be pushed through its Committee stage without the kind of detailed examination required by legislation as complex as this. One would have thought that some of the lessons and failings of the poll tax would by now have sunk into the thick skulls of Conservative Members. Obviously, that has not happened. They are so grateful to escape from the poll tax that they will grab any pig in a poke that happens to be passing by.

The Bill is a pig in a poke. I am only grateful for the fact that people will not have to live with it for very long. My colleagues on the Opposition Front Bench will be in government in a few months' time and they will have to restore to local authorities the accountability and control over local decision making and local resource raising that they should have and had enjoyed in the past before this interfering bunch of incompetents stumbled into Westminster. Fortunately, they are on their way out and local government can be put back on to a fit and proper basis.

8.15 pm

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock): There are two striking features about this debate. The first is unusual in that this must be one of the few areas of our work in this place that we can debate today without the European Community poking its nose into what we should or should not be doing. The other striking feature is very common in this Parliament and that is the lack of detail and genuine, constructive criticism from the Opposition. The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), in opposing the Second Reading, made the utterly vacuous speech that we have come to expect from him.

The community charge is no longer a big issue. In many parts of the country, until it was announced that the community charge was to be abolished, non-payment of the charge was not particularly different from previous non-payment of domestic rates in any given locality. For the whole of the borough of Thurrock, non-payment of the community charge in March 1991 was down to 6·4 per cent.—a level at least commensurate with non-payment in the last year of the rating system and probably slightly lower than that. We must bear in mind that the system that we are leaving behind, until the announcement of its abolition, had not been the unmitigated failure in terms of its implementation and collection that some hon. Members believed it to be.

We are considering today the council tax, a major piece of legislation to introduce a new way of raising local revenue for the financing of local government. I will be voting for the property tax tonight——

Mr. Tony Banks: If the hon. Gentleman does that, he will be the only one because we shall be voting tomorrow night.

Mr. Janman: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I will be voting for the property tax tomorrow night. The most important reason why I will do that is that the vast majority of my constituents will gain from the replacement of the community charge with the property tax.

Before any Opposition Member pipes up with the question, "Why did you vote for the community charge in 1988?", I must explain that compared with the revaluation of rateable values which would have occurred if the community charge had not replaced the rating system, most of my constituents were gaining from the advent of the community charge. I am being consistent. I am voting for a change in the system of local government finance that will benefit my constituents compared with the other options on offer.

It does not matter what system a Government introduces, there will always be winners and losers when one system of local government finance is replaced with another. However, even those who will lose, primarily people who live on their own in properties in the higher bands—of which there are not many in my constituency—will not be losing as much as they would lose if we had a Labour Government introducing their so-called fair rating system.

We have an opportunity with this Bill to introduce a system of local government finance that will be a middle-of-the-road option in comparison to its two forerunners. The old rating system took no account of the problem whereby one person living on his or her own would be expected to pay the same for their local government services as, say, four people all earning a wage and living in an identical house.

It is correct to differentiate between the fundamental principle of the community charge and the exact implementation of it. Some of my hon. Friends say that that is not a fair differentiation, but it was fair. The community charge took us from one extreme, in which there was no account of the number of people living in a household, to another extreme. For example, in my constituency, due to the high overspending of my local Labour-controlled council, four adults living in a three-bedroom semi-detached house would have been paying £1,700 because of the profligacy of my local Labour council.

Under the community charge, the straight line relationship in terms of how much a household paid and the number living in it was just that—a far too straight line. With this legislation, we are moving towards a better balance between protecting households of only one person and not overcharging households of a greater number of people.

Given that we are replacing the community charge, we must ask whether it improved accountability. The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) made much of that point. There is conflicting evidence. It is true that, in almost two years since the community charge was introduced, there have been far more letters to the *Thurrock Gazette* about the inefficiency and wastage of my local Labour council than there were in the days of the rating system. By making everybody make some contribution, however small, the community charge concentrated people's minds on what the local council was or was not doing and on whether it was effective and efficient.

I take issue with the hon. Member for Newham, North-West, because we must consider whether the community charge made any difference to voting patterns in local government elections and whether it made any difference to whether people fully understood their local council's revenue-raising powers and other powers. The theory of the community charge was that, with every person making some contribution, there would be a much higher turnout in local elections and a trend towards the electorate understanding that the people they put in office had revenue-raising powers and it is therefore important to examine critically their proposals. Perhaps with the exception of certain London boroughs, that has not happened.

I have spoken to hundreds of constituents about this matter because it genuinely fascinates me. A substantial percentage of the electorate do not vote in local elections, according to what the Labour party and Liberal Democrats are saying; they vote on the basis of the performance of the national Government. One has only to look at the correlation between local election results and the party in power and how it affects the same party at local level to realise that that is true.

In the 1970s, probably some reasonable Labour councils were chucked out of office because of the appalling Labour Government of the day. *[Interruption.]* I am not making a party political point. Whether the hon. Member for Newham, North-West likes it or not, local government democracy, which he clearly loves and talks about often, actually breaks down because of the party political system. As he knows, the vast majority of people do not even bother to vote in local elections. My local Labour party, which has 33 of the 39 seats on Thurrock borough council, saw its hegemony reinforced in May this year by getting fewer than 17 per cent. of the votes of those who are eligible to vote.

Mr. McCartney: How many voted for Tory candidates?

Mr. Janman: That is not the point. It does not matter which party it is. I am not trying to make a party political point in the way that the hon. Gentleman normally does. Irrespective of which party it is, it is ridiculous to say that, in most local authorities, the party in power has the overwhelming support of the local people, based on the percentage of the local community who actually voted and put their cross by the name of that party's candidate.

Many people—it is only because nobody has told them—do not understand how much power county and borough councillors have. When I say to people that elected councillors on Essex county council, when its gets its massive dollop of revenue from the Government, can decide how that massive dollop of taxpayers' money is divided, they look at me aghast. They do not understand how much power elected borough and county councillors have.

Rightly or wrongly, and conveniently or inconveniently for the concepts and theories of local government of the hon. Member for Newham, North-West, most people look to central Government to rescue them from the overspending and largesse of local councils. In Thurrock, where my local Labour-controlled council is overspending to the tune of £50 a head, that is certainly no exception. I agree, certainly in respect of my own locality, that it is a shame that people do not rescue themselves by voting in local elections in the way that they vote in a general election. If they did that, we would not have a Labour council any more. Because of that, I support the Government's capping proposals.

I support the capping proposals in the absence of a radical reform of finding a local mechanism for holding local politicians to account. I would much rather a system where, if local councillors, having been elected, wished to spend more than central Government thought they should, they did not have to stand for re-election as my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) suggested, but faced a yes-no referendum on whether councils should be allowed a budget that was bigger than that commensurate with the standard spending assessment set for it.

I hope that Opposition Members agree that, although that would take away the party political aspect, which would reduce confusion in the electorate about who has

[Mr. Janman]

authority for what and exactly what the power relationship is between central Government and local government, it would make matters clear cut. People would be asked, "Do you vote yes or no to local councillors in effect challenging the authority of central Government, who obviously have the duty to protect public spending as a whole?" That would give an accurate and specific local mechanism which was better than the current mechanism which is clouded by party labels and national party politics.

We must not make the same mistake that we made when we changed from the rating system to the community charge, when councillors—mainly socialist but including some Tory councillors who were only Tory in name and description but not in action—took their community charge payers, the Government and this Parliament to the cleaners. They used the opportunity that was presented by the change in the system to whack up their spending in a cynical fashion. When Thurrock council did that, I said in the local papers that its cynicism was worse than that of Ceausescu in Romania. That ruthless political cynicism went on up and down the country and the main victims were those who were least able to pay. However, Labour councils were determined to ensure that people were fleeced. They banked on the fact—with some success, unfortunately—that the electorate would blame the change in the system, whereas it was the promises and decisions that those Labour councils were making within the system that were to blame for millions of citizens being fleeced.

I also support the courts retaining strong powers to extract payment from those who will not pay. My Labour opponent in Thurrock trotted along to the inaugural meeting of the Thurrock branch of the Anti-Poll Tax Union, which was held at the Thameside theatre at Grays, thus giving that organisation succour and support. With the odd exception—I accept that there will always be odd exceptions, especially in relation to the standard community charge on houses that are no longer lived in and where there are problems in selling the property—because of the generous rebate system that exists, and the even more generous rebate system that is proposed under the new legislation, there is no valid excuse for non-payment for the person paying one personal community charge.

The most important improvement under the new system as compared with the old rating system is the provision for a 25 per cent. discount. However, I should like to know how the figure of 25 per cent. was arrived at. Is there any likelihood, on reflection, of its being increased? Although I would not go as far as some of my hon. Friends who believe that there should be a discount of 50 per cent.—although none has said so in the debate—I suggest that the discount should be about 40 per cent. For reasons that I shall not go into in detail now, and although I believe that the 50 per cent. figure is illogical, I believe that the 25 per cent. discount is possibly too low. Could not larger households, containing more than two adults, pay a small supplement to the council tax and thus, in effect, fund the increased reduction of 40 per cent. for single householders?

The principle of the community charge was never all that unpopular—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members may make strange hissing noises, but, as has already been said, the vast majority of the British people are fair-minded, and they saw nothing wrong with the principle that all those who have the right to vote in local elections should, in some degree or another, make some contribution to the revenue that has to be raised. The Labour party will come unstuck on that point. Opposition Members may glibly adopt slogans and dub the council tax "poll tax mark II", but they will come unstuck if they make such comments as a way of buttressing their attack on the principle that any system of local government finance should take at least some account of the number of people living in a household. The proposed reduction for single person households is the only element of the previous system that has been retained. I cannot put it any more strongly than "an element". The Opposition will come extremely unstuck if they attack the Bill on that basis.

One weakness of the current system is that community charge payers do not see the separate charges imposed by the county tier as opposed to the borough or district council tier of local government. Therefore, I am pleased that the legislation proposes to give a separate council tax figure for each tier of local government for those parts of the country, such as mine, where there are two tiers. However, may I also ask—if the answer is no, I hope that it will change—that the individual comparative standard spending assessment be set against the individual amounts? If that does not happen, we could end up with the tricky situation of a Tory-controlled county council, such as Essex, spending 2 per cent. under its SSA but, because it is a county, it will be raising a much bigger proportion of the total tax bill than the borough. Thurrock, for example, has a much smaller budget and raises a much smaller amount of money, but is overspending by £50 per head against its SSA. Given the deviousness of the people who run that council, I know that they will come out with all sorts of claptrap about the Labour local council taking much less money than the Tory county council. If the two figures are separated and given as individual amounts, it is essential that the individual SSA comparatives are also given so that people can put the figures in their proper context when they receive their bill.

I am pleased to support the Bill tonight and shall be pleased to vote for it tomorrow on Second Reading. I am always grateful to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West for making sure that I know where I am going and what I am doing. He does a good job on that. Surely, however, it cannot be beyond the wit of man to find a system of local government finance which is practical to implement and enforce, which is fair and is perceived as being fair by the public, which is comprehensively accepted by them and which gives accountability. Let us hope that the council tax is it.

8.35 pm

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): First, I should like to assure the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) and my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) that I shall stick to what I understand to be the agreement behind the Chair to ensure that every hon. Member who wishes to participate in the debate has the opportunity to do so, especially those who have stayed for the whole debate——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. I must correct what the hon. Gentleman has just said. The Chair is not involved in the question of the length of hon. Members' speeches. It is of course very nice if all hon. Members can be called, but a debate is a debate.

Mr. McCartney: I did say "behind the Chair", Madam Deputy Speaker.

As someone who has spent most of the last decade as an elected member of a local authority and having continued to serve in that capacity for a period after being elected to this House, I have listened with anger to those Conservative Back Benchers who are on the road to Damascus tonight and who have given us the reasons why they did not really support the introduction of the poll tax. They have said that it was all the fault of the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley); that it was the fault of the former Chancellor of the Exchequer for not providing sufficient resources when the legislation was implemented; that it was the fault of the profligate Labour local authorities and that the local authorities failed to play fair with the central exchequer and to develop adequate systems for ensuring payment for local services. However, none of that is true.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) has said, the poll tax was the Government's flagship. Last November, however, when the captain was ashore in Paris, restocking the victuals, the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) delivered the black spot. But it was not the right hon. Gentleman who delivered the final blow; it was the former Prime Minister's most trusted and personally appointed Chancellor—the man who would ultimately replace her —who made the right hon. Lady walk the plank because of the poll tax.

The right hon. Member for Henley delivered a 52-minute speech earlier today, of which five minutes dealt with the council tax while he spent 47 minutes on anything but the council tax. That was a signal that the admiral had finally scuppered his own flagship. Not since the sinking of the Graf Spey have we seen so many rats deserting a sinking ship at the same time.

Unfortunately, Conservative Members have sought only to defend themselves tonight. They have not apologised for the poll tax's consequence for local government, its cost to local government or to the individuals who have suffered from it. At one stage, some Conservative Members even gloated over the fact that people in Wandsworth who can pay the poll tax do not have to pay any in the current year. That is grotesque when hundreds of miners' widows in my constituency, whose husbands died of pneumoconiosis, now have to pay the full poll tax because their widows' pension is taxed at 97p in the pound. They do not qualify for poll tax rebates simply because of that level of taxation. It was because of such grotesqueness that people recognised the unfairness of the poll tax. Many of my constituents who are Conservative voters and who can afford to pay the poll tax have been turned against that party because of its basic unfairness. It was only in November last year when it became clear that the right hon. Member for Henley was making a major grab for the Conservative leadership that the Cabinet was forced to do something about the poll tax.

Conservative Members have blamed everything bar themselves. What did the Prime Minister say in an interview with the *Daily Mail* shortly after being elected Prime Minister? He said:

> "I'll tell you the trouble with poll tax. We were bounced into it quickly because there was such a fuss about rates in Scotland and we were bounced without thinking because of the political fuss".

Without thinking, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and his colleagues in the Cabinet bounced the poll tax and its consequences on the electorate of Britain. Tonight they ask us and the people of Britain to believe them when they say that they have got it right this time.

What an admission for the Prime Minister to say that he did not think about the introduction of such a major piece of legislation. The poll tax being introduced in its second form this evening is a panic measure. It is an attempt to get the Conservatives over the next general election and give the impression, as they seek to do with the economy, that things are going well and are about right. They say, "Leave it to us chaps. With a steady hand on the tiller over the next few months, everything will come right and after the next election that will prove to be the case."

The timescale is out of sync for one major reason. We have a crisis in local government funding in the United Kingdom. Whether local authorities are Conservative, Labour, Scottish National party, Liberal Democrat or Plaid Cymru, in the length and breadth of Britain there is a major crisis in the funding of local government. There is a crisis in the structure of local government, people's expectations of local government and the delivery of services. The reason is that for over a decade local government has been undermined, underfunded and placed in a hostile position by the Government.

The consensus about delivery of local authority services in Britain was smashed deliberately by the Government and continues to be smashed by the introduction of this legislation. The measure will be unsuccessful. The tragedy is that the unsuccessful nature of the Bill will result in many of our constituents continuing to pay huge amounts towards local government finance while resources are ploughed into not improvement and development of services at local level but the administration of a system which is about hoping to ensure the return of the Conservative party to power.

The council tax is clearly poll tax with another name. It has three basic and fundamental weaknesses which were present in the poll tax. It is not simple to understand—it is complex. Its complexities will mean that whether hon. Members support it or not, they will be unable to do anything to improve it within the parliamentary timescale. Therefore, a flawed Bill will go on to the statute book, just as the Bill which introduced the poll tax was flawed. The way in which the Bill will be put through the House will be a negation of the House of Commons' right to develop a strategy to create good legislation. Surely that is what the House should be about, irrespective of hon. Members' party political differences about the concepts and principles of legislation.

When the Bill leaves the House it must be understood and it must be workable. To be workable it must be good law and have a benefit flowing from it. There is no way in which misuse of the guillotine can ensure that the Bill will

[Mr. McCartney]

go out as a good and acceptable measure which will improve local government finance and the way in which the British people pay for it.

The link between the concept of paying for local Government resources at local level and the maintenance of those payments has been the greatest disaster and tragedy of the poll tax. Previously, 99 per cent. of people paid the rates. More than 99 per cent. of local businesses paid the rates. In my area the figure was 99·7 per cent. The system was understood. It was simple and, despite people's grumbles, there was a commitment and an understanding that local government services had to be funded proportionately at local level. The poll tax ended that consensus for ever. No matter what system is brought into operation, millions of people will decide not to contribute to paying for local government services. In my view, that is a wrong decision. The Government broke into that basic tradition of life in the United Kingdom.

The council tax will be expensive to administer and collect as was the poll tax. The council tax does not relate to people's ability to pay. That is one of the major reasons why the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) was important. How can it be that someone who has in excess of £150,000 per year disposable income can pay the same or less than a miner's wife in my constituency? Under no circumstances is that a fair system of local taxation.

Not only the Labour party says that the council tax is unfair. The Secretary of State for Wales will reply to the debate tonight. He owes it to those of us who are worried about it to clarify exactly how students, and especially nursing students in the national health service, will be treated. The Royal College of Nursing has made it clear that the regulations which currently define students for the purposes of the community charge distinguish between nursing students pursuing Project 2000 courses, who are in receipt of a bursary, and students pursuing conventional nursing courses, who receive a training allowance. The incomes of the two groups of nursing students are similar but under the community charge Project 2000 students pay 20 per cent. of the tax while the others pay 100 per cent.

In the same health authority student nurses may work together making beds and caring for patients. But when they leave the ward, one is exempt from the new community charge and others make an immediate payment. The Government must clarify the position under schedule 1 for nurses on the two types of courses. If they do not do so tonight, they should table amendments in Committee. It cannot be acceptable in terms of either logic or good administration to discriminate between the two types of student nurse.

I will probably be one of the Opposition members of the Standing Committee that will consider the Bill. Although we are opposed to it in principle, I genuinely hope that the Government will provide an opportunity to examine the workings of this complex piece of legislation and ensure that when it leaves the House it has some semblance of a workable piece of legislation. Local authority treasurers, irrespective of local authority and party, all say that the timescale within which the Government intend to introduce the council tax and the way in which they intend to force through the proposals will leave local authorities in administrative trauma. The Government owe it to the House, local government and, more importantly, to the British people to introduce workable proposals. I hope that when it is seen in Committee that there are major flaws in the Bill, the Government will be big enough to accept Opposition amendments to improve it. Britain cannot afford either financially or in terms of its democratic structures to go through another debacle like the poll tax.

8.47 pm

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): It is clear from the debate that every right hon. and hon. Member wants an equitable and bearable form of local government taxation. Indeed, as was rightly pointed out, this is not the first time that we have sought that end. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and my right hon. Friend the Health Secretary set about devising such a form of taxation and it was the poll tax and the uniform business rate which brought us to this stage and so low in public esteem.

My hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) said that the central proposition of the poll tax was that everyone should pay a little. Of course, if one recalls, that was not the first principle of the poll tax. The first principle was that we should all pay equally. On Second Reading of the poll tax legislation I accepted the advances of the Government and voted for the Bill. I am grateful for the processes of legislation in the House, because as the Bill unfolded it became clear that the original principle was unsustainable. It was so unsustainable that the Government had to accommodate the changes, inadequate as they turned out to be, which enabled my hon. Friend and other Conservative Members to argue that the principle of the poll tax was that everyone should pay a little, almost as if it were a discretionary tax. But the original concept was that everyone should pay equally and it was swept up by the magnificent phrase of my right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) with his usual panache—"Why should a duke pay more than a dustman". That phrase swept round the country and concentrated our minds on what the debate meant more than any other contribution.

During the parliamentary discussions one began to understand the principles that underlay the debate, what it amounted to and why the tax could not be borne by our constituents. We could genuinely signify neither acquiescence nor consent.

The spokesman for the Liberal Democrat party pointed out something about the process of legislation that was very true. At our first attempt to reform local government finance in the House, taking three bites of the cherry, there were 218 Government amendments in Committee—not the perversities of modest Back Benchers such as ourselves —135 on Report and 268 on Lords Report. That was the scale of amendments to a thought-through, carefully designed Bill that we were told was certain. We were told that we could return to our constituents and assure them that the tax was bearable, just and equal.

I wish this Bill the best in the world. I want an equitable and bearable form of local government taxation. Normally, I would vote for the Second Reading, but the most extraordinary guillotine that has ever been introduced into the House is marching with the Bill. We are talking about a guillotine, which will be moved tomorrow, but in the knowledge of the Bill and of the fact,

fundamental to its passage, that we shall discuss in Committee for only nine days a Bill whose predecessor required more than 700 Government amendments. We have witnessed Ministers unable even to argue their new clauses let alone understand, for the conviction of the House, what the Bill means.

The Government are insistent that by 6 December—St. Nicholas' day, that is Father Christmas' day—they will bring back to the House a Bill that they will claim has been thoughtfully considered. Conservative Members understand Burke's understanding of the British constitution. As Back Benchers of a constitutional party our role is to scrutinise legislation and to attest that our constituents, our people, will bear it. That is the justice of the system of Parliament—Parliament meaning that we have the right to free speech on behalf of our constituents. Yet, on the same Order Paper as this measure, the Government propose to restrict debate to nine days in Committee. It is a travesty of parliamentary procedures. It will do us down—not because the Bill may be wrong, but because we will be unable to judge it. Driving through a major piece of taxation legislation to secure their purpose this side of Christmas is the most high risk strategy that a Government can undertake.

There is no point in imploring the Government because they have cast their die. I hope and pray that this Bill has integrity, because the assumption behind it is that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has spent his days since he came to office with the Lord above and the accounting angels to forge the most perfect piece of legislation that has been known. That is an absurdity. I cannot imagine that the Government will not come forward with a large number of amendments.

In the justice of this argument we are talking about the Local Government Finance Bill, but we have not heard one word from the Government about the uniform business rate which has been a fundamental element in the finances of our local authorities for many years. That issue has not been tackled.

Whether the Bill is enacted before a general election is also a moot point, as we have no call over the processes and the time that the House of Lords takes for consideration of the Bill. Therefore, it may or may not come about. All that the Government will demonstrate is that by the brutal use of a guillotine they will certainly ensure that the Bill is enacted without proper and adequate debate. As a constitutional party, we have a duty to have regard to the form of debates and procedures in the House.

8.55 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): That was an eloquent and honest speech by the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) and he is right to draw attention to the savagery of the guillotine on this measure. This tax is being imposed on our constituents without proper parliamentary consideration. There will be an enormous number of flaws and unfairness in it. Like the poll tax, the consequences will be a scandal.

The Secretary of State for the Environment's speeches today and during the Queen's Speech were full of jokes and banter, but many of my constituents do not view the costly shambles of the poll tax as much of a laughing matter. The Secretary of State has pretensions as a political heavyweight, but his performances have been more of a light banterweight. During the five minutes that he spoke about the Bill in his 52-minute speech he was floored by his own seconds—Conservative Back Benchers—when they expressed their concern. That is why he spent as much time as he possibly could outside the ring, talking about anything but the council tax.

The poll tax could have been abolished from April next year, but it will linger on for at least another year under the Government. At the end of 1990-91, £1 billion of the poll tax remains uncollected in England alone and about 7·5 million summonses will have been issued by the end of the year. That is the largest debt collection exercise in history.

Many people think that the poll tax has already been abolished, which will make it even harder to collect. The non-collection element will be loaded on to the bills of those who pay, which is an inherent feature of the poll tax system. The Government must get the blame when bills go through people's doors, and I for one intend to make clear that that is their fault.

Mr. James Paice (Cambridgeshire, South-East): How can the hon. Gentleman say that it is the Government's fault when someone does not pay taxes? He is right to point out that arrears caused by people who have not paid are a burden on the vast majority of law-abiding people who pay up, whether they agree with the basis of the taxation or not. However, as some of the non-payers are members of the Labour party and are his colleagues on the Opposition Benches, how can he blame the Government for the fact that people have decided of their own free will not to pay a tax?

Mr. Cohen: It is the Government's fault, because their legislation took no account of ability to pay. There will always be vast numbers of people who cannot afford to pay. I tabled a question asking how much the Government had set aside for bad debts, and the answer showed that not one penny had been set aside. There should be immediate abolition of the minimum 20 per cent. payment. That should happen this year, or at least in 1992-93.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert Key): Why?

Mr. Cohen: Because it affects the poorest people.

Mr. Key: The hon. Gentleman is on an important point. The 20 percenters, as they are colloquially known, receive benefits which more than compensate this year for their 20 per cent. payment of the community charge.

Mr. Cohen: That is not the case in London where the 20 per cent. bill is higher than elsewhere in relation to DSS payments. Secondly, as my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) reminded the House, the Audit Commission has said that it costs £15 to collect £8. Thirdly, there is a housing benefit crisis in local government. Low-income families are put at grave risk and local authorities are unable to administer the housing benefit system efficiently because they are tied to the 20 per cent. element. If it were abolished, administration of the poll tax system would be easier.

The Government have accepted 100 per cent. rebates for the new tax. Why should abolition not apply to the poll tax during what are allegedly its last two years? The Government have been most mean in not getting rid of the 20 per cent. payments. On BBC news on 23 November last year the Prime Minister said:

[Mr. Cohen]

"One of the difficulties we got into with the community charge was being bounced into decisions before they were fully thought through and before we knew precisely how they would affect people."

As the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills so eloquently pointed out, we are seeing exactly the same thing with this tax.

Mr. McCartney: In today's truncated debate hon. Members have questioned in great detail the precise nature of the rebate system for students and others who are eligible. The Government have been woolly about the exact meaning of their proposals. Because of the guillotine, amendments to ensure that the rebate system is simple and reaches people who require it may not be properly discussed.

Mr. Cohen: My hon. Friend makes a good point. We will not know whether an ability-to-pay element will apply in relation to the rebates.

One of the major problems for local authorities is the computer software that is essential for the efficient billing and collecting of the tax. For the poll tax the Government gave councils 18 months to get their computer software in order, but the councils were unable to do so because they did not have the resources and the rules and complexities kept changing. It is now less than 17 months to April 1993 when the council tax will be introduced. Much of the information and secondary legislation which are vital to work out what will be in the computer programmes are not yet available. The Government are leading us to a shambles.

Mr. Key: I am delighted to reassure the hon. Gentleman on the subject of computer software for local authorities. My Department is working closely with local authority associations on the matter. Only last week we had yet another meeting with them on the subject of computer software. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already made it plain that, unlike some other Bills, we hope that for this one not only will most of the regulations be in place before Royal Assent, but that draft regulations will be composed parallel to the legislation. Many of the draft regulations will be complete by Christmas. There is no point in engaging in scaremongering about a matter that is well in hand.

Mr. Cohen: Experience shows that there will not be enough time and that on the Government's reckoning there will not be enough resources. Is the Minister saying that by Christmas every dot and comma of what local authorities need for their computers will be in place? The Government keep changing the rules of the game, which creates enormous problems for local authorities.

Mr. McCartney: The Minister is disingenuous, because he did not mention the twin-track approach that local authorities have been asked to operate—not only the introduction of the new tax, but the maintenance of the poll tax. There will not be the same winding down that occurred with the old rating system. In addition, because of poll tax capping, local authorities have to deliver their budgets within a matter of weeks of the Government's decision on standard spending assessments. There could well be a major collapse in the administration of local government funding. I make not a party-political point, but one which shows the reality of not having proper consultations on the time scale for implementing such a major piece of legislation.

Mr. Cohen: My hon. Friend is right. Local authorities will have to administer the dying poll tax and deal with all the problems associated with that, while trying to get the new council tax system into play. The Government have not provided sufficient time or resources to ensure that the system works properly.

Three major elements run through the council tax. One is its complexity, both for the authorities to administer and for ordinary people to understand. Secondly, a register will be required. As I said earlier, I do not think that a register is necessarily bad. We had a register of property under the old rating system. However, the new register will include personal details, especially in relation to the benefit and discount systems. That invasion of privacy will be a problem. Thirdly, many of the unfairnesses of the old poll tax will persist in the new council tax system.

I want to run through the discount system. It is not targeted at those in greatest need, because ability to pay will not be a factor. Indeed, two discounts will be available to the owner of a second home—

Mr. Tony Banks: Not in Wales.

Mr. Cohen: Why should that be so in Wales, but not in England?

The administration of the new tax will be complex. Local authorities will have to check the applications of those claiming discounts. They will have to police the discounts, both for someone's initial eligibility for the discount, and for any change in circumstances that might take away that eligibility. That is an enormous and difficult task for local authorities.

The vital secondary legislation on the benefits system has not yet been published. My understanding was that it was likely to be published in the spring. Although I welcome the Minister's assurance that it will be earlier than that, we shall have to wait and see. Local authorities can do little preparatory work before the regulations are published.

Mr. Tony Banks: My hon. Friend makes a good point about the complexities of the system, especially with regard to benefits. In my local authority it is estimated that only 9 per cent. of overall income will be raised by the council tax. Despite all the effort, the local authority will get only 9 per cent. of its income from the tax, even if it manages to achieve 100 per cent. collection—and the very idea of that is a nonsense. Does my hon. Friend know the estimated figure for his local authority?

Mr. Cohen: Local authorities in London are estimating the figure to be about 15 per cent. The business rate has been taken away from local authorities, and in London that accounted for about £2 billion of income. That has implications for the gearing of the system.

The proposed method of operation for the benefits system will cause enormous problems for families. If a liable person wants to claim benefit, he must tell his local council that a second person in the household has a low income. That implies that that person already knows the financial details of the second person, and if he does not that could create some problems. There is absolutely no incentive for the second person on a low income to sign the application form because he is not liable to pay the tax. He

will not be the one receiving the bill. Who is supposed to tell the council of any changes in circumstances? It may be in the interest of neither of those two persons to do so. If there is a fraudulent claim for benefits, who will be prosecuted? That is not clear from the way that the Bill is worded. The benefit structure is not workable, and it will be a software nightmare until it is made clear.

Mr. Key: If one is talking about second adult rebates, of course it is true that we need to try to simplify the proposals, to overcome the administrative difficulties brought to our attention by local authority associations. It is true also that the regulations will be a matter for discussion at a later stage. Those aspects will have to be the subject of regulations that the House will have to consider later.

Mr. Cohen: The Minister was not particularly forthright. Is he saying that they will be completed by Christmas?

Mr. Key *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Cohen: The Minister is shaking his head, so they will not be completed by Christmas. Local authorities had their fingers burnt before when they tried to get the software up and running and then found that the Government were changing the rules. It looks as though exactly the same will happen again in respect of the benefits system.

Another feature that will survive from the poll tax is joint and several liability. Under that unfair system, many women were caught for bills payable by their husbands, and vice versa. Under the council tax, that hierarchy will be extended to two tenants, who, if they are at the same level in that hierarchy, could become responsible for each other's council tax jointly and severally. A tenant could be held responsible for an absentee landlord, in the same way that a married couple and partners living together as husband and wife will be responsible for each other. Not only is that unfair, but it will require checks by local authorities, and snooping to see how couples are living together to decide whether they are liable for each other's bill.

Londoners will be particularly disadvantaged by the valuation banding. Most London homes will find themselves at the top levels. The Department of the Environment's own statistics give a Greater London average council tax for two adults of £478. From past experience, that figure could be out by as much as 100 per cent. In any event, it is 20 per cent. higher than for the rest of England and Wales.

The Government must look to be fairer to London, with equalisation at least in the grants system—perhaps on the basis of incomes, or by taking the regional banding approach. They could at least give the business rate—or an element of it—back to London so that the bills can be kept down there.

There is no local accountability in the new system. That was discarded as the justification for the poll tax. In its place we shall have the serious problem of gearing for London. As I said, something like 15 per cent. of a local authority's revenue will come from the council tax, and my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) said that in some local authorities the percentage will be even lower. That will have serious consequences, because where there is a small increase in spending by a local authority, high gearing will result in a large increase in the council tax that it has to levy. In Tower Hamlets, for example, a 1 per cent. spending increase will mean an 11 per cent. rise in council tax. In Newham, the figure is 9 per cent.; in Hackney, it is 8 per cent.; in Waltham Forest, my borough, it is about 7 per cent. That is unfair, and it certainly does not represent local accountability.

Mr. Tony Banks: As my hon. Friend clearly knows far more about the Bill than does the Secretary of State, I am far more likely to get sensible answers out of him. What will this mean for my borough?

Mr. Cohen: Every 1 per cent. over the figure set by the Government will mean at least a 9 per cent. increase in Newham's tax. Moreover, the Government's original standard spending assessment may or may not be realistic.

The Secretary of State also controls the criteria for capping. If he considers an authority's budget excessive —or, indeed, considers it an excessive increase on the previous year's budget—that is sufficient reason for him to cap that authority. Although the authority may appeal, the Secretary of State controls the appeal process as well. That, too, directly negates the principle of local accountability.

Mr. McCartney: A recent survey showed that my local authority, Wigan metropolitan council, was one of Britain's top 10 councils in terms of giving value for money. According to its standard spending assessment, Manchester needs 69 per cent. more money to provide the same level of service. Why is my borough—which is also in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis)—to be capped? It is being penalised for providing a cost-effective service.

Mr. Cohen: That is an example of the arbitrary nature of the capping arrangement, and shows the extent to which it is controlled by the Secretary of State. Local accountability has gone out of the window; Ministers no longer even talk about it, because they know that it is not a reality.

Mr. Lewis: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Cohen: No, I will not; I have only a few minutes left.

The Government may call the proposed tax a council tax, but the bills will be their bills. That message will become increasingly clear.

Mr. Lewis *rose*——

Mr. Cohen: Because my hon. Friend looks so disconsolate, I will give way to him after all.

Mr. Lewis: I did not take it personally, but I thank my hon. Friend none the less.

I have just had an exchange with the Secretary of State for Wales across the Floor of the House. The irony of the position described by my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) is that, if Wigan had received the same amount in grant as was received by Wandsworth and Westminster in the year in which it was capped, it would not have had to levy a tax at all; indeed, it might have been able to give money back from the previous year's levy.

Mr. Cohen: My hon. Friend has made his point very well.

[Mr. Cohen]

The Bill gives the Secretary of State wide-ranging new powers, relating not only to capping but to the vast number of orders and regulations that he will be able to issue, and even to the grants that will be given to London's voluntary organisations. If a London voluntary body cannot agree a budget, as happened this year, the Secretary of State will set one, but will make no allowance for inflation. It would have been far better if majority voting had applied in that instance.

The worst aspect of all, however, is the way in which poll tax penalties have been carried forward and retained in this council tax Bill. The National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux commented on two features of the problem: imprisonment, and the position of bailiffs. In regard to bailiffs, the association said:

"We believe that the law and practice concerning the bailiffs should be urgently reviewed and amended. CABs would wish to see enforcement by private bailiffs abolished. All cases against individuals involving less than a specified amount (£25,000, for example) should be enforced through the County Court. It is much more straightforward to have warrants set aside and negotiations entered into in the County Court whereas Magistrates Courts are usually unwilling to reconsider until a warrant has been returned to the court. In addition, County Court bailiffs are employees of the court and usually better trained and more aware of the legal responsibilities and duties. On the other hand, private bailiffs are subject to far less control and scrutiny. Disturbing cases of abuse of power and criminal activity have been reported concerning private bailiffs. Monitoring of private bailiffs is needed as a matter of urgency."

On imprisonment the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux says:

"Imprisonment of people for arrears of community charge should cease immediately."

It is not a left-wing Labour council or Member of Parliament who says that. It is the NACAB, which continues:

"It is financially highly inefficient and imprisoning people because of their financial vulnerability should be anathema to a humane society."

The council tax is better than the poll tax, but only just. It is still appallingly ill thought out and it will be grossly unfair. It is a mess. We need an election and a Labour Government to clear up the mess.

9.20 pm

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): I am glad to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen). The hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) made a number of unscheduled statements in the debate. I listened to them with great interest.

At the beginning of the Secretary of State for the Environment's speech there was a fusillade of Government interventions. The tenor of those interventions was worry and apprehension. There were interventions from the right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson), and the hon. Members for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall), for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman), for Rochford (Dr. Clark), for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson), for Warrington, South (Mr. Butler), for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) and for Honiton (Sir P. Emery). The hon. Member for Norfolk, North (Mr. Howell) sought a 2·5 per cent. increase in value added tax—but he is standing down at the general election.

I heard the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) say of the poll tax that it was the most misconceived legislation ever. He was intensely critical of the capping proposals in the Bill. He said that capping is "crude and unsatisfactory." I understand that the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) strongly criticised the Bill. The hon. Member for Leeds, North-West—a Conservative—said that the poll tax was a disaster. He severely criticised his right hon. Friend the former Secretary of State for the Environment, the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley), for the manner in which he had introduced the poll tax. The hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) —a Conservative—said that the Government had got the poll tax wrong. The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) said that the Government had wasted vast sums of money and that the council tax would not survive.

My hon. Friend the Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) made a robust speech. He called the council tax the poll tax mark II and said that the new tax was to be bulldozed through the House. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) said that Her Majesty's Government did not know how to organise local government. In his vigorous speech, he produced examples of the statements he has made. My hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) expressed his anger at Conservative Back Benchers who had supported the poll tax measures and who are now trooping forth to support this Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton made a passionate case for getting rid of the 20 per cent. minimum payment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) called the council tax a schizophrenic tax. He must be right. He spoke for the people of Neath and west Glamorgan, as he always does. We on these Benches agree with his wish that the money thrown at the poll tax had been invested in schools, hospitals and job creation. We understand why he had come to the House today to denounce freeloading for the rich. He, too, sought the end of the 20 per cent. payment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) spoke eloquently for social justice and said how the Prime Minister had been bounced into supporting the poll tax. We all drew the appropriate conclusions from her remarks on that.

I hope that the Secretary of State for Wales will tell us whether the rumours are correct that this week—perhaps tomorrow—the Government will make statements on local government finance for 1992-93.

Less than four years ago, the House debated the Second Reading of the poll tax bill. The poll tax has been a social, political and economic disaster of historic proportions. It has brought financial and administrative chaos to councils throughout Wales. It has caused collection problems on a hitherto unprecedented scale, and more than £100 million worth of taxpayers' money has been squandered on administering the wretched tax in Wales alone. The people of Wales deserve an apology from Ministers

The poll tax was conceived in Finchley, tested on Scotland, and imposed on Wales via the Wirral. The people of Wales have had the misfortune of having a concentration of poll tax fanatics representing them in Whitehall. I shall be generous because I shall exclude the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts), who is not here. He is well liked and sticks to his brief come what may —a tactic that has rightly earned him the nickname of the "Bardic steamroller".

The hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) is of a different vein. He told the House:

"The community charge is a fair tax and a reasonable charge to make on people, so we should support it."—[*Official Report*, 23 May 1989; Vol. 153, c. 911.]

We know that he was the archetypal loyal Thatcherite Back Bencher in the Second Reading debate four years ago. He told the House:

"The system of charging on the basis of property . . . is absurd."—[*Official Report*, 16 December 1987; Vol. 124, c. 1151.]

He was a member of the No Turning Back group, and he has not changed.

To placate the hon. Member for Pembroke and his kind, the Government introduced the council tax—a property-poll tax hybrid that makes but fleeting reference to ability to pay.

The poll tax has been an outstanding success for the right hon. Member for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt)—it has got him into the Cabinet. When his appointment as Secretary of State for Wales was announced, he told the House:

"I . . . look forward to explaining in Wales, as I have in England . . . the way in which the community charge is a much fairer and simpler system".—[*Official Report*, 21 March 1990; Vol. 169, c. 1109.]

He told the Conservative local government conference:

"In time I believe the community charge will come to be accepted for what it is; simple, straightforward, and, above all fair."

What came next? It was a priceless gem:

"But it will also do local government a power of good."

It did, like a dose of strychnine. That is how the right hon. Member for Wirral, West got into the Cabinet.

I found one other instructive quote from the right hon. Gentleman—a delphic utterance worthy of William Wordsworth at his best. In March 1990, the right hon. Gentleman said:

"I have an instinctive suspicion of calm. Calm comes before a storm. But equally so, a storm precedes calm. So too, I believe, it will be with the community charge."

Can we believe anything that Conservative Ministers say? Dare we believe anything that the Secretary of State for Wales will say? Did these Welsh Office Ministers experience a Pauline-like conversion on the road from the Welsh Office to the House? No. Poll tax panic prompted this change—a change borne out of short-term electoral desperation. It is not repentance; it is simply that they are scared for their skins and wish to save parliamentary seats in the general election.

With the council tax, the Government are set to repeat the mistakes of the poll tax. Like the poll tax, this property tax is deeply flawed. We believe that it is not fair, it is not practical, and it will not stand the test of time. The undoing of the poll tax was its unfairness. The people of Wales—not the local authority associations, not even Her Majesty's splendid Opposition—killed the poll tax. The people of Wales saw that it was unfair and they will not be fooled by this council tax.

The council tax will retain the most objectionable parts of the poll tax—the head count tax on the individual. As my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley said, the council tax will simply put a new kind of poll tax on the statute book. Just like the poll tax, as my hon. Friend the Member for Neath said, the council tax is designed to protect the very rich. It will protect, at the expense of the rest, those people in Wales who live in the most expensive properties. People in the top band in Wales will pay only three times the council tax of those at the bottom, although the value of their property is more than eight times greater.

The importance of the head count element in the property poll tax is most clearly shown in the proposals for the discounts. There is no relationship to ability to pay. One could say that a bank manager living alone will receive the same discount as a dustman. The poll tax has been a bureaucratic nightmare. It has thrown Welsh councils into administrative chaos and has proved difficult and expensive to collect. In Wales alone, it has cost more than £100 million to set up and administer.

Mr. Blunkett: In Wales alone.

Mr. Jones: In Wales alone, as my hon. Friend says.

The poll tax has succeeded in making ordinary citizens suspicious and resentful of local taxation. Some now pay late and with ill feeling. That is the achievement of Conservative Members. Resentment of the council tax will grow. That is certain as people begin to understand that the valuation given to their property is not necessarily the actual property value. That is soon to dawn on the people of Wales, and on people throughout Britain.

That resentment will grow further when people realise that the Welsh Office has got its sums wrong and that the bills that they pay will be much higher than Welsh Office estimates. I hope that the Secretary of State will address this question: does he accept that council tax bills are likely to be much higher than the Welsh Office predicted? Does he agree with the Nationwide Anglia building society, which said that house prices in Wales are below those used by the Welsh Office for its council tax calculations?

The right hon. Gentleman already had to allocate more than £10 million to offset part of the cost of implementing the council tax in Wales. As with the poll tax, our local authorities believe that the cost will far exceed that predicted by Welsh Office Ministers and their officials. Indeed, Welsh councils are also unhappy about the fact that the Government have invented a new tax but that the councils are expected to foot part of the bill for its implementation from their existing resources.

We believe that the principle of accountability in local democracy has gone out of the window under this Government. First under the poll tax and now under the council tax, central control has replaced local democracy in determining spending.

Mr. McCartney: An old Soviet system.

Mr. Jones: An old Soviet system, as my hon. Friend says. Local authorities are to be held accountable for the effects of a financial system over which they will have even less control than the councils in England and Scotland. In Wales, for every 1 per cent. increase in local spending, the council tax will rise by an average of 12 per cent. That is a severe gearing.

Greater accountability could be achieved if the Government accepted Labour's proposal to return control of the business rate to local authorities. I emphasise that the Assembly of Welsh Counties, the Council of Welsh Districts and the Audit Commission back the restoration of local control over the business rate. In this case, only the Secretary of State stands in the way of a move to decentralise control over local spending and to return it to

[Mr. Jones]

local communities. The Bill contains no provision for the widely supported proposal to strengthen local accountability.

I refer briefly to the question of second homes in Wales. Some hon. Members referred to the issue, but in the time available I say only that we all accept that second homes present a threat in parts of Wales. We also know that the poll tax arrangements for empty premises can be very unfair, for example, to elderly people in hospital or old people's homes. The Government's proposals for second homes in Wales are wrong.

The discount principle is costly to administer. It will require a register, and a proper rebate system would do the job much better. In Committee we shall probe deeply into that issue.

The Government are bringing the council tax to Wales out of the utmost panic. The Conservatives are offering a property poll tax in a desperate effort to avoid what we know to be their imminent electoral slaughter, as we would call it. The people of Wales observe the Government's panic-stricken measures with contempt. They do not support them. They recollect that the Secretary of State for Wales perfected the poll tax and boasted of its merits. Indeed, he was promoted to the Cabinet for his total commitment to that hated and unjust tax in Wales.

The people of Wales do not believe the right hon. Gentleman's protestations about the so-called council tax. We know that it still has a poll tax element, that it will still need a register, and that it still does not relate to the ability to pay. It will still create administrative chaos. It is still unfair and costly. It still keeps the uniform business rate. It still celebrates central Government control.

All of us who represent Welsh constituencies know that in the general election the Conservatives will lose their seats there. The people of Wales now regard this tired Government with the utmost contempt. They await the general election with enthusiasm because they want this wretched Government out of office. They know that the next Queen's Speech will be the product of a Labour Government. They want a fair deal and, under the Administration of my right hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock), justice and fair play is what they will get.

9.40 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. David Hunt): I have listened carefully to 19 speeches, each of which has, in its own way, added to the lustre of this occasion.

Before dealing with the many points raised by right hon. and hon. Members, I propose to say something about Wales but, before doing that, I should point out that I have never in my life before spoken from one doughnut to another. Given their present configuration, Opposition Front-Bench Members might better be described as a hot dog. I do not know where all the Labour Back-Bench Members, supposedly so angry about the Bill, can have gone. It appears that only five or six Labour Back Benchers have come here to protest about local government finance. [HON. MEMBERS: "What about your lot?"]

Although the hot dog is making so much noise, I shall endeavour to say something about the structure in Wales. My predecessors and I have enjoyed a close and fruitful working relationship with local authorities in Wales over many years and I believe that that has contributed significantly to the efficient and effective conduct of business between central and local government which is the key to the debate. I have previously paid tribute to the high level of dedication and professionalism exhibited by the staff of all Welsh councils in introducing and managing changes in local government finance. It is commendable that they have once again quickly seized the opportunity to involve themselves fully with my Department in working towards the successful implementation of the council tax in 1993.

In that respect, close contact has been established with leaders of the Council of Welsh Districts and the Assembly of Welsh Counties, and local government officers and my officials are paying detailed attention to the practical aspects of implementing the new council tax, including —as the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) said—the information technology requirement.

It is nonsense to claim—as one or two Opposition Members have—that councils will not be ready to implement the tax in 1993. The Government have introduced the Bill at the earliest possible moment in the Session, and we shall ensure that secondary legislation is made as quickly as possible. Combined with the preparatory work now being undertaken, that will give councils the maximum time to prepare themselves before April 1993.

I welcome the positive approach—perhaps I should qualify that by saying "part positive"—adopted by the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) towards the Committee stage. I hope that the Committee will examine the Bill carefully. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) has a longstanding opposition to guillotines, but he will recall that many hon. Members on both sides of the House have proposed that we should adopt a procedure under which there is an automatic timetable motion in respect of all Bills. He should consider that. However, my hon. Friend is right to point out that there must be sufficient time to consider the Bill. We must be satisfied that there is an appropriate amount of time. My hon. Friend made his point very effectively.

We believe that the council tax is straight forward and fair. It is based on the market value of properties, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment explained. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) that regional banding would produce many more anomalies. The tax takes account of the number of people in households. My hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman) asked us to review the 25 per cent. discount. However, 90 per cent. of adults are counted if one counts, as we do, one or two in the household. There are generous rebates for those on low incomes. In that context, we commend the new council tax.

Mr. McCartney: Before I accept the Secretary of State's olive branch and damn my political career in front of my colleagues on the Opposition Front Bench, will he clarify at an early stage in the Standing Committee the position about nurses in Wales, England, Scotland and Northern Ireland who take courses and then return to their own districts? Irrespective of how nurses enter a training scheme, will all nurses undertaking training be treated in the same way?

Mr. Hunt: I withdraw the commendation that I gave the hon. Gentleman, but only because that is damaging his political career.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) and the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) asked about students and student nurses. I want to make the Government's proposals absolutely clear. Students, student nurses, apprentices and YT trainees will receive a 25 per cent. personal discount. That means that such people cannot increase the bill for any household. As I have said before, they are invisible with regard to the council tax.

Student nurses, other than those on Project 2000, with apprentices and YT trainees, will be able to claim council tax benefit if they are on low incomes. However, because most students and student nurses on Project 2000 cannot obtain social security benefits, we have made special arrangements for them. Property occupied only by students will be exempt. Student halls of residence and hostels will be exempt, as will be houses and flats where all the residents are students. Students living alone will not therefore have to pay.

Mr. Wallace: The Secretary of State for Wales is trying to be helpful and to clarify the matter. However, if a landlord or landlady has a resident student, is there any guarantee that the student will not be asked to contribute towards the council tax?

Mr. Hunt: I obviously cannot give that guarantee. Where students choose to share accommodation with non-students, the point that the hon. Gentleman described arises. They will have to decide between them how the council tax bill is shared. However, their presence will not add to the bill. If a number of people share a house, it is unlikely that any student in it would be worse off than under the community charge.

Several hon. Members have said that there must be a register. The Government have made it absolutely clear that a statutory register of council taxpayers is not required. There is no provision for one in the Bill. It will be up to councils to decide how to keep—*[Interruption.]* Of course it will. It will be up to councils to decide how to keep——

Mr. Douglas *rose*——

Mr. Hunt: May I finish my sentence?

It will be up to councils to decide how to keep information about people who are liable to pay the council tax. Some councils may choose to canvass residents, but there will be no requirement, and there is no requirement in the Bill, to respond to such a canvass.

Mr. Douglas: Will the Secretary of State canvass how this matter is being approached from the point of view of data protection? What advice would he give local authorities which might want to keep not a register but a list? What is the difference between a register and a list in relation to data protection?

Mr. Hunt: I could say that the hon. Gentleman should ask one of his former hon. Friends because he has given a definition. I am talking about a statutory register. There is no provision in the Bill for a statutory register. I make that absolutely clear. We have answered that point—there is no statutory register. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas), who I believe is a prospective candidate in Garscadden, need have no worries about a statutory register in respect of the council tax.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Hunt: I have many points to answer, rather than respond to hon. Members who have not been present for the full debate. *[Interruption.]* I shall give way in a few moments.

One of the points that the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) failed to make is what he proposes to introduce in Wales. I can disclose tonight that there is a five-point plan of pain for the Welsh people. I will tell the hon. Gentleman what it is. The first point was given by the hon. Gentleman's hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) on 26 March in an interview on the "Today" programme. He said that the Labour party intends to increase the burden of council spending met locally to 20 per cent.

Mr. Gould: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hunt: Let me finish the quotation. I want the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside to respond, because, although that is an increase of 40 per cent. in England, it is two and a half times what is raised presently in Wales.

Mr. Gould *rose*——

Mr. Hunt: I want the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside to respond. He does not want to respond.

Mr. Gould *rose*——

Mr. Hunt: I want the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside to respond. I say to the hon. Member for Dagenham what the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) said about his speech, which is that he made very heavy weather. As soon as he finished his speech, he fled from the Chamber like a fly-by-night quack doctor, disappearing before his patent medicine is tasted. He might well brief the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside.

Mr. Gould *rose*——

Mr. Hunt: In Wales, the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside—

Mr. Blunkett: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There is a convention in the House that if an hon. Member is attacked by a Front-Bench Member, he is allowed the opportunity to reply.

Mr. Hunt: I was merely quoting what the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside said and I have said that I am willing to give way to him.

The second point is that we have been told that we in Wales would return to the rates. At present, Wales has rates that are structured on rateable values that were worked out in 1973. Like my hon. Friends the Members for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) and for Leeds, North-West, I must now advise the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside that a revaluation would be bad news for Wales. I do not believe that the rates are a fair system.

The words of the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock), speaking in Gwent in 1980, have been quoted against us many times today. The Opposition replied, "That was 10 years ago", to which my hon. Friend the

[Mr. Hunt]

Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls), whom I commend for this observation, said, that 10 years was a very long time for the Leader of the Opposition and 10 minutes was about the average length of every policy that he had put forward. The right hon. Gentleman said that the rates were the most unjust form of local taxation, yet under Labour we would have a revaluation that would be carried out on an arbitrary basis such as the market price; the rebuilding cost; the maintenance and repair cost; the private rent value; the number of windows, the size of the roof, or the view from the property. What on earth is the modernised valuation system? It is bad news for Wales.

Under Labour, there would be unlimited spending. As my hon. Friends the Members for Wyre (Mr. Mans) and for Thurrock have said, people expected to be protected by central Government, but we have been told by the Labour party that there will be no limit whatsoever on spending. If we look at the rates proposals—*[Interruption.]* I shall give way to the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside—*[Interruption.]* He does not want to intervene because what I am saying is right. I advise him that with unlimited spending, with arbitrary revaluations, with a rates proposal that goes back to 1973——

Mr. Gould *rose*——

Mr. Hunt: No, I have said that I will give way to the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside.

With a rates system that no longer preserves the Welsh grant advantage, it is all bad news for Wales.

Labour's rates proposals are to fairness what Henry VIII was to marital stability and what Basil Fawlty is to the art of hospital and hotel management. Labour's faulty fairness is something—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members should see what Basil Fawlty has done to hospitals as well as to hotels.

It is about time that Opposition Members reconsidered this matter. I made an offer to the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside that he may well recall. I said that I was willing to see him and his colleagues to consult on how best and how quickly to abolish the poll tax and on how best and how quickly to introduce a new and fairer system. The Liberal Democrats, Plaid Cymru and Conservative Members came in to see me, but the Labour party did not.

Mr. Lewis: Will the Secretary of State tell us how many ideas from the Liberals and others he has included in the Bill?

Mr. Hunt: I am not sure what the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) is trying to say, but although I made an offer to his hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside, the hon. Gentleman did not come to see me. The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside is brandishing a document that he sent to me, but he refused my offer to come to see me. I understand that the hon. Member for Dagenham also refused a similar offer from my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine). It does not sit easily with that denial of consultation for the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside now to criticise my right hon. Friends and myself for introducing fair and straightforward proposals for a council tax.

Many of the points which have been raised this evening will be considered in Committee. Not only did the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) get his facts wrong, but the key point——

Mr. Barry Jones: The Secretary of State has consistently misrepresented the position of my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) and all the statements that the Labour party has made about the matter. The people of Wales are tired of observing him whingeing and whining his way around Wales. The people of Wales do not take kindly—

Mr. Hunt *rose*——

Mr. Jones: —to being lectured by the right hon. Gentleman, who is the man who perfected the poll tax. He should be ashamed of himself.

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

Derbyshire Police Force

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Greg Knight.]*

10 pm

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): It is without any pleasure that I seek once more to call the attention of the House to the problems faced by Derbyshire police force. I am pleased to see so many of my colleagues here, including my hon. Friends the Members for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim), for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) and for Derbyshire, West (Mr. McLoughlin) and several other colleagues. I know that they share my views and worries.

The House will recall my Adjournment debate of 22 January 1991 following the publication in December 1990 for the first time of the annual report by Her Majesty's inspector of constabulary, Mr. Geoffrey Dear. Mr. Dear painted a picture of a poorly funded, undermanned force under great pressure, and a chief constable with his hands tied behind his back by council rules and bureaucracy such that decisions on spending even minute amounts have to be referred to a committee, including items as minute as the installation of a telephone line.

The fingerprint bureau was on the point of collapse. Specialised services on drugs and undercover activity were severely curtailed. The police computer was overloaded. Police stations were falling apart and in a disgusting state. The net result was rising crime and falling detection rates —an astonishing pattern in our sensible and law-abiding community. In all, Mr. Dear threatened to withhold the certificate of efficiency if matters did not improve.

Mr. Dear has now returned to Derbyshire and has produced another interim report. It makes even worse reading and it distresses me to have to bring it to the attention of the House. In paragraph 2.2 he reminds everybody that in his first report

"the state of policing in Derbyshire was described as 'mixed but all too often one of deterioration in infrastructure and morale.' . . . The position almost 12 months later is now worse."

He reports, for example, exactly what the committee has done since the first report was published. The report was discussed with the police authority back in October 1990 and with the chairman of the police authority in October 1990. It was published in December 1990 and almost immediately debated by the police committee. What did the committee do? Did it pass resolutions to spend more money and get itself organised to ensure that the police could run themselves properly? No. The only thing that it did was to clarify the legality of its position. So it sought the opinion of legal counsel. It instructed him in February 1991. It received his opinion in March 1991. The report went back to legal counsel with suggested amendments. It was debated again on 4 June 1991.

Mr. Dear says that almost no action that could be registered and measured by Her Majesty's inspector has yet been taken by the police committee. He commented rather wryly:

"Whether or not the delay of almost 6 months was procrastination must remain a matter of opinion."

The committee was still discussing its response to crucial aspects of the first inspection when the next inspection process commenced in May this year.

Where are we now? Let us take staffing. The authorised establishment of Derbyshire police force is 1,820 officers. That is effectively the official Home Office ceiling. It has been increased twice in recent months. It has been increased by 27 posts. But the actual number of police officers employed at 15 October 1991 was 1,713, not 1,820. That is a reduction of 38 officers in a year. The council's main reaction to Mr. Dear's complaints of undermanning has been to cut the force even further. All recruitment stopped in mid-1990 and we are now more than 100 officers below strength. Moreover, there are now 66 fewer officers in post than there were 10 years ago. That has been the result of 10 years of Labour control in Derbyshire county council. Yet, according to the chief constable, in the same period calls for service have increased by 85 per cent. In 1990 a total of 220,000 calls for service—a record —were received. The sensible response would have been to increase the number of officers, not to cut them.

The shortfall was made worse by the high level of civilian staff, which is traditional in Derbyshire. However, the county is not recruiting them either, and they are 100 posts below establishment. That means that we have even fewer uniformed officers on our streets because they have to do civilian tasks such as manning telephones.

There are virtually no traffic wardens, school patrols are entirely haphazard activities, and in many parts of the county rural policing has disappeared—it is non-existent in many parts, especially in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, West and in my own constituency.

This is not fantasy—I am not making it up. In paragraph 2.16 of his report, the inspector says:

"The effect on the public of Derbyshire must now be very serious. It was apparent throughout the Inspection that substantial areas of the County are no longer patrolled by the Police. The Chief Constable has recently stated that community policing is now a myth and foot patrols a rarity."

The results should be fairly obvious. The crime rate in the first quarter of 1991 rose by 26 per cent. over previous years in Derbyshire. In the same period, burglary in dwellings was up by 65 per cent., compared to a 15 per cent. increase nationally. The detection rate is well down and has fallen steadily in the past four years—the detection rate for burglary in dwellings is now less than 20 per cent.

Officers are working huge amounts of overtime and they are not being paid for it. The sickness rate is well up and is a matter of considerable concern. Because no spare officers are available to give assistance, attacks on the police have increased and are 50 per cent. higher than in similar forces.

The situation is deeply worrying. Let me quote again from the report so that people realise that I am not making this up. For example, in paragraph 2.19 it states

"HMI was concerned to hear, repeatedly, from police officers that they were having to concede more and more ground to the hooligans in the street, as no police back-up could be expected when scanty resources were deployed to incidents."

Those of my constituents who are members of the police force—both uniformed and civilian—and those in the constituencies of my hon. Friends are absolute saints to continue to work in such circumstances with bravery, courage, commitment and cheerfulness. The fact that they do so and produce any results at all in such circumstances says a great deal about the men and women who serve us all in Derbyshire. It is a heartbreaking business.

Why is it happening? Money has a lot to do with it, as it has with every problem in Derbyshire. It is interesting to reflect on that. The Labour party won control of Derbyshire with a substantial majority in 1981 and the

[Mrs. Edwina Currie]

inspector of constabulary says that there have been at least eight years of progressive underfunding by the police committee—1·8 per cent. per annum less than the average for English non-metropolitan forces. The cumulative effect in the past decade means that the force has more than 14 per cent. less funding than it would have been expected to have. The inspector adds that he thinks that

"the Force was in a parlous state in 1990."

This year he says:

"a further £2·116 million has been cut from the budget. Effectively the police budget only grew by 5·4% in 1991-92 over the previous year, in the face of inflation and pay awards running at 9·5%."

That results in an absolutely ridiculous state of affairs. The way in which the cuts and budgetary controls are applied makes Derbyshire the laughing stock of the country. I shall give the House a few examples. Throughout the country, mileage restrictions on operational vehicles and on essential users include the following:

"in the north west of the County, an area 20 miles across, was patrolled by an Area car with a 40 miles allocation for an 8 hour tour of duty; in the conurbation the panda vehicles were restricted to 28 miles for each 8 hour shift".

One of them recently ran out of petrol and had to do a 45-mile round trip for fuel when its total allocation for the whole shift was only 28 miles.

"supervisory officers were virtually confined to their office or foot after midnight on the night shift when they had used up their allocation. Some detectives were restricted to 18 miles per day with their main custody suite located some 12 miles away from their base."

That of course means that the police pay for petrol out of their own pockets and that is an absolute disgrace.

There was a row over a kettle in the communications room at Alfreton in Amber Valley, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley drew attention. The electric kettle broke down and will not work unless somebody stands beside it holding in the knob. They sensibly asked for a new kettle but were told that they could not have one because cuts meant that no new equipment or furniture of any kind was available. The office staff even have to share staples. Depriving our police force of a cup of tea is astronomically vindictive and silly.

However, Derbyshire county council is not short of money. The standard spending assessment for all services in Derbyshire was set at 17 per cent. over the 1990-91 figure. By anybody's calculations that is much more than inflation and allows a tremendous amount of growth—and growth there has been. The fire service, which has an SSA of £15 million, had a budget of £15·7 million. It spent more than its SSA, but perhaps that has something to do with the marginally left-wing nature of the fire services union in our area. However, the fire service, especially in south Derbyshire, does a very good job.

The SSA for the social services is £68 million but the total spend is £86 million. That is not a misprint. The social services spend £18 million more than SSA partly because everybody in Derbyshire gets free home helps whether they are in financial need or not. Education has an SSA of £311 million, but its actual budget this year is £350 million, almost £40 million more than its SSA. My hon. Friends know where the money is spent. I shall return to that.

The police SSA is £32·3 million and that is the amount that the county budgets to spend on them. It is the only budget in which the SSA is exactly matched by what is spent. The largest chunk of the increase over SSA is spent on funding school meals in Derbyshire because the price has not been increased for more than 10 years. My constituents face the most extraordinary problems. They cannot police the place for themselves or teach for themselves, yet 400 teachers face redundancy this year. My constituents cannot run the library service for themselves, but some libraries in my constituency have been closed.

The one thing at which my constituents are jolly good is feeding their children and they do not need to be subsidised to the tune of £14 million a year to do it. That is where some of the money goes. Some of it also goes on several splendid, wonderful, much-admired council newspapers. The official cost of this rubbish is nearly £200,000 a year. There is one for the work force and something called "Green Watch" on which I have had correspondence with the county director and which costs about £60,000 a year. They all go in the bin because we have abandoned the process that we adopted some years ago of posting them back to the county officials and the councillors because that was not having any effect. If the official cost of that little lot is well over £250,000, I suspect, and I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley will agree, that the actual cost is much more.

Our football clubs have free policing. Mr. Justice Taylor's report following his inquiry into the Hillsborough stadium disaster commented on the cost of policing and stated:

"The temptation to the clubs to leave it all to the police is stronger if they are not required to make a realistic payment for police services."

He commented with amazement that the charge was supposed to be entirely arbitrary and that at one ground it was said to be nil. Just one ground in the entire country does not pay for its police service, and of course that has to be Derby County football club, yet it is the Derbyshire police force that so desperately needs the money.

The council spent £600,000 on a legal department. It has sued most hon. Members in the Chamber tonight——

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): Unsuccessfully.

Mrs. Currie: No doubt it will be equally unsuccessful in future. Goodness only knows why the county has to spend so much. It challenged the Government on charge-capping legislation and lost. The moment that there is any challenge to the council, there is an inquiry. It spent £24,000 on a so-called independent inquiry into the library service. It spent £10,000 on market research into the attitudes of the police, when it could have spent that money on such items as kettles for the constables to have a cup of tea, a little more petrol and so on. It is all nonsense.

Recently, the council agreed to send a group of its councillors and supporters on a day trip to Brussels in December to lobby MEPs on the single European market impact on "immigration and citizenship issues." That quote comes from the council's press release. The council is sending not just one or two people, and not at their own expense; it is sending a whole coachload of them at our expense. Goodness knows what they think they will do when they get there, except possibly claim their attendance allowances and charge us even more.

We all know how the funding system works for the police. The county council could choose to spend more on the police now; my understanding is that the Government

would match that spending pound for pound because the Home Office pays 51 per cent. The Government cannot simply hand over a large chunk of money, as they have done for education, because it would be wasted in the same way that so much of the other money is wasted.

I quote with approbation the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), the Labour party spokesman on local government, who said:

"Bureaucracy and incompetence are not a result of financial stringency . . . but rather the result of poor management or political direction."

Never was a truer word spoken. It is time that Derbyshire county council accepted its responsibilities and ensured that the police can do their job. We want our lovely and beautiful county to return to the peaceful and relatively crime-free state that it was in before Labour won control.

Labour's stupid and lunatic policies, which I have described, are the brainchild of one man, currently the leader of the council. I think that he hates the police, but why is a matter for speculation. Perhaps it is because he was convicted under a Trade Descriptions Act prosecution. Perhaps it is because of the miners' strike, when the working miners in my constituency were protected by the police. Perhaps it is because of a lingering belief in certain left-wing circles that the police should be the instrument of a socialist state, do what they are told and not make life difficult for criminals. That is a criminal attitude, which is found in county hall, and especially in the plush offices of the leader of the council and the chairman of the police committee.

I call on both those people, but especially Councillor Bookbinder, to do the honourable thing and resign and let someone else, less political, less irresponsible and more sensible, to take their place.

10.18 pm

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley) *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. Does the hon. Gentleman have the consent of both the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) and the Minister to speak?

Mr. Oppenheim: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) for allowing me to participate in the debate. I congratulate her on raising such an important issue. I do not want to go over the ground that she so expertly and thoroughly covered, but I want to emphasise that we are talking about real problems that have been caused for our constituents.

Rarely a weekend passes when a constituent does not come to me worried about the state of the police, about underpolicing in the area and about the way that the police are so thinly spread on the ground that they cannot always tackle the problem of crime in the way that they should and would like to be able to do.

I emphasise that I do not believe that the current state of affairs is in any way the fault of the police. People in Derbyshire get a tremendously good deal from their police, who are generally people of the highest calibre and do a tremendous job under difficult circumstances. In return, the police receive the wholehearted support of the vast majority of Derbyshire people. If it were not for the high calibre of the county's police and the attitude of Derbyshire people, the situation would be much worse.

The problem is that Derbyshire police are hamstrung by the county council, which effectively holds the purse strings. Councils all over Britain have to order their priorities, and we all appreciate the difficulties of prioritising different parts of public spending. The difficulties in Derbyshire centre on the priorities that the county council and its leadership have chosen.

Over the past 10 years or so, the county council has taken on more than 8,000 extra staff—the highest increase of any such authority in England and Wales. At the same time, Derbyshire is the only county in England and Wales to have fewer police. Virtually every county in Britain except Derbyshire has many more police than 12 years ago. It seems strange that the county council's priorities are so warped that it can employ 8,000 extra people—some of whom are in worthwhile jobs, but not all—but employ fewer police than 10 years ago.

That serious problem possibly transcends all the other difficulties that the regime in Matlock has caused for people in Derbyshire. Responsibility for it lies fairly and squarely at the feet of the leader of the county council. I add my voice to that of my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South in saying that it is time that Councillor Bookbinder did the honourable thing and departed quietly from the scene.

People in Derbyshire are sick of Councillor Bookbinder's posturing and posing. They are tired of the way that he seems to place more emphasis and importance on trying to set up a millionaire's resort in Russia, and manages to give well-paid jobs in the council to his political friends and cronies—rather than do his job properly and ensure that police in Derbyshire get the resources and support from the county council that they need and deserve to do their job properly.

Above all, people in Derbyshire are fed up with Councillor Bookbinder's priorities, which hold that it is more important to spend £1 million on a publicity department than to put more police on the streets.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Instead of this knockabout stuff, will the hon. Gentleman say whether he agrees that the Government's standard spending assessment, which determines the level at which Derbyshire county council can spend, is wholly inadequate? Should not the Government ensure that the SSAs for many items, but particularly those relating to the police, are increased? That would improve the Government grant and ensure that money available for other areas could appropriately be spent on policing. That would also go some way towards improving what is a desperate situation—and the policing situation is desperate throughout the country.

Mr. Oppenheim: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman believes that this is knockabout stuff. The issues that my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South and I are raising are of great concern to our constituents. It is disgraceful of the hon. Gentleman to claim that this is some sort of political knockabout. As to the SSA, clearly the hon. Gentleman did not listen to my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South, who dealt fully with that aspect.

Councillor Bookbinder's fan club is dwindling, with its membership in the House now confined, it seems, to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) —and even the councillor's own Labour colleagues in

[Mr. Oppenheim]

Derbyshire think that it is time for him to go. If Councillor Bookbinder lines his own pockets with some spurious, well-paid county council job when he goes—as it is rumoured he will try to do—the people of Derbyshire will never forgive either Councillor Bookbinder or his Labour colleagues for letting him get away with it.

10.24 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Peter Lloyd): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) on securing this Adjournment debate. I am grateful to her, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim), for their clear exposition of the difficulties faced by Derbyshire police as a result of the county council's policies and priorities. I am well aware that my hon. Friends the Members for Derbyshire, West (Mr. McLoughlin) and for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) are also deeply concerned; they have demonstrated that by their presence in the Chamber this evening.

As the House has already been reminded, this is the second Adjournment debate on this subject in the current year. That is a proper reflection of the continuing worry felt by my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South —who has secured the debates—and other Conservative Members representing Derbyshire constituencies, who have given her audible moral support. It also reflects the Government's concern. We all share the same determination to ensure that the deficiencies that have been identified in successive HMI reports are addressed, and addressed effectively, so that the long-suffering public in Derbyshire can benefit from the standard of policing that other counties can take for granted.

I stress, however, that it is the Derbyshire police force itself that most wishes to see improvements in the service with which the public are provided. It is no criticism of the chief constable or his officers to say that they are prevented by council policies from delivering the service that they would like to operate. Indeed—as Mr. Dear's most recent report makes clear—they are going to heroic lengths to provide as good a service as possible in the difficult circumstances in which they have been placed.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South pointed out, overtime is being worked voluntarily, without payment and without time off in lieu. Private vehicles are being used without recompense to ensure minimum levels of services. Everyone in Derbyshire can feel both pride and gratitude in regard to the dedication and commitment that are being shown throughout the force. Only by the determination of individual officers have the Derbyshire public been shielded from the full effects of the county council's lack of adequate support for the police.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire South knows, the Government share her concern about the state to which the county council has brought policing in Derbyshire. At a meeting last month, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary discussed the position with her and other Conservative Members, in the light of Mr. Dear's interim inspection report published in September. It may help the House if I set out now how the Government see the position, and the next steps to be taken.

Mr. Dear's first inspection report on Derbyshire, published in December 1990, set out in detail the effects of the combination of neglect and restrictive procedures from which the police force has suffered for a considerable period. He found the force on the brink of inefficiency, and made a series of key recommendations for improvements. Mr. Dear reviewed the position in a further inspection, the report of which was published in September. I am happy to say that the recommendations that were matters for the chief constable have largely been addressed, but recommendations affecting the procedures imposed by the police authority and the county council had been addressed so recently that Mr. Dear could reach no conclusion on their effectiveness at the time. Exceptionally, he has deferred making any formal judgment on the force's efficiency, and will revisit the force before the end of the financial year to assess the effect of the changes now in progress.

I hope that by then Derbyshire will have taken the action needed to bring its police force up to the standards enjoyed by other counties. Let us make no mistake: it is the legal duty of the police authority, under section 4 of the Police Act 1964,

"to secure the maintenance of an adequate and efficient police force for the area".

That is the authority's duty, and its alone.

The whole tripartite structure of our policing is based on the division of powers and duties between the chief constable, the police authority and the Home Secretary. It works as long as all parties share the common aim of achieving the most effective policing possible; but it runs the risk—as we have seen in Derbyshire—of standards falling sharply if one party puts a spoke in the wheels. Derbyshire's problems are clearly of its own making. The county council may try to blame the standard spending assessment formula or the limited sums available for capital expenditure, but the fact remains that those factors apply equally to all other police authorities. Only in Derbyshire have affairs been so badly managed as to provoke such a level of criticism from the independent inspectorate.

For all the serious criticisms in the report—and I do not devalue them in the slightest—Mr. Dear has noted some signs of progress. For instance, in January's Adjournment debate I drew the House's attention to the example of the casualty bureau which would, in the judgment of the 1990 report, be totally inadequate to deal with the demands of a major disaster. That has been improved, and I hope that other improvements will follow. Powers exist, resting with the Home Secretary, that can be used if the inspector, in his report, declares the authority to be insufficient, and not to be providing a service that can be described as in any way compatible with its obligations under the law.

The motion having been made at Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 12 November 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

MESSAGE FROM THE QUEEN

QUEEN'S SPEECH (ANSWER TO ADDRESS)

The Vice-Chamberlain of the Household reported Her Majesty's Answer to the Address, as follows:

I have received with great satisfaction the loyal and dutiful expression of your thanks for the Speech with which I opened the present Session of Parliament.

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON UNDERGROUND (SAFETY MEASURES) BILL *[Lords]*

Order for Third Reading read.
To be read the Third time tomorrow.

LONDON UNDERGROUND (KING'S CROSS) BILL

Order for consideration read.
To be considered tomorrow.

COMMERCIAL AND PRIVATE BANK BILL *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time tomorrow.

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Student Loans

1. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has any plans to change the student loans scheme.

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): No, Sir.

Mr. Bennett: Does the Minister agree that the loans scheme has turned out to be an administrative nightmare and that it has caused a great deal of bureaucracy and hardship to students, especially since they have been removed from the safety net of social security? Is not it hard that all those measures have been placed on students at a time when they find it particularly difficult to get vacation jobs or part-time jobs in term time and when those who graduate find it increasingly difficult to get jobs to pay off the overdrafts that they have had to incur as students?

Mr. Clarke: I do not agree with any of those premises. First, the scheme has been extremely well run and the loans company has met its target of getting the loans to those who have applied within 21 days in almost all cases. The majority of students have not felt obliged to take out loans as they have not thought it necessary. Those who have done so have enjoyed the benefit. The loan plus the grant is 30 per cent. higher than the grant alone two years ago. There is no evidence of significant student hardship, despite a somewhat half-baked campaign by the National Union of Students to try to suggest that there is. We have provided an access fund to the institutions to enable them to deal with the few cases of hardship that genuinely occur.

Mr. Pawsey: If the situation is as the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) describes it, why has the number of applicants to advanced education increased and why does the number of admissions to universities and polytechnics show a substantial increase? Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that student support in the United Kingdom continues to be the most generous in the western world?

Mr. Clarke: I am unable to answer my hon. Friend's first question; it puzzles me, too. We had been told that the loans system would deter people who might otherwise have gone into higher education because of the so-called financial hardship that they would face. In fact, since it has been introduced, the rate at which student numbers have increased has been unprecedented and we expect it to increase by 10 per cent. again this year. All the evidence refutes the nonsense that we have heard about the impact of the student loans scheme.

My hon. Friend is right that we have the most generous system in the developed world for supporting students. I make no apology for that. It is Government policy to continue to extend opportunity for students in that way.

Mr. Straw: Why is the Secretary of State so contemptuous of the evidence about student hardship when it comes from sources such as the citizens advice

bureaux and from scores of cases sent to him by hon. Members on both sides of the House? Does the Secretary of State recognise that the access funds are in no sense a substitute for student eligibility for social security and for vacation hardship allowance and that mature students in particular have been plunged into severe hardship by the Government's policies? In the light of that, will he reconsider the abolition of vacation hardship allowance, especially as it was abolished in clear breach of undertakings given in the House that it would remain as a safety net following the abolition of social security provision?

Mr. Clarke: I have looked at the evidence of so-called student hardship and I do not accept that the "scores" of cases stand up to examination. There have always been some students in serious difficulties. Mature students and those who do not receive the parental contribution towards their grant have always been a problem. It is somewhat eased for some by the student loans system. It can also be addressed by using the access funds provided by the Government. The average student is much better off under our arrangements of a combined grant and loan scheme than previously. The few that are not—those with high housing benefit—can be helped through the access funds. The vacation hardship allowance was almost unheard of and was not being demanded. When we abolished it there was scarcely any take-up.

Grant-maintained Schools

2. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many schools in Hampshire have now applied for and achieved grant-maintained status; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of State, Department of Education and Science (Mr. Tim Eggar): Four schools in Hampshire have applied for and achieved grant-maintained status. I am pleased that the parents of pupils at those schools have voted to take up this option for their schools. I hope that many more in Hampshire and, indeed, throughout the country will follow their example.

Mr. Colvin: May I take this opportunity to congratulate Hardley school in my constituency which was the first in Hampshire to achieve grant-maintained status? Does my hon. Friend accept that opting out, as it is called, is a misnomer because schools which achieve grant-maintained status are opting into a new educational regime of higher morale, better educational opportunities and more money? What percentage of schools in Hampshire will have to achieve grant-maintained status for the local education authority to become redundant?

Mr. Eggar: I hope that the local education authority will encourage schools to go grant maintained. There is much evidence from a recent survey that that is beneficial to schools and pupils. For example, of the schools replying to the survey, 90 per cent. reported an increase in the number of pupils applying, 65 per cent. reported more teachers in the schools and 75 per cent. reported an improved teacher-pupil ratio. That is evidence of the success of the GM policy.

Mr. Hardy *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: The question is about Hampshire.

Mr. Hardy: I know that it is about Hampshire, Mr. Speaker. Will the Minister offer the House any justification for the provision of more money to schools in Hampshire because they happen to serve the current dogma of the present Government?

Mr. Eggar: The money is allocated to Hampshire on the normal standard spending assessment basis. Grant-maintained schools rightly get money which would otherwise be spent on administration costs by Hampshire. Those grant-maintained schools are using that money effectively for the benefit of the school and, more importantly, of improving education for the pupils attending those schools.

Foundation for Sport and the Arts

3. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what responsibilities he has for the sports and arts foundation.

The Minister for Sports (Mr. Robert Atkins): The Foundation for Sport and the Arts is an independent trust which decides the allocation of its own funds. Under the trust deed I appoint a Government observer and am consulted on the appointment of the chairman. In practice, I keep in close touch with the work of the foundation.

Mr. Mans: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Football Trust gets an extra £20 million from the 2·5 per cent. reduction in the betting levy which goes towards the safety and improvement of football grounds?

Mr. Atkins: That is certainly part of the money that is made available as a result of the far-sighted decision of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer. When one adds to that the £40 million or so from the trust, my hon. Friends at least will recognise that the Government can lay claim to spending more money on sport than any party has done for many years.

Mr. Pendry: Is not the Minister somewhat ashamed of himself? Despite the various amounts that come from the Foundation for Sports and the Arts—given at the whim of the trustees in a haphazard fashion—they do not compensate in any way for the £60 million cut in real grant from the Government since 1986. What answer will the Minister give to the chairman of the Sports Council, who described the recent cuts as a kick in the teeth?

Mr. Atkins: I am delighted to see the hon. Gentleman in the Chamber; he should be on the Opposition Front Bench as their spokesman for sport, as my shadow is not here. Perhaps something should be read into that.

This year the increase in grant to the Sports Council is 4·4 per cent., which is more than the rate of inflation and equivalent year on year to what we have pledged ourselves to provide. I repeat that if one adds to that the £40 million from the foundation, the £20 million a year for football and the £1 million that I found for the champion coaching scheme, it is clear that our commitment to sport is greater than anyone's.

I spoke to the chairman of the Sports Council this morning and pointed out that the increase in grant is in excess of inflation. Therefore, his comment was wrong.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Does the Minister understand that, despite what he has just said, there is still

considerable apprehension that the Government will use the existence of the foundation as an excuse for not funding sport properly? The Minister is aware that the Sports Council's plan did not represent a standstill, but involved the development and expansion of all its activities. That is why the settlement of 4·4 per cent. is rightly described as a kick in the teeth.

Mr. Atkins: It is extraordinary that even though the Government found an extra £40 million for sport in the last Budget, which is near enough double the expenditure on sport year on year, Opposition Members criticise us and suggest that we are not providing the necessary resources for sport. The first tranche of money from the foundation of £3·7 million—*[Interruption.]* Do stop interrupting.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am supposed to say that. Can we get on?

Mr. Atkins: I was referring to the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw). He is supposed to believe in discipline in our schools, but his behaviour is singularly ill-disciplined. As a public school boy, he should know better.

I have sought to demonstrate that the claim of the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) is fatuous, because we are spending much more money on sport than in the past.

Mr. David Evans: Does my hon. Friend agree that Labour's charter for sport is about more interference, more committees, more regional committees and, most of all, more costs? Will sport be subject to Beckett's law? Will it be a top priority, a priority, or what? Does not that contrast with the Conservative policy of reducing the betting levy by 2·5 per cent., which has given £100 million to sport and increased the Sports Council grant to £50 million——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let us have a question please.

Mr. Evans: Does not it mean that we are the party of hot money, not hot air?

Mr. Atkins: I can do no better than to draw the attention of the House to this statement in Labour's charter for sport:

"We will . . . review the composition and powers of the Sports Council . . . to free them from political bias".

However, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell), who is supposed to be the shadow spokesman on this subject, suggested that Labour would encourage a greater ministerial role in the Sports Council. May we know which is which?

Mr. Cormack: Does my hon. Friend accept that much as many of us welcome the sports and arts foundation, we would infinitely prefer to have a national lottery, which would produce far more money for sport and the arts?

Mr. Atkins: I am sure that my hon. Friend recognises that there are a number of views on this subject. My views are well known, but it is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Derbyshire County Council (Funding)

4. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will increase the educational funding for Derbyshire county council.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Michael Fallon): Councils' current spending on all services next year should be 7·2 per cent. higher than this year, but it is for Derbyshire to decide its level of spending and priorities between services. Capital spending in schools, supported by annual guidelines, is set to rise from £472 million this year to £524 million next year, an increase of 11 per cent. Derbyshire's allocation will be announced before Christmas.

Mr. Skinner: Will the Minister confirm that in the summer he met a group from Derbyshire county council who asked for £140 million, spread over the next three years, to get rid of all outstanding repairs and make necessary improvements? After 12 years of Tory rule, little toddlers must still run across playgrounds to get to outside toilets. We have the citizens charter, the parents charter and every charter under the sun. When will the Government put their money where their mouth is?

Mr. Fallon: I confirm that Councillor Young came to the Department in July with five hours' worth of videos showing how Derbyshire had been running down its schools. I allocated Derbyshire £21 million this year, the fourth highest allocation of any education authority in England. I now understand that Derbyshire is planning to siphon off £5·5 million of capital spending to pay for extra redundancy and personnel costs at county hall.

Mrs. Currie: Might the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) want more money for Derbyshire so that it can employ more people such as his brother, who is employed as a personnel liaison officer for Toyota, his sister-in-law, who is employed in the county publicity department—*[Interruption.]*—and such as another sister-in-law, who is employed in the education department? The hon. Gentleman is always talking about jobs for the boys. Should not that include brothers and sisters as well?

Mr. Fallon: Derbyshire not only employs some pretty odd people, but it makes some rather odd choices. This year, Derbyshire has chosen to cut music and swimming while spending over £5 million keeping school meals at 1981 prices.

Greater Manchester Schools

6. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the staffing levels and the conditions of schools in Greater Manchester.

Mr. Fallon: In January 1991, the 10 local education authorities in Greater Manchester reported 230 full-time permanent posts unfilled, a vacancy rate of 1 per cent. below the national vacancy rate of 1·5 per cent. Vacancy figures in September showed a significant improvement, with only 15 vacancies reported for the whole of Greater Manchester at the start of the school year.

Mr. Lloyd: I am not surprised that the Minister failed to mention the condition of schools in Greater Manchester. Will he confirm that in every year and for

every authority recently in Greater Manchester, the amount of money that the Government have allowed them to spend on capital projects has been way behind what they have needed, with the result that there is now a backlog of repairs and maintenance? Is he aware that one head teacher recently told me that not only do they have to teach in unsavoury conditions, but they are now having to teach in unsafe conditions? The Government are putting the health and safety of children at school at risk. What will the Minister do to make sure that that state of affairs does not continue?

Mr. Fallon: For the 10 councils in the Greater Manchester area, I increased capital guidelines from £32·6 million last year to £41·6 million this year. I shall be announcing the individual allocations for next year before Christmas.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the worst-ever cuts in education took place in 1976 under a Labour Government? Will he further confirm that the 11 per cent. increase in the autumn statement is bound to be helpful?

Mr. Fallon: Yes, the 11 per cent. increase for school buildings next year is a good outcome, given that the level of inflation is only about 4 per cent. and given the drop in construction prices. Trafford education authority has received about £13 million in the past two years to help it reorganise and improve its schools.

Higher Education

7. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he next expects to visit Leeds university and Leeds polytechnic to discuss funding for higher education.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Alan Howarth): I will be visiting Leeds polytechnic to open the Higher Education for Capability office on 27 November. This is a joint project of the polytechnic and the university.

Mr. Battle: Is the Minister aware that at Leeds university top-quality alpha-grade research in technical and scientific subjects can no longer be funded? Will he give an assurance that in future research at Leeds polytechnic will be funded under the new joint proposals? Is he aware that such cuts in academic research will prove to be economic short termism with vengeance?

Mr. Howarth: Our policy is that high-quality research should be supported in departments of universities and polytechnics, wherever they may be. The Universities Funding Council and the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council will embark jointly on a new research and assessment exercise next year. As a consequence, up-to-date ratings of quality will be made, department by department, across the spectrum of higher education. Every department that scores highly in those assessments will benefit accordingly. That is a thoroughly fair system.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will the Minister make absolutely certain that the funding councils use up-to-date figures? Universities such as Lancaster are going steadily and rapidly up the poll and are doing very well indeed. However, the 1988 criteria are not as good as current ideas, so it is important that the universities that are forging ahead should be encouraged.

Mr. Howarth: As always, my hon. Friend is eloquent in championing the university in her constituency—and rightly so. The new research assessment exercise has been brought forward in anticipation of ending the binary line and bringing together the polytechnics and universities in one sector. As a result of the exercise to be carried out during 1992, the assessments of research quality will be based on the most up-to-date data.

Mr. Andrew Smith: When the Minister discusses higher education funding at Leeds, will he confirm that it is Government policy to increase basic funding in line with the increase in student numbers? Given the pressures on laboratories, libraries, teaching and student accommodation, and the real cut in capital funding in this year's autumn statement, what is the Government's policy on capital expenditure?

Mr. Howarth: I am delighted to be able to tell the hon. Gentleman that our policy on capital expenditure is to encourage and enable higher education institutions to invest, as they need to do, to accommodate the dramatic increase in student numbers as well as provide facilities for the research of remarkable quality which takes place in so many of our universities. Capital funding available from the polytechnics has increased by 50 per cent. since 1989-90, when the PCFC sector was established. I am pleased that, in the new settlement that has just been announced, we have secured an extra £9 million of capital funding for the higher education institutions.

School Inspectors

8. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he next expects to receive a report from Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The senior chief inspector's annual report is being prepared now and will be submitted to me on completion.

Mr. Spearing: Does the Secretary of State agree that, whatever the merits of Her Majesty's inspectors being involved in the advocacy of method, their function of providing independent and publicised reports on the quality of education has never been in question? If he wishes to make an adjustment, would not it be more sensible to detach their role from advocacy of method and confine it solely to inspection? Is not his solution of private consultants to be engaged by competitive schools asking for trouble, because it creates an automatic conflict of interest and renders their reports suspect by definition?

Mr. Clarke: With respect, the hon. Gentleman appears to be slightly confused about what we are doing. First, I accept that the inspectors' production of an annual report and other reports on our schools is extremely valuable, as they base their advice on the inspections that they carry out. The Education (Schools) Bill will continue that. Indeed, we strengthen the independence of Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools in producing those reports by detaching him, to a much greater degree than in the past, from my Department. Secondly, the new role for HMI will be to monitor the quality of all those inspectors who will

carry out the new inspections in individual schools throughout the country and to give, for the first time, reports to every parent about those schools.

Mr. Spearing *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman dismisses that. Does he think that we should employ 5,000 HMIs to carry out inspections, or does he prefer the Labour party's solution —that only local councils should be allowed to inspect schools? We are giving Her Majesty's inspectorate a key role in monitoring the quality of those permitted to carry out that public service.

Mr. Amos: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the whole purpose of the reforms is to increase the number of inspections in schools, not reduce them, and that the monitoring and regulation of the new system will be such that it would not be in the professional interest of any inspector to try to fiddle a report?

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Last year Her Majesty's inspectors produced and published about 150 reports on individual schools and, usually, no parent saw the reports. Our arrangements will lead to about 6,000 inspections each year, and each parent will receive, without requesting it, a straightforward description of the inspection. We state that the teams of inspectors should be monitored and approved by Her Majesty's inspectorate. The new, independent Her Majesty's inspectorate will have the duty of giving a little lion stamp to those inspectors and ensuring that they are up to the mark.

Mr. Straw: How can the Secretary of State conceivably claim that Her Majesty's inspectorate is to be strengthened when its numbers are to be cut by two thirds and it is to be subject to clear and specific direction from the Secretary of State? Will the Secretary of State confirm that the privatisation of the inspectorate inherent in the Education (Schools) Bill goes far further than that presaged in the schools charter and includes, under the guise of additional inspectors, the substitution of private money-making firms to do the work currently carried out, not just by local inspectors but by the chief inspector of schools?

Mr. Clarke: I have carried out several privatisations in my time in commercial and industrial departments, and my understanding of the word privatisation is that one takes something currently managed in the public sector and transfers it to the private sector—the last such transfer in which I was engaged involved British Steel. In this case, Her Majesty's inspectorate is not being transferred and its role will remain the same except that as a public organisation it will be made more independent of the Secretary of State. The hon. Gentleman's complaints are based solely on the fact that the total number of staff in the inspectorate are to be reduced. The Labour party judges such matters only on the number of employees and trade union members on the books, which is not the test that we shall apply. We shall give Her Majesty's inspectorate powers and duties and the number of staff that the chief inspector and I think are required to fulfil those roles.

Mr. John Browne: Will Her Majesty's chief inspector report on the case of Kings school, Winchester, which was denied grant-maintained status as a direct result of the local authority using public funds to wage a campaign against it?

Mr. Clarke: I do not think that Her Majesty's inspectorate can look at that case. A parental ballot was carried out on grant-maintained status and the parents decided to vote against the application for that status. I agree with my hon. Friend that Hampshire county council waged an extremely vigorous campaign against the proposal. I do not agree that Hampshire presented the case fairly, and I keep trying to obtain undertakings from Hampshire county council that, even if it cannot support Government policy, it might at least present a more detached account of the case to parents when grant-maintained options are on the table.

Gateshead CTC

9. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the proposed per capita capital spending per pupil in 1991-92 at *(a)* Gateshead city technology college and *(b)* all secondary schools in the borough of Sunderland.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend's planned capital contribution to Emmanuel college, Gateshead in 1991-92 is £259,000. The funding agreement with the CTC allows for 300 pupils in 1991-92. The Department does not hold figures for the proposed capital expenditure on secondary schools in the borough of Sunderland in 1991-92.

Mr. Mullin: I am not surprised that the Minister declines to give us the figures because is not the truth that about 60 to 80 times the amount of money is being spent per capita on students at the city technology college than is spent on pupils at secondary schools in Sunderland and surrounding boroughs? Can the Minister point to any country apart from South Africa where such large sums are spent on a small elite group at the expense of the majority?

Mr. Eggar: I am not sure where the hon. Gentleman gets his figures from—perhaps from the same Labour party briefing on which the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) relies. The hon. Member for Blackburn produces wholly fictitious figures which compare the new building costs for new schools or for the conversion of schools to CTCs over a period of three years with the capital expenditure borrowing guidelines for 14 authorities in one year. That shows that he has not reached level 1 in mathematics, and nor has the hon. Gentleman.

Student Grants

10. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will review the criteria for student grant eligibility.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Education (Mandatory Awards) Regulations are reviewed annually. Extending them to a substantially wider range of courses or students would, however, require primary legislation. We have no present plans for that.

Mr. Bowis: Is my hon. Friend aware that in many local education authorities, not least in London, it is a prerequisite for a discretionary award that a student lives for at least three years within the borough concerned? Will he give at least gentle guidance to LEAs suggesting that it is not reasonable for students to be excluded from

discretionary grants merely because their parents have moved home? Or will he try to find some other way of funding such students?

Mr. Howarth: The regulations do not impose any specific requirements on how local education authorities should treat people ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom when considering their applications for discretionary awards. It is for each LEA to construct its own policies in respect of discretionary awards. "Discretionary" means what it says: it is not our policy to intervene or even to lean gently on authorities in this matter.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Does the Minister accept that it is no good being eligible for a mandatory award if it is then not paid? What steps is he taking to ensure that this year local authorities such as Southwark, which a week or two ago had paid less than one fifth of its mandatory grant cheques to eligible students, pay up, so as to minimise student hardship? And what will he do to ensure that in future years the system pays up at the beginning of the year, not a third of the way through it or later?

Mr. Howarth: We have a student support system as generous as any in the world, but under long-established arrangements local education authorities administer the award system, and students depend absolutely on those authorities playing their part. We have substantially increased resources for students, providing more money for more of them. It is a disgrace if students are in difficulty on account of administrative failures by local education authorities. I have already made my views clear: officials have written to every education authority about which we have received evidence of a failure to carry out its statutory duties—and we will continue to pursue the matter vigorously.

Mr. Hannam: Is my hon. Friend aware of the problem that some mature students, particularly women with home commitments, have to take their degree courses in the form of part-time courses and that they are therefore not eligible for mandatory grant? Will he look into that?

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the changing pattern of higher education. There has been a dramatic expansion of participation, and there are more mature and part-time students and more people working their way towards qualifications on the basis of credit accumulation and transfer. We shall keep our administrative and financial systems under review in the light of these trends.

Mr. Cryer: Does the Minister accept that a local authority such as Bradford, which tries to provide a wide range of discretionary awards, is inevitably limited by the amount of money that it can give? If central Government provided more assistance, the Minister may rest assured that such LEAs would provide more students with the opportunity of further and higher education through the application of discretionary awards.

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman would do well to go back to Bradford and ask the authority one or two questions. The assumption on education spending that underlies the revenue support grant to local authorities this year allowed for increased spending on discretionary awards of 15 per cent. in 1991-92. If authorities are failing to increase their spending on discretionary awards commensurately, that is their decision.

Primary Schools (Funding)

11. **Mr. Robert Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he is taking to assure himself of the adequacy of the funding arrangements for local management of smaller primary schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: Local education authorities have considerable flexibility to provide additional assistance to small primary schools, through the small school protection factor, but it is for each authority to devise its own scheme and to choose its priorities within that scheme in the light of local needs.

Mr. Hicks: Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be regrettable if the objectives of local school management could not be met because of inadequate funding? Is he aware that there are problems not only in respect of teachers' salaries, actual as opposed to average, but in respect of responsibility for the funding of the older village primary schools which predominate in rural areas? There is a clash here between the local authority and the governors.

Mr. Fallon: Yes, that is an important point which was impressed on me when I recently visited Cornwall. The Cornwall scheme protects small primary schools with fewer than 12 staff by paying most of the difference between average salary costs at the school and the average salary costs across the local education authority area.

Ms. Armstrong: Does the Minister realise that many small primary schools are now under enormous pressure in terms of delivering the full curriculum because they do not have the additional resources to enable them to employ the staff to teach it? Will the Government stop pressurising authorities to cease supporting small primary schools through additional support across the county? That pressure is making the future of many rural primary schools very unpredictable.

Mr. Fallon: There is no such pressure. Three years after the Act was passed, the hon. Lady still does not seem to understand that local management of schools funds the pupils and not the teachers. It is open to any local education authority to tilt its scheme towards primary schools and I have been encouraging local education authorities, where appropriate, to revise their schemes with precisely that aim.

Mr. Allason: Is my hon. Friend aware that despite the success of local management of schools, staff are still very worried that experienced older teachers who qualify for the higher salary scales will be discarded in favour of less experienced younger staff?

Mr. Fallon: That is precisely why we allow local education authorities the flexibility to devise schemes to accommodate the particular circumstances of small schools and those with very high inherited salary costs.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: The Minister is right to commend Cornwall county council for its efforts to help small primary schools. Nevertheless, the problem of average

teacher costs strikes hard in rural areas that have many small schools. That problem will increase, thereby penalising schools with the most experienced and loyal teaching staffs. Will he go some way towards reviewing the process?

Mr. Fallon: Yes, we shall be reviewing the teaching cost issue in 1993. Cornwall still has much to do to meet our requirement of 85 per cent. delegation to school budgets. It has not yet reached that target and I urge it to re-examine its spending allocations to make sure that it does. I was struck by the fact that Cornwall seems to be overspending on roads and underspending on its schools.

Adult Education

12. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has any plans to expand the adult education service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The Government's proposals for transferring further education colleges to a new independent sector are designed to increase the number of people studying at those colleges and to improve opportunities for all in further education.

Mr. Greenway: Will my hon. Friend confirm the Government's total commitment to adult education and its comparative cheapness in providing excellent courses for so many people? In particular, will he confirm that the Government see leisure courses and non-vocational courses as being equal in value to vocational courses and will they ensure funding for all?

Mr. Eggar: I can readily confirm to my hon. Friend, to whose long-held interest in education I pay tribute, that we are committed to continuing to fund adult education of all kinds—vocational, leisure, basic education and English as a second language. The increased recent trend of more adults studying in their own community is greatly welcomed and is exactly what the White Paper seeks to underline.

Mr. Fatchett: Is it not clear from Government statements that the future of the adult education service is at great risk? Will the Minister give a commitment that the present adult education programme will be built upon and secured, or are the Government pulling the ladder away from thousands of our fellow citizens who have prospered from adult education in the past?

Mr. Eggar: What is becoming increasingly clear is that the Labour party is trying to do nothing other than promote scare stories so as deliberately to frighten people who have traditionally relied on adult education courses. The hon. Gentleman knows that we are determined to sustain adult education, to extend it and to ensure that it is properly based in the local community. The hon. Gentleman should admit that.

Local Management of Schools

13. **Mr. Brandon-Bravo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the average amount of money being held back by local education authorities in England and Wales, per pupil, under the system of local management of schools.

Mr. Fallon: Across the 97 local education authorities operating local management of schools, the average amount of the potential schools budget retained centrally is £260 per pupil.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Is my hon. Friend aware that the tyranny that controls education in Nottinghamshire holds back £10 or more for each and every child above that national average, that it is somewhere around two thirds of the way down the merit table for putting resources where they belong—at the school—and sits on about £3 million at the centre, which is the same as holding back £5,000 for every school in the county? Does that not prove that we need the parents charter? Will my hon. Friend ensure that every parent in the county gets one?

Mr. Fallon: Yes, Sir. My hon. Friend will be interested to know that Nottinghamshire holds back nearly £43 million and that its total administrative costs are 4·4 per cent. of the schools' budget—twice as high, for example, as those in Northamptonshire.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Trimble:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 12 November.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Trimble: Now that the by-election in Kincardine and Deeside has focused attention on the issue of Scotland once again, and with the continuing difficulties in establishing a democratic local administration in Ulster, will the Prime Minister consider initiating consultations with other parliamentary parties with a view to reaching agreement on common structures of government throughout the United Kingdom?

The Prime Minister: I understand why the hon. Gentleman makes that point, given all the difficulties in Northern Ireland and the historical perspective there. It is precisely to deal with those problems that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been having so many discussions over the past year.

Q2. **Mr. Ashby:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 12 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Ashby: Has my right hon. Friend seen the good producer price figures issued today? Do not these support the contention of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer that the economy is beginning to turn around?

The Prime Minister: I saw the producer price figures issued this morning, and they are good news. They show a continuing collapse in inflation and that can only help the competitiveness of industry and thereafter the growth of the economy and the creation of jobs.

Mr. Kinnock: Given that the Prime Minister correctly said last night that Maastricht will be an important stage

on the road to even closer European union, what does he say today to those of his right hon. Friends who say that he has already gone far enough down the road to political and monetary union and, in their words, we should stay where we are?

The Prime Minister: I have made it clear over recent months, and am happy to repeat today, that we are seeking an agreement at Maastricht that will be acceptable to the House and will enable Europe to move forward together. That is true on economic and monetary union and on political union. There is some way to go before I could sign the political union treaty that is before us. There are still matters to be agreed on the monetary union treaty, but in both cases we are making progress.

Mr. Kinnock: The Prime Minister says that he recognises, in his words, the

"potential impact on our influence and prosperity were we to take a different decision from our principal competitors".

In saying that, is he recognising that isolation would mean the sacrifice of influence that is essential to the vital interests of the British people—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Kinnock: Will the Prime Minister take this advice:

"We have nothing to gain by sitting on the margins . . . while others frame new structures without us"?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, this Conservative Government have been the leader in Europe for the past 12 years. The single market would not have come about but for this Conservative Government. The change in rebates would not have come about without the Conservative Government. The Fontainebleau abatement would not have come about without the Conservative Government. We propose to remain within the centre of the Community, framing the future of the Community in the interests of the United Kingdom and the rest of Europe.

Mr. Kinnock: So now perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will answer my first question; what does he have to say to those of his right hon. Friends who say that he has gone far enough and should stay where he is?

The Prime Minister: I answered that question some moments ago.

Q3. **Mr. Day:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 12 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Day: Will my right hon. Friend accept my congratulations and those of my right hon. and hon. Friends for the massive increase in health spending that the Government recently announced, which shows beyond doubt the Government's commitment to the principles of the national health service? Does he agree that that is in stark contrast to the contributions that have been made by Opposition Members, who have nothing to offer the NHS but smears and attacks on staff and patients, and on the care that patients receive? Will he give the House some positive information about the success of the reforms that the Government are making, which will save the NHS for the year 2000?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. There has been yet another substantial increase in resources for the NHS, and that will enable a continuing reduction in waiting lists and better service for all those who use the NHS. Trusts are effective and efficient and they are the future. Increasingly, they are proving that.

Mr. Ashdown: Will the Prime Minister take the opportunity of the vote that will take place on Thursday to think again about Scotland? Does he realise that the real potential danger to the Union of Scotland with Britain lies not with the separatists but with his Government's refusal to listen to the voice of the people of Scotland? So I ask him again: will he listen and will he think again?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman sounds from what he has just said as though he is a separatist. I can tell him frankly that the Government are not separatist. The Government remain fully committed to the Union between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Roe: Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the £24 billion programme for public housing over the next three years detailed by the Department of the Environment yesterday? Will he join me also in condemning the inefficiency of Labour councils, whose failure to collect rents and fill empty properties is a major barrier to the provision of homes for the homeless?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. As people can see throughout the country, the reality is that Labour authorities leave houses empty even when people are in need of them.

Q4. **Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 12 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Smith: Will the Prime Minister join me in congratulating the Cowley workers, the trade unions and the management on the launch today of the excellent and new Cowley-designed and Cowley-built Rover 800? Will he explain why, at the hands of his high-tax Government, the car will face total sales taxation of 27·3 per cent., when its BMW competitor faces tax in its domestic market of only 14 per cent? Is it not time that he started backing the British car industry in the way that the Germans support theirs?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman can certainly be certain that I congratulate Rover on its splendid new product, and I hope that it will be immensely successful. As an owner of Rover cars for many years, I am sure that it will be. Rover and other car manufacturers are now so successful that they are exporting to Japan and elsewhere.

Sir Gerrard Neale: Can my right hon. Friend find time during his busy day to congratulate the management and staff of Rover on the fact that over the past 12 months not one single minute of production time has been lost through industrial disputes? Will he contrast that excellent achievement under Conservative trade union law with the undoubted industrial chaos that would result in the unlikely event of the Labour party's returning to government?

The Prime Minister: What my hon. Friend has said is certainly the case at Rover, but it has also been the case throughout industry during the past year, when there was the lowest number of strikes for more than 45 years. I welcome that very much. Of course, if we were to revert to legalising secondary action, flying pickets and the other actions that the Opposition propose, I do not doubt that strikes would return.

Q5. **Ms. Hoey:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 12 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Ms. Hoey: What has the Prime Minister to say about the comments of the last Conservative leader of Lambeth council, who in a letter published in *The Guardian* on Saturday said—*[Interruption.]* I want to quote it, and he said, "The Government is failing in its treatment of the mentally ill"—[HON. MEMBERS: "No quoting."]

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady can paraphrase, and she is doing so.

Ms. Hoey: Conservative Members do not want to hear what a former Conservative leader has to say. He said that the Government were out of touch with homelessness and with the hopelessness of large sections of society, and that they had forfeited their right to govern.

The Prime Minister: I have not seen the remarks quoted by the hon. Lady, and neither have I seen the context in which they were put or what else was said. However, I say to the hon. Lady and to the alleged author of that statement that, frankly, I disagree. As a former Minister with responsibility for the disabled, I am well aware of the immense amount of work and care that has gone into the care of the disabled. As a former Lambeth housing chairman, I do not take lectures from anyone in Lambeth about housing.

Mr. Burt: Is my right hon. Friend aware that he carries the support of the vast majority in this House and in the country in his refusal to rule out a single currency on our terms at some future time? In displaying the consistency of involvement and leadership in the Conservative party with regard to Europe, is he not finally giving this country the role that it lost with the empire?

The Prime Minister: We must consider the long-standing interests of this country when we make decisions on the treaties, and that is what I will do.

Q6. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagement for Tuesday 12 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the rely that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Cohen: As crime in London increased yet again last year—by 13 per cent.—has the Prime Minister read the comment by police commander David Stevens that the police are not responsible for crime any more than doctors are responsible for disease, and that crime is an indicator of economic and social malaise? As the Conservative party has been in power for 12½ years, who does the Prime Minister think is responsible for the economic and social malaise?

The Prime Minister: Crime prevention begins in the home and in the treatment of people from an early age. On the questions of prevention and punishment of crime, the Government have taken committed and sustained action for more than a decade. That includes providing a strong and effective police force. We are spending 67 per cent. more, over and above inflation, than in 1979. No Government could have done more against crime than we have, and no future Government would be able to do more than we will.

Q8. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 12 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bowis: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the level of community charge or council tax depends partly on the efficiency of the local council and partly on the proportion of local government spending which is required to be raised by local taxation? Does he further agree that if that proportion were to be raised to 20 per cent., overnight every household bill would rise by 50 per cent? Is he not astonished that that is the Labour party's proposal?

The Prime Minister: No, I am not astonished because, two years after announcing its local government plans, the Labour party still does not know how they would work. My hon. Friend makes some pertinent points. We will make sure that local tax bills are restrained and, where councils are extravagant, unlike the Labour party, which would let extravagance run wild to the cost of the local taxpayer with no let or hindrance, we will cap them.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Sillars—question 9.

Hon. Members: Where is he?

Mr. Speaker: I call Mr. Dennis Turner.

Mr. Turner: Has the Prime Minister one shred of sympathy for Britain's beer drinkers? Prices have increased way beyond the rate of inflation and the Government's legislation to check monopolies is a complete fiasco. When will the Government do something to protect the British beer drinker?

The Prime Minister: With regard to having sympathy for them, I would say to the hon. Gentleman that I am one of them.

NATO Summit

3.31 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I shall make a statement on the NATO summit in Rome on 7 and 8 November which I attended with my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary.

Last July, in London, NATO agreed to adapt its strategy to the changed situation in Europe and to build up a new partnership with the countries of central and eastern Europe. At the summit we agreed on how to carry forward both those tasks.

The strategic concept reflects the British Government's objectives. These were to ensure that NATO remains the linchpin of western security, charged with dealing with whatever security problems might threaten. The strategy reaffirms the need for a collective defence based on NATO's integrated military structure; and also on the need for both nuclear and conventional forces, kept up to date where necessary, but at significantly lower levels. Alliance forces in every NATO country will be smaller, more mobile and more flexible. At the summit we endorsed the establishment of new rapid reaction forces, in which the United Kingdom will command the land element.

The summit declaration establishes a North Atlantic Co-operation Council. This forum will enable NATO to discuss common security issues with the Soviet Union, the Baltic states and the countries of eastern Europe. At Britain's suggestion, the first such meeting will be held at Foreign Minister level in Brussels in mid-December.

We have agreed a wider role for NATO. Henceforth, NATO will not just be keeping the peace; it will be actively promoting peace. It will be prepared to help the countries of eastern Europe in planning defence forces in a democracy, with civilian-military relations, and in converting defence production to civilian purposes. The relationship may well develop still further.

The NATO summit also, for the first time, considered in depth the European defence identity and the alliance. We affirmed some important principles: first, the principle that NATO is the essential forum for consultation and agreement on policies bearing on the security and defence of alliance territory; secondly, endorsement of the British proposals to use the Western European Union as the means of strengthening the European pillar of the alliance; thirdly, the need to establish clear and open relations between NATO and the Western European Union and to involve other allies on issues discussed in the Western European Union which affect their security.

Heads of Government received a report on Yugoslavia following a meeting of Community Foreign Ministers with Lord Carrington. In view of the grave situation in Yugoslavia and the repeated breaches of the ceasefire, Community Governments agreed in Rome on a series of restrictive measures. They include suspension of the trade and co-operation agreement; suspension of benefits under the general scheme of preferences; suspension of the PHARE—Poland and Hungary Assistance for Economic Restructuring—programme; and the restoration of quotas on textiles. Community Governments asked those member states that are members of the Security Council to promote measures in the Security Council to tighten the arms embargo, and to take steps towards imposing an oil embargo. We are now consulting other members of the UN Security Council about the introduction of such measures.

Community Governments also decided that positive action should be taken to benefit the parties which were being co-operative in the peace process. Taken together, these measures will increase the pressure on those responsible for appalling bloodshed and suffering in Yugoslavia. NATO Heads of Government issued a separate statement making clear the allies' strong support for the efforts of the European Community to promote peace in Yugoslavia.

We also discussed developments in the Soviet Union. We publicly supported economic reform and democratisation. We stressed the need for the authorities in the republics, as well as at the centre, to respect their obligations—on human rights, on arms control and on economic policy. In particular, we urged them to do everything necessary to implement the CFE—conventional forces in Europe—and strategic arms reduction treaties, and to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

We are living through a dramatic revolution in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. We have to use all the means at our disposal—the European Community, the conference on security and co-operation in Europe and NATO—to help them to build stable democracy in their countries. NATO remains the core of our defence. Were we again to face a military threat, NATO would be there to meet it; but NATO is now reaching out to the countries of eastern Europe to help to provide stability and a sense of security. All of us at last week's meeting agreed that the continuing American and Canadian presence in Europe is vital to both defending and promoting peace in Europe. Britain will have a central part in that task, both in the alliance and in the European Community.

The decisions of the NATO summit provide important guidelines for the negotiations leading to the European Council in Maastricht. I hope that the House will welcome the outcome of the summit as a significant contribution to a sound defence and to democratic stability in Europe.

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): I thank the Prime Minister for his statement.

First, let me welcome the broader definition of security that was reached at the Rome summit, and the shift to a strategic concept of co-operative security through which European states can address their common security concerns—as the Prime Minister has pointed out—in partnership.

Especially welcome is the recognition that, in the words of the strategic concept, the threats of the past "have effectively been removed", and the focus for allied strategy should be on the "multi-faceted . . . risks" of the future. In that context, we welcome the leading role allocated to the United Kingdom in the rapid reaction force.

The proposal for cuts in both conventional and nuclear weapons confirmed by the declaration and the calls for further negotiations made in it are, naturally, commendable. Will the Prime Minister tell the House whether he will be supporting the non-proliferation measures referred to in the declaration by actively pursuing negotiations for a comprehensive test ban treaty? Will he also tell us what steps his Government are prepared to take to promote what the Rome declaration calls

"welcome prospects for further advances in arms control in conventional and nuclear forces"?

Can the right hon. Gentleman say how Britain would participate in negotiations to achieve such advances? Will he, in any event, take account of Norwegian concerns, and urge our other partners in NATO to respond to Soviet requests for talks about reducing maritime forces?

Let me turn to the declaration itself. Is the Prime Minister satisfied that its terms guarantee the primacy of NATO in matters of security? Does he agree that the parallel development of any European security identity and defence role must not detract from the central importance of NATO and the transatlantic relationship with the United States and Canada?

In view of the welcome establishment of a North Atlantic Co-operation Council with eastern European countries, could the Prime Minister tell us how he sees that new council's relationship with the conference on security and co-operation in Europe? Does he foresee any possibility of further developments that might in the future include the granting of associate membership of NATO to some eastern European countries?

We welcome the NATO statements on developments in the Soviet Union and the need to use all means possible to strengthen pluralism and democracy. In the interests of achieving clear and dependable progress with disarmament, does not the Prime Minister agree that the variety of political and economic contacts which Britain and other NATO countries have with the Soviet republics should be used to emphasise the need for their Governments to adhere fully and readily to all relevant treaties agreed by the Soviet Union?

While welcoming the NATO statement on Yugoslavia and the Prime Minister's further information today, may I ask what efforts the British Government are making to provide the humanitarian relief that is referred to in the Rome communiqué, which is daily becoming more necessary as the tragedy in Yugoslavia continues?

In the strategic concept, established at the Rome summit, it is clear that the NATO countries are adopting policies that seek to take full advantage of the new opportunities produced by the historic change in the Soviet Union and elsewhere. People and countries, east and west, will doubtless benefit from these deliberate efforts to replace the peace of tension with the peace of trust and co-operation.

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his welcome of the strategic concept and of the United Kingdom's role in commanding the land-based rapid reaction corps and for much else that he had to say. There is a measure of agreement on many of the matters that he touched upon.

We are working towards a test ban treaty, but it is some way away. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, there are many difficulties. To hold talks on reducing maritime forces would be premature. I can confirm his remarks about the primacy of NATO. That is secure. It was quite specifically realised and accepted at the NATO summit that that was the case and that the role of the United States and Canadian forces was central in maintaining the peace of Europe and remaining on the land continent of Europe.

As for the North Atlantic Co-operation Council, there will, over time, develop a relationship with the CSCE—very probably an informal one. I expect, over time also, that there is an aspiration that we should move towards associate membership of NATO for some of the eastern European countries. I would not expect that to happen at an early stage, but the North Atlantic Co-operation Council expressly exists in order to establish a bridge between western and eastern Europe and removes so many of the fears and concerns that have existed for so much of the post-war period.

As for the Soviet Union, I can expressly confirm to the right hon. Gentleman that we are expressing both to the Soviet Union, at the centre, and, equally important, to those representatives of the republics whom we now meet so regularly the need to adhere to treaties signed by the Soviet Union, the implementation of which may pass to the republics in the months and years ahead.

Returning to the strategic concept, I reaffirm that the principles upon which the alliance is based are those set out in the strategic concept: that NATO is the essential forum for defence and that that is where we shall discuss policies based on security and defence, on collective defence and, most critically, the appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional forces.

There are plans for humanitarian relief for Yugoslavia, much of which is likely to come through the European Community. In view of the problems in Yugoslavia, there are huge difficulties with that at the moment. There is much discussion about it. When I am in a position to do so, I shall write to the right hon. Gentleman with the details.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, particularly the initiative taken with the North Atlantic Co-operation Council. Can he say a little more about the European pillar, the Western European Union? While Members on both sides of the House accept that there is a role for the WEU in a European security identity, what reassurance can my right hon. Friend give that the core of the NATO alliance will not have its vital strategy affected by possible control by the European Community over the Western European Union?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The intention behind building up the Western European Union is to use it as a vehicle for building up the European contribution to our collective defence. It is not our policy that the Western European Union should be subordinate either to NATO or to the European union. It is expected that there will be organic links, and no doubt that will be a matter to be discussed as we come towards a treaty at Maastricht. There are several things that we are clear about concerning the WEU. It should not duplicate NATO decision-making; it should not duplicate NATO structures; it should not be subordinated either to the union or to NATO; and it should not discriminate between European allies favouring some against others depending on their membership of the Community or not.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): I congratulate the Prime Minister on a broadly successful NATO summit. May I welcome in particular the initiatives taken to draw in the emerging democracies of eastern Europe and to widening the strategic concept of NATO?

May I also tell the Prime Minister how welcome are the steps, limited though they are, that Heads of Community Governments have taken on Yugoslavia? In view of the daily increase in the oppression and brutality of Croatia and the bombardment of Dubrovnik, does he realise that

[Mr. Paddy Ashdown]

many of us sometimes wonder whether we have done all within our power in that tragic situation and whether we have done enough to stop those events?

On the broad thrust of the Prime Minister's statement, does he agree that there is nothing inimical between support for NATO and the establishment of a common security and defence policy for Europe? Will he confirm, as I asked him to do the other day, that the Government's policy on the matter remains that stated in the Anglo-Italian declaration less than six weeks ago—to work for a common security and defence policy in the inter-governmental conferences on political union?

The Prime Minister: We are looking for a common defence policy. The European defence identity is important, and it should be built up, but not as subordinate to the European Council because that would inevitably lead us into the position where we would be establishing competing structures to NATO and, in so doing, would weaken NATO. I believe that the right hon. Gentleman shares my view that the primacy of NATO is essential not merely for the security of our country but for the peace of Europe. I think that our position on that is entirely clear.

I was grateful for the welcome that the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) gave to the strategic concept and for his earlier remarks.

As regards Yugoslavia, it is a great and increasing tragedy and does not seem to be susceptible to reason. I very much regret that. The Hague conference made no progress on 5 November. I am delighted to say that Lord Carrington is returning to Belgrade today at the request of European Community Foreign Ministers, who were meeting this morning. I hope that he will be able to make progress, but there does not seem to be much indication on the Yugoslavian side that it will return to the peace conference and negotiate constructively.

Mr. William Powell (Corby): My right hon. Friend deserves the warmest congratulations for the successful and necessary outcome of the conference. Does he agree that the one weakness of NATO is the reluctance of the republic of France to join the integrated command system? Will he make it clear that it would be widely welcomed by the rest of the members of the alliance if France could find her way to rejoining what she left?

The Prime Minister: France is an important member of NATO and a long-standing ally of ours inside NATO and without, but I certainly share my hon. Friend's view: I would welcome its return to the integrated structure.

Sir Patrick Duffy (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Is the Prime Minister aware that the North Atlantic Assembly extended associate delegate status to former members of the Warsaw pact some time ago and that it brought the Baltic states into the same relationship at its Madrid conference last month? I know how welcome in those circles the proposed North Atlantic Co-operation Council will be, and how commendable was the part that the Prime Minister played; he is to be warmly congratulated. However, is he aware that in those same circles and further afield within the alliance any proposals, such as the recent French proposal, that may impinge on the responsibilities of NATO for the security of Europe or that will weaken the transatlantic bridge will be viewed with deepening anxiety?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman's third point. He is a specialist in these matters, so his support is especially welcome and I am grateful for it. Events have proved how far-seeing and correct the North Atlantic Assembly was in its actions some time ago. I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's confirmation that the new co-operation body that we have established will meet with a welcome.

Sir Jim Spicer (Dorset, West): My right hon. Friend has rightly stressed that we are offering a helping hand not only to eastern Europe but to the Soviet Union. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that in the next few months we shall see the total collapse of the distribution network within the Soviet Union. In those circumstances, does my right hon. Friend envisage that we might be called upon to provide necessary infrastructure by the use of NATO troops offering the hand of friendship to the Soviet Union?

The Prime Minister: I do not believe that that will be necessary. It is certainly possible that there will be difficulties with food distribution and the availability of food, and, in particular, with animal foodstuffs in the Soviet Union. We are seeking to arrange with our partners in the European Community a proper distribution system to meet that eventuality. There is now the equivalent of about $10 billion of assistance available to the Soviet Union. Much of that cannot be disbursed until the completion of meetings with the Soviet Union to determine where the need is and how we can most appropriately meet it without duplicating the assistance that is already available.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): Will the Prime Minister clarify part of his statement on the NATO summit? The second page states:

> "Heads of Government received a report on Yugoslavia following a meeting of Community Foreign Ministers with Lord Carrington."

What is the status of the "report"? The statement is about a NATO meeting. Too often the EEC has been greatly influenced by the policies of Italy and Germany and by support for Croatia, and has not concerned itself with the wider problems of Yugoslavia. What is the role of NATO in all this? Will it play a part? The EEC has been great at talking, but little else.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is being unfair to the activities of the EC. A great deal of effort has been expended to alleviate the situation in Yugoslavia. Thus far it has not been successful. It is the view of the NATO partners, collectively and individually, that the European Community's action has been helpful and should continue, and that it provides the most likely forum to bring the parties together at a peace conference to obtain a satisfactory conclusion and the ending of bloodshed. On the basis of that collective view, the Foreign Ministers who met, whose Governments are members of NATO, reported to Heads of Government and NATO, so that NATO could issue its own statement.

Mr. Churchill (Davyhulme): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his sound leadership at the recent NATO summit and on the fact that he managed to secure

agreement on new links between eastern Europe and NATO, and recognition of the primacy of the role of NATO in European defence? Will he confirm that, so long as there is a Conservative Government in this country, American troops will always be welcome on British soil, in contrast to the approach of the Labour party which, for many years, has campaigned to have American bases removed from the United Kingdom?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. I confirm that American troops will be welcome in this country. I believe that that is the view of our partners in Europe. It was clearly expressed in that fashion during our discussions of the past few days. I speak with particular interest in this matter, as there is a large American air base in my constituency. American troops are welcome here and I hope that they will continue to stay.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): Should we not welcome the prospect of a European defence and foreign policy as a way of escaping from our humiliating status in relation to the United States? Would not it have the advantage that we would never again have the degrading spectacle of Ministers coming to the Dispatch Box and defending the bombing of Vietnam, terrorism in Nicaragua, the invasion of Grenada and many other disreputable episodes in post-war history, to which we have been shackled by our long relationship with the United States?

The Prime Minister: On the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, I welcome communal European policies on defence providing they are agreed intergovernmentally and agreed by unanimity. When that happens, it strengthens the foreign policy of the individual countries and of the European Community collectively. That is the way in which we have been operating in the past few years.

I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's assessment of our relationship with the United States or with the individual examples he gave. One of the reasons why he has the freedom to stand here and express such views is that the success of the alliance depends largely on the Americans, who have remained here since the 1940s to help to protect Europe.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): I welcome my right hon. Friend's excellent statement. Does he agree that one of the tragic features of the previous occasion when Europe was in a state of reformation, just after the first world war, was the American decision to withdraw? Will my right hon. Friend confirm that he has never been a member of an organisation that has poured scorn on the United States, picketed their bases, and spat on American service men?

The Prime Minister: I can certainly confirm that. The United States will stay in Europe, although it is now recognised that it will reduce the number of its troops here as a result of the changed circumstances on the German border. Clearly there is now a much smaller need for a large military land-based presence than there was when the Soviet Union had troops in eastern Germany. There will be changes, but the commitment to the defence of Europe will remain.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): The Prime Minister and his NATO allies have discussed developments in the Soviet Union and argued that there should be no further proliferation of nuclear weapons. Can the right hon. Gentleman therefore explain to the House what arguments he uses to the Soviet Union to explain the decision of the Government, and indeed of the official Opposition, to have four Trident submarines as part of their defence strategy? Is he aware that hardly a single tear was shed in Scotland this weekend when the Poseidon submarines left the Clyde, yet we are now expected to accept Trident while at the same time our conventional forces, including the regiments, are being cut. How does he square the circle?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady may not be fully aware of what has been happening. NATO has agreed that an 80 per cent. reduction in nuclear weapons is in prospect. That will involve the elimination of all nuclear artillery and short-range Lance missiles. That reduction has come about because NATO was so staunch in recent years in keeping its nuclear weapons, which forced upon the Soviet Union the need for negotiated reductions on both sides of Europe. That is the reason for the reduction in the nuclear threshold. That reduction is welcome and has been achieved through the policies of the Conservative party, not those advocated by the hon. Lady.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): Faced with the apparent collapse of central control in the Soviet Union and the new assertiveness of the republics such as the Ukraine, which wants to control its own nuclear weapons, is my right hon. Friend happy with the way in which NATO proposes to handle future arms negotiations with those fragmented republics? Should the republics take their own line on nuclear weapons, is my right hon. Friend satisfied that there are enough safeguards in place?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend touches upon an important point. In future it will clearly be much more difficult to carry out negotiations on nuclear reductions until the circumstances in the Soviet Union are clarified and until we are clear precisely who has control over nuclear weapons in the Soviet Union and who can negotiate for them. It is precisely for that reason that we made it so clear in our statement that we expect the republics to honour the START agreement and the CFE agreement and to look towards non-proliferation. There is a great deal of discussion to be had upon this matter, and the North Atlantic Co-operation Council will be one forum in which that can begin.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): Given that the Rome summit renounced any extension of the geographical limits of its competence in 1949, and mindful that the real threat today is the political and economic stability of the former Russian empire—witness the decision of newly independent states over the renunciation of their commitment to hand back nuclear weapons—does the right hon. Gentleman agree that that is a matter for regret? Does he agree that the political talks already agreed with eastern European Foreign Ministers should be continued through military talks as well?

The Prime Minister: I am not sure what conclusion one would draw from the hon. Gentleman's first assertions. It is certainly true that the threat from the Soviet Union has changed and perhaps is changing. That is no reason for us to lift our vigilance in any sense, and there is no mood among NATO members to do so. But there is a mood in NATO to enter into much closer dialogue with the east

[The Prime Minister]

European nations, including the Soviet Union, to help to continue to diminish both the threshold of armaments and the balance of risks that has existed in the past. That is of critical importance, but it must be done steadily, carefully and without putting our own security at risk.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Has my right hon. Friend seen any indication from the French Government that they might rejoin the military command structure of NATO? Will that form part of his negotiating stance on a European defence policy, having France back into NATO fully, with possibly even Eire joining the alliance?

The Prime Minister: I have had no indication that the French Government are likely to move back into the integrated military structure. As I said, we would welcome that in NATO. While I do not think it is imminent or something that we are likely to see for quite a few years, there is no doubt a willingness among NATO to accept it. As for discussions within the European Community, I do not think that that would be a practical negotiating point, even though it would be welcome.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): I understand the Prime Minister seeming to throw up his hands in despair over Yugoslavia, but may I ask whether he is aware of the appeal by the mayor of Dubrovnik for assistance in relieving the trapped people of that tragic city? Is he also aware of statements apparently made by the Presidents of Croatia and Serbia for the first time recognising the need for a peace-keeping force? Does he agree that it is imperative for there to be an early meeting of WEU with the authorities in Croatia and Serbia to test the credence of the statements of those Presidents?

The Prime Minister: To keep the peace one must first have a peace, and that was the purpose of trying to ensure, through the conference, that a peace was established. I do not believe that in the absence of that secure peace, and in the absence of both sides being prepared to keep the peace and be anxious to see a peace-keeping force there, it would be a prudent or wise proposition to send troops there.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): Further to the question asked by the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing), at a time when the eyes of the world are focused with horror on the destruction of the ancient and historic city of Dubrovnik, does my right hon. Friend appreciate that there is some disappointment that there appears to be no discussion about the possibility of short-term or emergency measures to alleaviate or in any way relieve that catastrophe? In particular, there should be discussion of the fact that some criticism should be levelled at those European countries which are clandestinely supplying arms to the contestants in Yugoslavia. Is it possible to put a stop to that practice?

The Prime Minister: I appreciate the point that my hon. Friend makes, but it is extremely difficult to see what in practice could be done while the fighting continues. There is absolutely no doubt that there is a will to assist, when it is possible and practicable to assist. At the moment I cannot immediately see how we could do that. I assure my hon. Friend that the point is of great importance and that we shall keep it under review.

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): The Prime Minister reported the difficulties that surfaced at the meeting when it came to the idea of involving western European forces in Yugoslavia. How did the discussions view the possible proliferation of nuclear weapons in Kazakhstan and the Ukraine, both Governments of which have said that they would like control of their nuclear weapons? If we cannot interfere with the nationalisms of western Europe, how can we interfere with the nationalisms of far-flung areas of the world?

The Prime Minister: To be technically correct, it is not proliferation in those republics because the nuclear weapons are already there. We seek to ensure that those nuclear weapons are under a single central control so that we are in a better position to assure our own security. There is complete understanding of that in the republics. We have made it clear in the Rome summit and elsewhere that we shall take those securities into account when we discuss the economic and other assistance that we may be able to provide to the republics and to the Soviet Union centrally.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): Is it not an essential strategic objective of the NATO powers to assist the forces of democracy and liberalisation in the Soviet Union against the dangers of a counter-coup? Will my right hon. Friend assure us that the NATO powers will do all that they can to assist the Soviet Union in its immense difficulties?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises a central point, and I am happy to give a categorical assurance. Much of the assistance may be economical and through forums other than NATO, but his point is none the less entirely valid.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): I welcome the decision to strengthen the Western European Union. However, will the right hon. Gentleman forgive me if I sound rather sceptical about that proposal because when the WEU presidential committee sought expert advice on armed intervention in Yugoslavia the prospect of getting it from the British and French defence Ministries and from the Institute for Defence Studies was vetoed by Herr Genscher, the current president of the ministerial Council? The WEU feels that it is being side-tracked on all those important issues. It needs the confidence of knowing that it has an important role to play.

The Prime Minister: I share the hon. Gentleman's views, as crystallised in his last couple of sentences. It is important that the Western European Union should be confident that it has an important role, and that that important role is clearly defined. We began to define it at the Rome summit and it will be crystallised further once we have completed the discussions at Maastricht. However, that the WEU has an increasing role in the defence of Europe as the European pillar of the alliance is undoubted.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have a heavy day ahead of us. I shall allow questions to continue until 4.15 and then we must move on. I hope that hon. Members will ask brief questions so that most hon. Members will have an opportunity to participate in the debate.

Mr. Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): Will my right hon. Friend say a little more about a rapid reaction force? Is not there a real danger in multi-country political control resulting in nothing happening if there is a real crisis? Does he agree that it is different from the previous situaton in NATO, when there was clearly only one real enemy and everyone knew where the threat came from —*[Interruption.]* In future, however, that may not be the case and a rapid reaction force with multi-country political control may never happen. Will my right hon. Friend comment on that?

The Prime Minister: I regret to say that I could not hear every aspect of my hon. Friend's question. A rapid reaction corps is a new system. It is a new way to respond more flexibly and speedily to the changed circumstances in Europe and the need for a different form of defence in Europe. It is under a different command. We command the land forces in the rapid reaction corps. The NATO assessment is that that is the right way to proceed and will maximise defence at minimum cost to the alliance.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Given that NATO was a creation of the cold war in 1948, does not the Prime Minister understand that many of us are disappointed that the NATO summit did not use the opportunity to wind up the organisation altogether and rid itself of nuclear weapons rather than prolong a military alliance that could have been transformed into a peaceful alliance of European countries?

The Prime Minister: NATO has played a great role in ensuring the freedom of the whole of eastern Europe, and I think that the hon. Gentleman should welcome that. If his suggestion is that NATO should be wound up because there is now no military threat, I say to him that the huge stock of nuclear weapons that still exists on Soviet Union soil is of such a scale that I believe his opinion will be shared by very few people.

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): Will my right hon. Friend accept my sincere congratulations on Britain's role in what was obviously an historic, far-reaching and forward-looking meeting, especially its role in ensuring the promotion of peace throughout Europe and the maintenance of the essential link with the United States of America? Will he confirm that, when he mentions the word "peace", he means not peace alone, but peace with freedom, which has always been demanded by the people of the United Kingdom and the United States? If he agrees, will he include that small but vital word in future NATO communiqués?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend's definition, but I believe that it is implicit in the way that the term is used in the declarations made from the Rome summit. I am grateful to him for his earlier remarks and reaffirm my view that the United States linked with NATO and United States troops in this country are both essential for our freedom.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): When the Prime Minister discussed with other NATO leaders his determination to go ahead with the tactical air-to-surface missile weapon system, did not some of the other leaders suggest to him that it was a little odd for Britain to be going ahead with a new weapon system when the main threat of the talks involved non-proliferation and disarmament? Did he discuss with the west Germans whether they would be happy for us to base such a system on their soil?

The Prime Minister: It was not a matter of discussion at the NATO summit, but we need an appropriate mix of nuclear weapons, both now and in the future. If the day comes when we do not, no one will be more pleased than me, but at present we need a proper mix of nuclear weapons, and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): May I express my appreciation for my right hon. Friend's constructive work in ensuring that there is no incompatibility between strengthening Europe's contribution to its own defence and retaining the primacy of NATO for the defence of alliance territory? Are other countries of the Western European Union assigning permanent representatives to NATO to the WEU ministerial Council as we are? Have plans been advanced to encourage the WEU to take a more active role in out-of-area operations and contingencies?

The Prime Minister: The answer to the latter question is yes, and we have suggested to our partners that they should assign their permanent representatives to the new organisation. They have not all concluded precisely how they will react, but I have great hopes that they will do so.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): A few moments ago the Prime Minister was reminded of the fact that the last United States' navy nuclear submarine sailed out of the Firth of Clyde at the weekend. Could not that significant event be seen as an advance signal of the eventual American withdrawal of its membership of NATO? Is there not a growing body of opinion in America that believes that Europe should be defended exclusively by the forces of European nations?

The Prime Minister: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's first question is no. The Americans will have much longer range submarines in future, but there is no doubt that it is, and has been for many years, the policy of the American Administration that the Americans should continue to play a key part in the defence of Europe. That view was expressly reaffirmed by the President at the Rome summit.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): May I join my hon. Friends in congratulating my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on the significant personal role he played in securing for NATO its position as the linchpin of western security and on ensuring that there is a continued welcome for the United States and Canada to help in the defence of the north Atlantic? Is that not evidence that as long as my right hon. Friend retains his present position the defences of our country will be secure?

The Prime Minister: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind remarks. I regard it as a matter of prime importance that defence should remain central to our policies and that no risks should be taken with British defence. No risks have been or will be taken.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The Prime Minister referred to a possible economic blockade of Yugoslavia. Is

[Mr. Dennis Skinner]

not that interference in another nation state; and how would he respond if other countries in Europe or elsewhere told him how to organise Northern Ireland?

The Prime Minister: If we were not seeking to stop the bloodshed in Yugoslavia, the hon. Gentleman would be the first Member of this House to criticise us.

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): Does my right hon. Friend agree that in uncertain times, and with the possibility of loose nukes in eastern Europe, in the Soviet republics and elsewhere, it is essential that under his leadership the Government not only retain that last guarantee of our national independence and security—the British nuclear deterrent—but that we improve and modernise it?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree. Some reductions in nuclear weapons are in prospect, as I said earlier, but I can affirm that we propose to update Polaris and that we propose to build and keep Trident. That is the absolute guarantor of our defence, and that will remain our policy in future.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Was not the plea that reportedly came from Croatia and Serbia today for military involvement in Yugoslavia not so much for a peace-keeping force as for an intervention force to separate the two sides so that a political settlement can be reached? The two sides simply cannot trust each other with ceasefires arranged from The Hague that do not hold on the ground. Is it not time that the Government went to the Security Council seeking sanction for a military intervention force so that a political settlement can be found? If they do not, we shall have to witness these people slaughtering each other, and that is disgraceful in a European country.

The Prime Minister: I do not believe that that would be the right way to proceed—for the practical reason that I do not believe that it would be successful. It would perhaps increase and extend the fighting to Bosnia, Macedonia and elsewhere, which would not be in the interests of Yugoslavia as a whole, if it still exists. The only way forward for the time being is to try to proceed as we are and to hope that Lord Carrington's latest mission to Belgrade is successful.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): Bearing in mind the almost unanimous support given in the House this afternoon for the continuing role of NATO as the linchpin of Western security, would my right hon. Friend be surprised to be reminded that only a year or so ago the Norwich city council banned a NATO exhibition? Would he be further surprised to learn that the council is controlled by the Labour party? Does he not therefore think that its support for NATO is skin deep and that it is vital that he remain in charge of these matters up to the next election and beyond?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am surprised that such a sensible area as Norwich should have a Labour council, but I am not surprised by its action.

NEW MEMBERS

The following Members took the Oath or made and subscribed the affirmation required by law:

Ashok Kumar Esq., for Langbaurgh

Derek Anthony Enright Esq., for Hemsworth

Nicol Ross Stephen Esq., for Kincardine and Deeside

Points of Order

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have not raised this matter before. I have no wish to question your ruling. I am a member of the Select Committee on Health and, as you know, the House has referred to the Select Committee on Privileges the important issue of the leaked report. In view of doubts that have been raised in the House and elsewhere, may I ask for clarification on whether the Privileges Committee is free to consider the role of the Secretary of State for Health and senior officials in his Department and, most important, the role of the parliamentary private secretary to the Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor)? Can you make it clear that these matters will be dealt with urgently and, in view of the credibility of all Select Committees, will you ensure that a firm conclusion is reached?

Mr. Speaker: I confirm that the Committee is free to look into all those matters.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is not it extraordinary that Opposition Members are sanctimoniously concerned about leaks when their Front-Bench spokesmen live off leaks from Departments?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for me.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek your guidance about a matter on today's Order Paper that is causing some confusion. Early-day motion 117 commends the Bolshevik communist revolution. [HON. MEMBERS:"Hear, hear."] Some Opposition Members say "Hear, hear". As you know, Mr. Speaker, the new model Labour party has been assiduously trying to distance itself from its Bolshevik friends. However, a Labour Whip has signed this motion. Can you clarify Labour party policy by saying whether Labour is in favour of Bolshevism or against it?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman and the House know that early-day motions are expressions of opinion. The motion was in order when it was put down and it is open to any hon. Member to support it—or amend it—if he or she wishes.

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): Further to the previous point of order, Mr. Speaker. On Thursday, a correct point of order was raised with Mr. Deputy Speaker about what one should do with matters arising from the first report of the Select Committee on Health. It was ruled clearly that as this was being automatically sent to the Select Committee on Privileges, it could not be discussed on the Floor of the House. However, just before the point of order was raised, a group of Labour Members came in and raised, on spurious points of order, allegations against the Secretary of State for Health arising from matters that did not appear in the report. They implied that these allegations were in the report. How can we refer this matter? Is it for you, or is it a matter for the Select Committee on Privileges? There was a conspiracy among Labour Members to put on the record points that do not arise from the report.

Mr. Speaker: Did I hear the hon. Gentleman say that this happened on Thursday when I was in the Chair? This is Tuesday and it would have been appropriate for him to have raised this matter then. We can go no further on this point today.

Orders of the Day

Local Government Finance Bill

[SECOND DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question, That the Bill be now read a Second time—*[11 November.]*

Question again proposed.

Mr. Speaker: I must announce to the House that I have not selected either of the amendments on the Order Paper, but they may be referred to during the debate.

4.25 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Ian Lang): At the height of the first day's debate on the Second Reading of the Local Government Finance Bill, there were six Labour Back-Bench Members present. There are now about 24, but that count is falling fast. I am sure that the House will start to fill rapidly as I address it at the start of the second day of debate on the Bill. After all, the Scottish clauses comprise a substantial proportion of its contents. The House will be aware that, for the most part, these are closely equivalent to the clauses which relate to the introduction and operation of the council tax in England and Wales which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment described yesterday. It is important that we have this opportunity to concentrate on the Bill as it affects Scotland.

We have already done some of the groundwork for the new tax. It was necessary, if we were to meet the target of 1 April 1993 for introduction of the tax, to ensure that the first step towards the levying of the tax—the valuation of properties—was begun as soon as possible. Therefore, we enacted, before the summer recess, the Local Government Finance and Valuation Act 1991. That enabled a considerable amount of groundwork for the valuation exercise to be undertaken over the summer. In Scotland, the assessors, in discussions with the Inland Revenue valuation office in Scotland, have been preparing for the actual task of valuation, which will get under way shortly. Therefore, we are very much on course for the introduction of the new tax in 1993.

Clauses 84 to 92 carry over and develop the arrangements for valuation set out in the 1991 Act and provide for changes to be made in lists to take account, for example, of new properties and appeals against taxation. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) described our valuation arrangements for Scotland as a recipe for disaster. I am sure that he did not intend to insult thereby the professionals involved—the assessors—who will be responsible for the valuation and the Commissioners of Inland Revenue, who are responsible for ensuring consistency in the way in which the valuation is undertaken throughout the country. I am glad to reassure him that all is on course and going smoothly.

Our decision to give the assessors that responsibility reflects the views put to us during the consultation which persuaded us that they were best placed to undertake the work and to do the job well within the timetable allowed. Our decision to give the Commissioners of Inland Revenue responsibility for overseeing the work reflected our understanding of the demand in Scotland for consistency in the way in which taxes operate throughout Great Britain. The arrangements are working well and I have every confidence that the job will be completed satisfactorily on time.

Clauses 70 to 73 provide for the introduction of the council tax set separately by the regional, islands and district councils in respect of dwellings in their areas. Clause 74 provides for the valuation bands into which dwellings are to be placed and which have already been described in the Domestic Property (Valuation) (Scotland) Regulations 1991. It also provides for the range of tax payable for the bands.

I think that it would be helpful now if I described in some detail what the effect of the banding arrangements will be, as there has been considerable misunderstanding of the provisions. The hon. Member for Garscadden said last week that he finds it incomprehensible that many properties may stay in the same band in perpetuity. But why should they not? A dwelling in Scotland that is placed in band D will have been assigned that band because its value at 1 April 1991 is over £45,000 but does not exceed £58,000. That value is around the Scottish average. Of course, the Bill includes provisions to allow the assigned band to be changed if the value of the property changes sufficiently to take it into another band. If the band is higher, however, the change can be made only on change of ownership of the dwelling. If there is no such change, the banding decision will remain unchanged.

The banding system irons out much of the effect of relative changes in property values within an area which, under the rating system, brought regular pressure for revaluation. The need for general revaluations is therefore much reduced. If, however, such a revaluation were required, say, 20 years hence, the same house in band D would probably remain a band D house, provided that its relative position within the range of property values had not changed so much as to take it outwith the new parameters for that band.

Clause 74 places an upper limit on the amount of tax that any person can be liable to pay. This aspect of the arrangements—inevitably, I suppose—has produced the standard response that the rich are being protected. That neatly ignores the imperfect correlation between people's circumstances and the value of their home. It demonstrates only the Labour party's vindictive desire to extract the maximum revenue from high-value properties regardless of the circumstances of their occupants, or any relationship between the tax burden and the services that are provided.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): Will my right hon. Friend explain to a simple fellow like me why it is considered sensible to return to a system of socialist taxation based on the capital value of an asset that produces no income and that is unrelated to the services for which the occupant is paying and to the income of the occupant, this asset being normally called a home?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend gives an admirable description of the so-called fair rates proposals of the Labour party, to which we do not intend to return.

Clause 75 defines liability to pay as an individual liability that is dependent on the relationship that persons have with dwellings. This liability would fall in the first instance on the resident owner, then the resident tenant and so on.

Clause 79 provides for discount where there is only one or no resident in the property. These arrangements will be fair and simple to administer.

During our debate on the Gracious Speech last Wednesday, we heard a different story from Opposition Members and especially from the hon. Member for Garscadden. The hon. Gentleman is determined, as ever, to see administrative nightmares where none exists. His contacts in local government have told him, presumably before even seeing the Bill, that discounts will be difficult to administer, and uncritically he believes them.

When it comes to the hon. Gentleman's examples of why the system will be difficult to administer, what do we find? There is a complete misunderstanding on his part of how the discount proposals will work in practice. As the mouthpiece of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, he asks whether authorities are supposed to send out bills for 100 per cent. of the liability to everyone and leave discounts to be claimed by householders. The answer is to be found in paragraph 4 to schedule 2. Local authorities are required to take reasonable steps to ascertain entitlement to discount, but in the absence of firm information they can send out an undiscounted bill. In other words, as a matter of sensible administrative practice, authorities should make efforts to ascertain discount households before sending out bills. [HON. MEMBERS: "How?"] By referring to existing information.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Can the Secretary of State tell me how local authorities will do what he describes?

Mr. Lang: They can make reasonable efforts by examining existing information or by carrying out a canvass. There are local authority housing tenancy lists. Authorities will be able to examine electoral rolls. They could even study community charge registers. They are most definitely not required to know the composition of every household in their areas before billing. There is no question, therefore, of a register being required.

We come now to what might be called COSLA's auntie problem. The hon. Member for Garscadden quoted COSLA as being concerned about what would happen if someone's aunt came to stay for a couple of months. Again, the answer is in the Bill—in clause 79 for Scotland. Discounts are calculated according to who is resident in a dwelling, and "resident" means having one's sole or main residence there—a concept not unfamiliar to Labour Members.

In the case described in our earlier debate by the hon. Gentleman, the local authority would make its decision to withdraw or not to withdraw discount on the basis of whether it thought that the dwelling in question was the auntie's sole or main residence. In fact, if she were there for two months, it would be unlikely that it would regard her as a resident. However, there will be a right of appeal against any decision.

Clauses 81 and 83 make provision for the appeal arrangements that will apply in Scotland. As the House will be aware, appeals under the community charge are, for the most part, made initially to the community charge registration officer and thereafter to the sheriff under summary procedure. That system has, by and large, worked well. However, we are aware of the concerns that have been expressed about the system as compared with the arrangements in England and Wales, where appeals are made to valuation and community charge tribunals. We have taken note of those concerns in formulating the arrangements for the council tax. Appeal on questions of valuation liability and levying of the tax will therefore lie with valuation appeal committees, with further appeal on points of law to the Court of Session.

Clause 94 and schedule 7 make provision for capping. They re-enact the arrangements already provided in the Local Government Finance and Valuation Act 1991, which is to be repealed and replaced by the Bill and do not, therefore, make any changes to the present arrangements. The House will be aware that I announced last month the principles that I am minded to adopt next year in considering whether planned expenditure is excessive or has increased excessively.

At this point, it might be appropriate to spend a few moments on a specifically Scottish aspect of the Bill.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): Before my right hon. Friend passes on to a specifically Scottish aspect, I wish to raise a general point. I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and my hon. Friend the Minister are on the Front Bench. I agree with my right hon. Friend that the intervention of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) aptly summed up the Labour party's position.

My right hon. Friend will be aware that most Conservative Members accept that, while some taxes may fall on income and others on spending, there is scope for a modest tax to fall on what we might describe as the amenity of property. One lesson that we learnt from the transition from domestic rates to the community charge was the injustice of the former rates system to the single-person household. My right hon. Friend is probably aware that there is considerable pressure from single-person households for an increase in the 25 per cent. discount. Will he and our right hon. and hon. Friends, over the next few weeks, consider whether there is scope for increasing that discount to something more related to the ability to pay of the single person?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend made a point that obviously concerns him, and he did so lucidly. I and my right hon. Friend are grateful for his support for the underlying principle of the Bill. I am sure that he will wish to develop that issue in Committee, if he is fortunate enough to be a member.

We gave close consideration to the appropriate discount level and I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that there is a certain symmetry and element of justice readily apparent in the concept of a 25 per cent. discount for a one-person residence and a 50 per cent. discount for a house that has no resident occupant.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): What will the Scottish electorate think when they discover what the millionaire Secretary of State for the Environment, who is sitting on the right hon. Gentleman's left, has to pay? Will they think that he is getting a massive discount, as he will have to pay only a small amount? No doubt the Scottish electorate will think that he drafted the Bill to suit himself.

Mr. Lang: If my right hon. Friend were fortunate enough to be resident in Scotland, he would find that about 89 per cent. of the cost of local government services was funded by central taxation. If my right hon. Friend is fortunate enough to be in the circumstances described by

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the hon. Gentleman, he is making a far larger contribution as an individual to income tax and other central Government taxation than would otherwise be the case.

As to the Scottish electorate, I reassure the hon. Gentleman that they were at the forefront in seeking the abolition of domestic rates and they will be at the forefront in resisting their reintroduction by the Opposition.

I want now to discuss an important aspect of the Bill which affects Scotland—the council water charge set out in schedule 11.

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): Can the Secretary of State tell us something about the effect of the council tax on the agricultural community? I have already had queries about what will happen. Many farmers and tenant farmers live in big old rambling houses. Crofters lost their 50 per cent. derating with the introduction of the poll tax and, given the present state of agriculture, there is considerable concern about what will happen under the council tax.

Mr. Lang: The hon. Lady will know that the market value of such houses will reflect the present state of agriculture and the demand for such houses. Therefore, they are likely to be put in a lower band and so attract a relatively lower tax than under the community charge. If they are tied houses of the sort that the hon. Lady described, that would be reflected in the market value. Therefore, no particular difficulty arises.

Let me press on to the important subject of the council water charge which is set out in schedule 11. Hon. Members will be aware that at the same time as we consulted about our council tax proposals, we issued a consultation paper in Scotland about water and sewerage charges. Among other things, that paper proposed that sewerage charges should be separated out from the new council tax in the same way as water charges are at present separately levied.

However, it became apparent during the consultation that separate charges would have borne most heavily on those about whom the hon. Lady is concerned—people in rural areas. It would also have meant higher administrative costs which would have had to have been borne by charge payers. Therefore, we have decided that it would not be appropriate to introduce separate charges for sewerage and the provisions in the Bill for water and sewerage charges in Scotland will essentially maintain the existing system whereby regional and island councils set the appropriate levels.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Lang: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's support.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Many will welcome that sensible proposal, but can the right hon. Gentleman underline it with a categorical assurance that the Government have no intention of privatising water in Scotland either this side of an election or afterwards?

Mr. Lang: I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that, to use the time-honoured phrase, we have no present plans to undertake such an exercise.

Water will continue to be charged via either the council tax, linked to property value bands, or the non-domestic water rate, linked to the rateable value of premises, or by direct metered charges. Sewerage will continue to be charged via the council tax or the non-domestic sewerage rate. All the discounts that will apply to the council tax itself will also apply to the water and sewerage charges.

No fundamental changes are, therefore, proposed in the Bill, but we have taken the opportunity to make two improvements in the way in which the charges are levied. One is that the Bill will extend to all consumers in Scotland the option of being able to pay for water by metered charges if they wish, having the amount that they use recorded and being charged direct. That is a useful extension of consumer choice. It offers an option to Scottish consumers which is available in England and Wales and which I am sure will be welcomed.

Some small businesses may also benefit from that option since the Bill abolished the minimum threshold of rateable value which a business previously had to meet to be eligible for a metered supply. We have also taken the opportunity in the Bill to provide for water to be supplied free of charge for fire training purposes and for other emergency purposes as well as fire fighting.

Mr. Dewar: There will be a widespread welcome for the Secretary of State's announcement about sewerage, if only because up to now, if I remember rightly, the water charge has not been included in the rebate scheme. Are there any plans to bring it within the rebate scheme?

Mr. Lang: I have no announcement to make about that at present, but, as the hon. Gentleman will have heard, I made it clear that the discounts would apply to water and sewerage.

The claim has been repeatedly made by Opposition Members, and most recently by the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham), who is not in his place today, that we are starving local government of resources. That is simply not true and I shall outline the facts. Starting with financial support, Government grants to Scottish authorities—rate support grant or revenue support grant and specific grants—have increased in real terms from £2,562 million in 1979-80 to £2,809 million in 1991-92. Therefore, far from Government support having been reduced during the period that the Government have been in office, there has been an increase in real terms of 9·6 per cent.

Then there is the alleged deterioration in local authority services; again, the facts are different. In education, since 1979 the percentage of pupils staying on until the fifth year has increased from 35 per cent. to 54 per cent. and the percentage staying on until the sixth year from 14 per cent. to 25 per cent. The percentage entering higher education has increased from 16·8 per cent. in 1978-79 to 24 per cent. and is still rising fast. Expenditure per pupil has increased in real terms by 49 per cent.—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): The Secretary of State is yawning at his own speech it is so boring.

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman is supposed to be in the medical profession, so he will know that that was not a yawn; I was choking.

The number of field social workers has also increased from 2,985 to 4,700, an increase of 47 per cent. There has been a 26 per cent. increase in all social work staff and a 13 per cent. increase in home care staff. The number of

places in local authority day care centres is up by 152 per cent. for the elderly, 59 per cent. for the mentally handicapped and 49 per cent. for the physically handicapped.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): The Secretary of State has just referred to the number of social workers. What decision has he reached about funding social workers involved in the Orkney inquiry?

Mr. Lang: It would not be appropriate to answer such a question in a debate on the Local Government Finance Bill. Any answer will be given in the appropriate way at the appropriate time.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): I am grateful to the Secretary of State. He has been most generous in giving way. All the increases that he has just quoted—in the number of pupils staying on to the fifth and sixth years and in the number of social workers—are down to the fact that all the regional authorities in Scotland are controlled by the Labour party and they see as their spending priorities the need to create educational opportunities for young people and to provide home helps for old people. Now the Secretary of State is telling them that he will cut their budgets next year to stop them increasing the number of educational opportunities and social workers. The Secretary of State cannot have it both ways.

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman is seeking to disguise the fact that under the Government in which he served the quality of service under the headings that I have just listed was vastly inferior to the quality of service provided under this Government.

Local authority expenditure during the 12 years since we took office has risen by 26 per cent. in real terms. It is an astonishing 30 per cent. higher in Scotland than in England and Wales, a fact for which COSLA has been unable to give any credible explanation.

To help sustain that substantial expansion of local government expenditure, the Government have shifted the burden so that central Government now bear up to 89 per cent. in Scotland with only 11 per cent. borne at local level. But now we are told that the Labour party plans to increase the local contribution to no less than 20 per cent.

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): Before the Secretary of State repeats that totally misleading canard, will he kindly check with his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State the percentage that he quoted? I think that 22 per cent. was the claim that the right hon. Gentleman made on behalf of his Government in exactly the same week that, in response to a question, I used the figure of 20 per cent. At that point, the Secretary of State and I were operating on a particular definition of local government spending. The fact that the Prime Minister then chose to use a totally different definition of local government spending seems to have eluded the Secretary of State and many of his right hon. and hon. Friends. Will they kindly sort out which statistical base they are using, because otherwise they simply confirm that the Government are, literally, at sixes and sevens?

Mr. Lang: It is interesting to note that the discussion centres simply on the amount by which Labour intends to increase the burden on local government spending.

The hon. Gentleman must be aware that the basis in Scotland differs from that in England and Wales: 11 per cent. of council expenditure in Scotland comes from local tax-raising, whereas in England and Wales the figures is 14 per cent. If the hon. Member for Garscadden can reassure me categorically that the next Labour Government will not increase the local contribution to 20 per cent., I shall be interested to learn to what level they will increase it.

If, before Labour even increased the actual spending level, a £300 local tax bill were increased by that proportion in Scotland, the charge would rise to nearly £600. Labour may claim that it proposes to reduce direct taxation through income tax or VAT—although, given Labour's record in that regard, we should be very sceptical about any such claim. The doubled figure that Labour would bring about, however, would appear before capping was lifted and before Labour transferred to local authorities a raft of new responsibilities.

Labour's policy document "Power to Act" contains a nightmare list of proposals for the extension of local authority power to training and economic development and intervention in local enterprise companies, health boards, community housing associations, transport, consumer protection, the environment, equal opportunities, crime prevention and community safety. The cost of such an explosion of power—with local councillors intervening in every sphere of activity—is not, of course, given; but to lay that burden across the weak framework of a revived domestic rating system would be to court disaster.

I seek elucidation on, in particular, Labour's proposals for capping. The purpose of capping is to protect local residents from extravagant local authorities: to protect, for example, the residents of Edinburgh, who were faced with a disgraceful and irresponsible proposal to levy a £584 poll tax until the Government stepped in. Capping, however, is also a measure of public expenditure control. Local authority expenditure accounts for a massive proportion of total public expenditure in Scotland. Next year's Scottish Office budget totals some £12·5 billion and local authority spending not only accounts for over half total public expenditure—54 per cent. this year—but has risen from 45·5 per cent. of the total since we came to office. Local government expenditure consumes millions of pounds that could be devoted to other cherished projects relating to health, roads or the environment.

Every year, a subsidy must be transferred from the Scottish block grant to meet current local authority spending levels and to try to protect local taxpayers. Labour has committed itself unequivocally to abolishing capping. I invite the hon. Member for Garscadden to confirm today that that is still his party's intention. What estimate has the hon. Gentleman made of the impact of that decision on public expenditure by a future Labour Government? Will it increase public expenditure in Scotland alone by £1 billion, £1·5 billion or more? Will the proportion of Scottish Office expenditure accounted for by local authorities rise from 54 per cent. to 64 per cent., or 74 per cent.? Perhaps it would not; we know that Labour is also committed to vast public expenditure increases, totalling some £35 billion, across the whole range of Government policy.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) must, however, preserve at least a figleaf of fiscal responsibility. What clearance did the hon. Member for Garscadden obtain from his right hon. and learned Friend to unleash such a surge of expenditure right

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across the board? To what level will local authority expenditure be allowed to rise before Labour reneges on its commitment to abolish capping?

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. With my hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg), I have been perusing the Bill in an attempt to find the part that covers what the Secretary of State is now discussing. There is no such clause. Will you please ask the right hon. Gentleman to return to the content of the Bill?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I have heard nothing from the Secretary of State which is out of order.

Mr. Lang: Capping is central to our proposals; it is central to the protection of residents from the extravagance of local authorities; and it is one of the central issues of disagreement between the Government and the Labour party. I want answers to my questions and I expect to hear them later from the hon. Member for Garscadden.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Lang: Labour Members do not like what I am saying, because it goes right to the heart of the matter. What other programmes will be cut to fund the insatiable extravagance of local authorities, while enabling them to meet public expenditure targets? Will Labour cut health expenditure, as a Labour Government did between 1974 and 1979? Will it cut expenditure on roads, as it did in that period? Or will it make cuts across the board, as it did then? Who will pay? Will it be the local resident, the national taxpayer or both—with the IMF thrown in as well? Under Labour, when will the party be over?

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): It seems that the right hon. Gentleman, as Secretary of State for Scotland, does not want extra billions to be spent on Scottish services, so that people can return to work and the country can start moving again. If he is worried about the cost, why does not he turn to the oil revenues—which could fund the full amount—rather than slating local government, which is doing a good job on the minimum that he chooses to give it?

Mr. Lang: Certainly I want Scotland to be on the move economically—as, indeed, it has been under the present Government. The only sense in which the hon. Gentleman wants to move Scotland is that he wants to move it outside the United Kingdom. He wants to erect tax and customs barriers and to shut Scotland off from the rest of the United Kingdom and Europe.

I have another question to ask the Labour party: what will be the effect of its proposals on business ratepayers? We all know that Scottish business rates are higher than those in the rest of the United Kingdom. I acknowledge that that is partly because Scotland's rating base is slightly smaller and partly because of the dominance of council housing. The central and underlying reason, however, is the huge extravagance of Scottish local authorities over the years. As I mentioned earlier, local government expenditure in Scotland is no less than 30 per cent. higher than it is in both England and Wales.

Businesses have no vote. Business rates are a direct on-cost. Year after year, under Labour councils, they have risen by more than the rate of inflation. They are perceived as arbitrary, unfair and oppressive and economically they are very damaging.

We have set out to introduce fairness and equity to business rates. We have been harmonising valuation practice and ironing out the anomalies. We have committed ourselves to introducing a uniform business rate over five years or so to achieve a level rate across the United Kingdom.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Why is the Secretary of State now reading a speech that he clearly had not seen before he came to the Dispatch Box? *[Interruption.]* I cannot help it if the right hon. Gentleman cannot read his civil servants' handwriting.

In the earlier part of his speech, the Secretary of State gave Scottish local government credit for the increase in the number of pupils staying on at school and in social work expenditure—for the improvement in all services that are provided directly by elected local government representatives. In the later part, he has rubbished the lot. The right hon. Gentleman really should be able to do better than that.

Mr. Lang: This may be poor stuff, but it is mine own. The point that I was making—it may have been lost on the hon. Gentleman—was that, because of our prudent management of the economy, the Government have been able to expand services and increase in real terms the funding of local authorities. They have allowed the economy to develop, prosper and have left people better off. In contrast to that, Labour's irresponsible approach—its proposed abandoning of all the controls that have made our achievements possible—would place burdens on our people that would cause immeasurable damage.

The cost of business rates has been reduced by some £270 million as a result of the steps that we have taken to bring them down to a level that would be comparable across the United Kingdom. Last year, they rose by 1·5 per cent., the rate of inflation being over 10 per cent. We have brought about a gradual convergence and I hope that we shall be able to do more this year.

Labour would undo all that. Labour would dismantle all the progress that we have made and all the justice that we have introduced; it would tear away the protection that we have brought in—especially for small businesses—and let business rates rip. I assume that the party would not take such action lightly: presumably it has thought it through and considered the consequences. I have another question for the hon. Member for Garscadden.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lang: No, not at the moment. This is an important point. The hon. Gentleman will want to hear the answer, as it will affect businesses in Orkney and Shetland just as it will affect businesses in Dumfries and Galloway. By how much does the hon. Member for Garscadden expect business rates to rise in the first two years after he has taken off the controls that we introduced on business rates? How many jobs will be lost as a result? How many businesses will close? Scottish business deserves and awaits answers to those questions. Those whose jobs would go deserve answers to those questions. I expect the hon. Gentleman to answer that question in his speech.

The Labour party wants to embark on a three-point programme to punish local government.

Mr. Wallace: Will the right hon. Gentleman now give way?

Mr. Lang: Yes.

Mr. Wallace: The 1986 Green Paper foreshadowed special arrangements for business rates in Orkney and Shetland, because of the anomaly created by the oil terminals. What progress is being made to implement the social arrangements promised by the Government?

Mr. Lang: As the hon. Gentleman knows, since he and I have had many exchanges on this subject across the Floor of the House, Orkney and Shetland almost always have special arrangements. These matters are continually up for review and reconsideration, but his representations will, as always, be borne in mind.

The Labour party has a three-point programme for punishing local government. Simultaneously the Opposition want to return to the worst injustices of the domestic rating system. They want to remove all safeguards to protect local taxpayers through capping. They want to expose the business community and its employees to the horrors of runaway council spending. It is an extortion racket that would make the mafia look like a children's charity.

If the Labour party really wants to get rid of the poll tax, it should help the Bill through. If not, the inescapable conclusion will be that it wants to stop the Government abolishing the poll tax for its own dark reasons.

What we are proposing is a tax based upon property and upon the people who live in it. It is a tax that will recognise that taxes are paid by people, not by buildings. It is a tax that will take account of the needs of single-person households, many of which contain pensioners, students, student nurses, apprentices and trainees, and of the needs of the young, the old, those on low incomes and those who live in high-priced areas. It is a tax which will be administratively simple, which will require no register to determine liability and which will provide a firm basis for local government finance. In other words, it is a fair tax, a sensible tax, a workable tax and a tax which I commend to the House.

5.1 pm

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): That was an entertaining performance, by the standards of the Secretary of State for Scotland. It contained one or two memorable lines. I was interested in the concept of the Secretary of State not yawning but choking over his script. I imagine that that is something he gets used to. I was also intrigued by the concept that somewhere in the International Monetary Fund there are a number of gentlemen who are very worried in case Stirling district council is not capped in 1996.

Before dealing with the Bill, may I say a few words about the way in which the Bill is to pass through the House and the parliamentary timetable. What is proposed—and what will no doubt happen, because of the power of the Whips—is an attack on Parliament itself. This is a complicated and controversial Bill that will be forced through its Committee stage in three weeks. The Committee will meet almost literally day and night. There will be no possibility of proper consideration. There will be no detailed scrutiny of very important matters that will have an impact on everyone. It is a straitjacket that makes a total mockery of the parliamentary process.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that it will be impossible within this three-week period, if the House votes for the three weeks, for there to be any proper consultations with interested parties and any sort of repetition, by means of which the ordinary person in the pub may understand what is to be visited upon him, and that it will be a complete abortion and distortion of the way in which Parliament ought to consider a complicated piece of legislation?

Mr. Dewar: I have a great deal of sympathy for what the hon. Gentleman says. I was about to refer to the constant approaches to me by professionals. I am referring not to politicians but to officials and assessors who are extremely worried about the practicality of many of the Bill's provisions. Poor souls—they approach me because they say that it will be possible, of course, to obtain the answers in Committee and to tease them out there. That will not be so. I do not want to enrage the Secretary of State, if that is not a contradiction in terms, by asking him about COSLA's views. For those on the Conservative Benches who are not familiar with the Scottish scene, that is the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. Local authorities of every political colour are members of COSLA. Its recent circular deals with the need for a statutory canvass which it says many people believe to be essential. The circular continues:

"No doubt these are issues which will be debated more fully within the Committee stages of the Bill".

COSLA appeals to its members to send in detailed suggestions for improvements and amendments.

Within that three-week period it will be very difficult to separate the Scottish provisions from the English provisions. There are differences—differences of starting base and differences of tradition. This is a very serious departure from the standards that we expect from a Government when dealing with the House of Commons.

In a letter to me on 30 October the Secretary of State said that, whatever else, he was sure

"that the Scottish interests will be dealt with appropriately."

If the Secretary of State thinks that this is dealing with Scottish interests appropriately, he is not living in the same world as I am. It will be met with deep cynicism and deeper dismay in Scotland.

Mr. Budgen: Is there not a serious risk that the problem of peope refusing to pay may become worse if they feel that the proper authority of Parliament has not been given to the Bill by means of proper discussion and argument?

Mr. Dewar: All I can say to the hon. Gentleman is that I very much hope that that is not the case. As he knows, my colleagues and I have turned our face against non-payment from the very beginning of this argument. We are opposed to such a policy. I would not want to see anything that encouraged that problem, either under the present system or any successor system.

May I put a point to the Secretary of State in very muted terms, because I do not wish to overstate it? It is extraordinary that one of the last Conservative politicians in Scotland should argue that Westminster is the right forum properly to look at Scottish legislation, to dissect it and to make sure that it reaches the statute book in a way

[Mr. Dewar]

that is a credit to the legislative process. It is extraordinary that the Secretary of State for Scotland should be responsible for and should be backing the kind of timetable motion that has been put before the House. It is an abuse of the parliamentary process that goes beyond the ordinary. It is a cop-out by the Secretary of State for Scotland, who gives the impression of having given up by allowing such a thing to happen.

As for the Second Reading debate, the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) gave a spirited performance yesterday. I use the word performance advisedly. He is a little bit faded these days, compared with the bright years of his youth, but undoubtedly it was a triumph of technique. He knows that when one is in difficulty one does not talk about the Bill that one is defending. One attacks, because that is the best form of defence. I suppose it is something that he learnt in the old days in the combined cadet force at some public school. He certainly did that during the exchanges.

It was interesting to listen to the arguments put forward by a string of distressed loyalists, who got little in the way of a response from the Secretary of State for the Environment. Their only consolation will be that the *Hendon Times*, the Brent Bugle and other local papers will record that they asked the questions, but they will not be able to record any of the answers to the worries that clearly exist among their Back Benchers, particularly in the south-east of England. That gives added force to the points that are being put forward from our side about the way in which the Bill is being railroaded through the House.

In particular, I noticed that the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) asked a question about the revenue support grant in the south-east of England. He was told by the Secretary of State that it was an important point and that he would deal with it specifically in his speech. I read the speech with great care this morning. There was not even an attempt to provide an answer. That is typical of the way in which the debate was conducted yesterday and has been conducted again today by the Secretary of State for Scotland.

The Secretary of State for Scotland made some interesting remarks about how we deal with sewage charges in Scotland and I believe that he was right, but I fear that the main reason that they were paraded was because it took up a few minutes without him having to deal with the fundamentals of the Bill. He went on to give a litany of hatred about local government and its responsibilities.

I do not want to spend a great deal of time on this subject, but it must occur to the Secretary of State that if he creates such an abrasive atmosphere, if on the one hand he says that local government has done well and he claims the credit while on the other hand blaming it for everything that goes wrong, he is undoubtedly creating a situation in which there will be continuing difficulties. With a better atmosphere, one could get more reasonable results for most parties. One of the tragedies has been the constant confrontation. I do not think that that area of policy has been conducted with any form of common sense in recent years.

For the Secretary of State to lecture us about the non-domestic rate—the business rate—and say that fear of that is driving companies out of business takes one's breath away. When I talk to business men, when I look at the records of insolvencies, liquidations and business failures, people talk to me about Government economic policy and the recession and not about some sort of hypothetical concern that lives large only in the mind of the right hon. Gentleman.

As regards the Bill, a number of our past arguments are clearly highly relevant to the debate. I said earlier that the Secretary of State was not noted for his phrases but, to be fair, he introduces them occasionally. He was the first person that I have heard talking about the dampening effect of banding and it may well be his modest monument. However, I object strongly to that phenomenon. I do so because I know that it is a form of protection racket, although I know that that is a phrase that Tories have found offensive, but it makes the point. To be fair, Conservative Members have not tried to hide that fact. They have said that they want to protect those in the upper range of the property market. They accept that there is a link between income and the housing that most people live in and they want to protect people who are likely to have substantial incomes. They want artificially to protect them by squeezing the range of banding—it is unashamed and unabashed.

The answer is that modest home owners such as first-time buyers will inevitably pay more than they otherwise would have done. The other day I described—I shall not do so again to save embarrassment, although it is the Conservatives' and not mine—all the tears that were shed for those at the bottom of the home ownership market, especially council tenants who bought their property who we were told would be victimised as the Labour party would take vengeance by taxing them on the full value of their houses when they had bought at a considerable discount. If that is not hypocrisy and if it was genuinely meant, there must be some troubled consciences on these Benches when Conservative Members consider what they are introducing.

It is not merely a question of the elimination of the discount in the local taxation system; there is also the weighting to which I referred which will clearly be a considerable problem for those people. I do not believe that there is misunderstanding of the system or that there is such lamentable ignorance on the Conservative Benches that they did not understand the argument when they made it so vociferously only a year or 18 months ago. When the Government defend what they once condemned we are looking at plain hypocrisy.

The right hon. Member for Henley lectures us about the politics of envy. I think what he means by that is that he does not want a system that is too progressive. It occurred to me that I should argue that that would be an odd thing to suggest because if one applied it to income tax one would have a regressive and unfortunate situation. However, when I consider what the Government have been doing to the tax system in the past year or two, it could be an argument that appealed to them. I have to repeat that it is not merely a matter of trying to protect or victimise. It ought to be a question of the fair distribution of the burden. The present rigging—if that is not too cruel a word—or, if we want to be more mealy-mouthed, the present adjustment of the banding system, ensures that there will not be a fair distribution. That also has another effect which has given rise to great discontent in areas such as Hendon. I see that one of the Members representing

Hendon, the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) is here. The problem with banding, even with an eight-band system in place, is that in some areas virtually all the properties fall into one or two bands. As a result, one is suspiciously near to a flat-rate tax system of the type that we are supposed to be abandoning.

My second serious point is the question of the complexity of the new tax and I shall put that in general terms. I listened carefully to the Secretary of State but I was not convinced. I noticed in the *Financial Times* this morning the suggestion that the right hon. Member for Henley does not know anything himself but

"knows a man who knows."

I was quite impressed until I discovered that that man turned out to be the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo). That was a strange accolade for a man who only a few months ago thought that the poll tax was a vote winner. In any event, he may have some grasp of some of the technical details, but I am not convinced that the Secretary of State for Scotland has the same grasp. When I listened to him musing about when a register becomes a list, I could only conclude that he wants to duck out of the controversy and leave it all to local authorities.

The Secretary of State knows that if one talks to people who will be involved, it is nonsense to say that everything is on course and is going smoothly. I shall give one example. In the middle of September, as the Secretary of State knows, a draft circular on the Local Government Finance and Valuation Act 1991 was issued. It dealt with the financing of the new valuation process. In mid September local authorities replied, raising a number of important issues. Unless the midday post brought something unexpectedly, since then there has not been a cheep out of the Scottish Office. We have not got the circular. There is a great deal of confusion and hiatus because understandably local authorities want to know about funding arrangements, practical details and want answers to their questions about the use of private sector surveyors and they have not had any answers. They are not being obtuse or refusing to act. They have waited week after week for the circular but it has not appeared and the timetable is slipping by. If that is things going smoothly, the Secretary of State is talking a different language from the ordinary people of Scotland.

That is a painful contrast with the way in which preparations for the passage of the Bill are being bulldozed through with no respect for the niceties of the parliamentary process.

Everyone knows that Opposition Members are concerned about the discount because we do not believe that it is a properly targeted concession. Many people argue that a statutory canvass is essential. I notice that the Secretary of State disagrees and says that it is very much a matter for local authorities to take what he describes as "reasonable steps". However, given that it is all on a daily basis and that it might not be an auntie but perhaps a youngster who moves from address to address—that happens frequently in my constituency and perhaps even in the Secretary of State's constituency—all the problems with identifying the number of folk in the house, which sank the administrative basis of the poll tax, will to a large extent arise again under this system. It is no good saying that it will be up to the local authority to take reasonable steps and then going home to Bovril or Horlicks and thinking that the problem has been solved.

I shall cite one example and I invite the Secretary of State to stop me if I am wrong. It is likely that I am because, although I have taken good advice, no one is sure that they know exactly how the system will work, but let me try. Let us consider students. That is fair because there has been a recent announcement and it will be fresh in the Secretary of State's mind. He will be able to keep the House right and that may also save time in Committee, which is important given the lack of time that will be available.

As I understand it, if a student lives in a hall of residence, he will be exempt. I am sure that the Secretary of State will nod his assent.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Dewar: The Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), who is slightly more animated, is doing so. I distinctly saw his sideburns move in the wind. The advice that I am given is that if a student is not in a hall of residence but is in a flat where he is the liable person, either because he is the owner or tenant, and no one else lives there, he will not be exempt. Am I right?

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. Michael Portillo): No.

Mr. Dewar: We are making progress. The Minister is shaking his head.

Mr. Foulkes: The Scottish Minister of State is nodding.

Mr. Dewar: It is very complicated indeed to read the signs. It will be by guess and by God, and certainly not by good advice.

In Scotland the impression, as explained to me by several experts, is that the liable person, if he is a student owner or tenant, will get a 50 per cent. reduction—25 per cent. because he is a single person and 25 per cent. based on his status. If he is the liable person but he is married, even if he is married to another student, he will get only a 25 per cent. reduction. If he is at home with one parent, he will get a 25 per cent. reduction. If he is at home with both parents, the full charge will be payable by that household. If there is a group of students in a flat, the position is not at all clear, unless they will be exempt under clause 4 in England or clause 72 in Scotland. It is a matter for interesting speculation what happens if one student fails his examinations so that one failed non-student is staying in the flat.

We in Scotland are proud that our failure rate is below the national average, but we did not realise that it would be a financial necessity to coach our colleagues through to avoid this chaos. I accept that I may have got that example wrong, but I hope that the Minister understands that I do not make these suggestions lightly. I have tried to canvass the best opinion that I can find, and that is the best advice that I can get.

Mr. Portillo: The reason why the hon. Gentleman is not entirely clear is that much of that will be covered by regulation. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have made these points clear in press conferences and the Secretary of State for Wales made it clear in his reply last night. Since the hon. Gentleman is obviously unclear about this, I undertake to make it clear in my reply this evening.

Mr. Dewar: That is a handsome offer and—I will not say that it ensures my presence, as I would have been here out of curiosity in any event—I shall certainly be present.

The point that I am making, perhaps rather over-lengthily, is that there are great areas of confusion, which are compounded by the fact that the system operates on a daily rate. I understand what the right hon. Gentleman says about a person having to have a principal residence or dwelling and that if somebody comes casually to visit that will not count. Nevertheless, there are great problems. I can think of categories of people, for example, Members of Parliament, and of interesting little tricks of the trade that may arise there. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Yes, that may well be. The position is not clear.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Michael Heseltine): I am interested. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will explain what he means by "tricks of the trade" by Members of Parliament.

Mr. Dewar: I certainly hope that no right hon. or hon. Gentleman would in any way seek to escape his liability. I have no doubt that sometimes people do. I can think of privatisation issues where rules have been bent. Those are exceptional cases. All I am suggesting is that there are great complexities and doubts.

I will give the right hon. Gentleman another example —the oil rig worker. As we know, under the poll tax there has been endless litigation and no satisfactory outcome. Such a worker may be away from home for over half a year, when the days are aggregated. That raises the question of how his liability can possibly be calculated on a daily rate.

Mr. Heseltine: Have we not seen the clearest example of scaremongering, invention and allegations without foundation? When challenged about the "tricks of the trade", the hon. Gentleman has nothing to say because his comment was wholly without foundation.

Mr. Dewar: The right hon. Gentleman has gone red in the face and he is making himself look ridiculous. I repeat that in a large number of areas there will be complexities and difficulties of interpretation which will lead to great confusion and a good deal of unhappiness.

Mr. Heseltine: That is a climb-down.

Mr. Dewar: It is not a climb-down at all. The right hon. Gentleman is, to say the least, seizing at any straw, if he is reduced to using that as an argument.

The other day the Secretary of State for the Environment put up a pathetic display about the 20 per cent. rule. When challenged to say why it could not be abolished in April next year, he said it was simply because income support levels had been set and it was impossible to change them. The reason is beyond me. We all know that every hon. Member is agreed that the 20 per cent. rule is indefensible. We have had it from the Audit Commission that its collection results in a net loss to the Exchequer. I cannot see that the technicality behind which the right hon. Gentleman shelters is any defence for the clear breach of principle in allowing an inhumanity and a financial nonsense to continue in a system where it has no place. It should go in April 1992. If the right hon. Gentleman had the courage of his own arguments, it would go then. To suggest otherwise is contemptible.

My view—I have to put it as bluntly as this—is that the Bill is a disorganised hypocrisy and few of its authors believe in it. Some at least would admit that in private. The Scottish Office team, largely still intact, attacked the so-called roof tax—a property-based system with capital valuations and a single person in the household liability —as an abomination. The team made it clear that it was a wholly unacceptable concept and said of the family home that it would be the family millstone, yet the team has ended up in exactly the same area.

Mr. Lang: When will the hon. Gentleman get round to answering the questions that I put to him during my speech?

Mr. Dewar: I know that the right hon. Gentleman does not like this, but I am talking about the proposals in the Bill before us and I intend to continue to do so. I am extremely interested in the arguments used in this debate in the past 24 hours or so.

Mr. Heseltine: Another "trick of the trade".

Mr. Dewar: It may well be.

Mr. Foulkes: Does my hon. Friend recall that the right hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger) had himself registered at a fictitious address in the town of Ayr to deceive the electorate that his principal home was in Ayr and not, as we all know, in Stirling? Is that properly described as a "trick of the trade"?

Mr. Dewar: I have no idea, but that is an interesting anecdote.

On 11 November the Secretary of State for the Environment was challenged by the hon. Member for Norfolk, North (Mr. Howell), who said that the Government should just add a further 2·5 per cent. to value added tax. The right hon. Gentleman said that the Government were determined to make progress, but that they did not believe that progress would be made by the imposition of a further 2·5 per cent. to VAT. He said:

"the inevitable conclusion on my hon. Friend's proposals . . . is that every authority's spending is fixed precisely. Authorities have no capacity to raise additional revenue, and, to the most minute detail, central Government fix their expenditure. That would not be the right way to progress."

I am grateful for that information, but I do not believe that that principle is operating in local government now. I do not believe that that is the general thrust of the policies advocated by the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues.

The Secretary of State also argued that the council tax would maintain accountability. He said:

"Thirty-eight million of the 42 million adults in Great Britain—that is, more than 90 per cent.—will be directly taken into account by the council tax."—[*Official Report*, 11 November 1991; Vol. 198, c. 786-789.]

I regard that as sophistry. I remember trying to argue that under the old rating system, and the successor that we were proposing, everyone in a household made a contribution towards its running and should be taken into account and counted as being part of the taxation system. I was vilified by Scottish Office Ministers for holding such a view—vilified is a word that I can take seriously. I was told that only one person was legally liable and therefore only a small percentage of the electorate was covered by the taxation system. I was told that that was totally unacceptable.

Now the right hon. Member for Henley has the brass neck to repeat that argument and attach it to a system to

which, in terms of the arguments that he and his colleagues used for so long, it does not apply. I thought that that was the most outrageous claim from the right hon. Gentleman in recent weeks until I remembered some of his other remarks. He said that the Scots had complained when they got a separate poll tax bill and asked why they should complain now that they do not. That was a remarkable statement. The right hon. Gentleman also said that the only thing standing in the way of the abolition of the poll tax was the Labour party. Such comments will merely lead the right hon. Member and his colleagues into disrepute.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Surely it is remarkable that, when the Secretary of State for the Environment was asked why he did not oppose the poll tax in Scotland when he did so in England, he replied that he thought the Scots had wanted it. Is that not a sign of how out of touch Ministers are with the people of Scotland?

Mr. Dewar: That is unfair to the right hon. Gentleman as I believe he is being misquoted. What he said was even more alarming. He said that he had asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if the Scots wanted it, and then he believed him.

Mr. John Butcher (Coventry, South-West): It is the duty of the Opposition to oppose and the hon. Gentleman is doing so with great vigour. I pay tribute to the Scottish Labour party for spearheading the Opposition's view on the community charge and local government reform. If the hon. Gentleman's speech is to have any intellectual and moral integrity on behalf of the Scottish Labour party, he should, in all conscience, answer the specific questions put to him by my right hon. Friend. The hon. Gentleman, more than any other hon. Member, has a duty to state his party's proposals and their effects on the Scottish people.

Mr. Dewar: If the hon. Gentleman believes that the relationship with local government should depend for ever on the ever pressing presence of capping power, he takes a gloomy and miserable view of the future of that relationship.

The Secretaries of State for Scotland and for the Environment have a great influence on spending in local government because they control the revenue support grant and the ability of additional expenditure to attract that grant. There are a number of ways in which they can, should and will influence responsibly, but the idea that one must spend one's time in a constant war over capping is mistaken.

In recent weeks the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) has made his stand against a single currency in Europe. He said that if we had such a machinery it would leave the Chancellor of the Exchequer

"as nothing more than the treasurer of a rate-capped local authority."

That tells us something interesting about the disunity on the European issue, but in the context of the Bill it is also interesting. The right hon. Member for Chingford is not noted for his lack of imagination or his inability to think of vindictive comparisons. Obviously he could think of nothing more wounding to say about the Chancellor than that he should be compared to the

"treasurer of a rate-capped local authority."

The Government should not seek to rely upon such capping powers. We do not want such a machinery and we would not rely upon it.

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman will recall that his former colleague, Lord Ross of Marnock, said that a Secretary of State should have

"necessary reserve powers to restrict grants where an authority fails to maintain standards or spends excessively."

The hon. Gentleman's predecessor thought that such capping powers were necessary, as did Bruce Millan, now a commissioner of the European Community. Will the hon. Gentleman now answer the questions that I put to him?

Mr. Dewar: I have already answered—we do not believe that such powers will be necessary.

The Secretary of State was a decade out when he spoke about this recently. We put section 5 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1966 on the statute book because it was thought to be necessary at the time. I was not party to that decision. However, no Secretary of State ever found it necessary to use it and we would not wish to see those powers restored. We would not contemplate using those powers and therefore the comparison is wrong.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Can the hon. Gentleman tell us why real deductions in local government expenditure took place in Scotland under the Government of 1978 as a result of the decision taken—quite properly in my view—by central Government to control expenditure? The reductions were not small, but massive.

Mr. Dewar: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who so often rides gallantly to the rescue of his enemies. That is exactly the point I was seeking to make earlier. The decision in 1978 was an unpleasant one, but it was thought necessary at the time. The reductions were made by cutting the rate grant support from central Government. That machinery is always open to a Government. At that time the Government rightly chose not to use the capping powers that existed.

Mr. Harry Ewing: I apologise to my hon. Friend for intervening and I know that he has been generous in giving way. The Secretary of State referred to the late Lord Ross but it is important to clarify that the Secretary of State is not talking about capping powers—those powers were described as indicative costs. At no time did any Labour Secretary of State, either Lord Ross or Bruce Millan, allow a local authority to set its budget and then cut that budget in the knowledge that cuts would then be made to public services. Unfortunately, the Secretary of State has deliberately misrepresented the late Lord Ross.

Mr. Dewar: I appreciate that my hon. Friend speaks from his experience in the Scottish Office.

Ministers are fond of complaining bitterly about the draconian way in which Labour Governments have controlled local authority spending in the past. It seems rather odd therefore that they should now complain that we would not use the capping machinery. We regard such machinery as redundant.

I have given way a great deal and I do not want to prevent other hon. Members from contributing to the debate. In conclusion, I believe that the story of the past two or three years has been an unhappy and disreputable one. Those who have followed the debate in the past few weeks will know that I have read the press releases that were put out in the past by hon. Members who are now part of the Scottish Office team. My fax machine used to go mad every Sunday when yet another letter to cheer me

[Mr. Dewar]

up was sent by the then chairman of the Scottish Conservative party. Hon. Members will remember when the Minister of State at the Scottish Office had that dignity.

I re-read one such letter from the hon. Gentleman this morning and it was full of words such as "deceitful" and "disreputable". The hon. Gentleman predicted that a property-based tax on a capital valuation, taking everything else as it was at that time, would produce a tax of between £30 and £40 per £1,000 of the value of a house.

I accept that the £140 sweetener must be taken into account, but the figures are so dramatically wrong, even taking account of that, that I can think only that they were put about with malice as scare stories. Such malice would, no doubt, be engaging at a fringe meeting of Young Conservatives, but it is alarming coming from a Minister of the Crown.

When I read the Minister's remarks, the words "disreputable" and "deceitful", which he used cheerfully about Labour Members, struck me as a useful vocabulary when considering his efforts. I find intellectually contemptible the way in which Conservative Members have stood on their heads when adducing such arguments.

We then had strong advice from the right hon. Member for Henley to read the *Municipal Journal*. When I examined the issue of that publication for 8 November, I noticed a splendidly robust quotation from Mr. Roger Humber, director of the Housebuilders' Federation, who said:

"Mr. Heseltine is talking absolute nonsense."

Mr. Humber will find that the right hon. Gentleman has a habit of doing that, certainly when dealing with local government taxation and house building statistics.

From Conservative Members and Ministers we have had bluff and bluster. They are attacking proposals from the Labour party which are sensible and coherent. In Scotland we have a valuation base that was put together in 1985 and is still hardly out of date, even if the system had run on. It is intact and would be a practical starting point. We propose to build on it, to move from that practical starting point to a reformed, improved and modernised rating system. That would be infinitely preferable to a scheme which was spawned by political disaster, and cobbled together in considerable panic.

The Secretary of State said that his system was fair. We question that. He also said that it was welcomed. As he said, no tax is likely to be popular. It is interesting to note that in the MORI poll of 1 November it was discovered that fewer than one in five favoured the so-called council tax. That poll was better for my hon. Friends than for Conservative Members, and that is true of most polls these days. At least we reached the 25 per cent. mark. The Liberals achieved only 11 per cent. with their proposals. I take some consolation from that.

We have a Government who dislike and distrust local democracy, and the reason is obvious. It is because, as the Secretary of State has constantly said, local authorities tend to be controlled by the Labour party. That does not happen by magical chemistry or conspiracy. It happens because people vote for and elect Labour candidates.

There is something shabby in a Government making great play of the fact that they lose elections at the local level. The result is that we are plunged into a situation in which, despite the quotation from the Secretary of State for the Environment to which I referred—about the need to prevent local government being controlled in every detail by central Government—in Scotland, only 11 per cent. of revenue is in local government control. The Secretary of State has only one argument and policy, and that is ever more brutal capping. That is not an argument for local democracy. Rather, it is an argument against the Government and their attitudes.

I fear that the Bill will do no service for Parliament. Nor will it be of service to the people of the United Kingdom and particularly to the people of Scotland. In Scotland it will buttress and reinforce the conviction that the Government are running out of energy and ideas and, best of all, running out of time. They should go.

5.43 pm

Sir Richard Luce (Shoreham): I enjoyed the speech of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) because it was entertaining. Although he spent much time criticising the council tax, only towards the end of his remarks did he touch on the alternative proposed by the Labour party and he did that without enthusiasm. Indeed, he failed throughout to answer the challenging questions put to him by the Secretary of State for Scotland. I can only conclude that the hon. Gentleman is not convinced that the Labour party has better proposals for dealing with local government taxation.

In 21 years in this place, I have not before found it possible to speak with enthusiasm about any local government taxation system. At least on this occasion I can give a modest welcome to the council tax. It is certainly a marked improvement on the community charge and it is infinitely better than Labour's proposals for a return to the rating system, remembering the intense pain that that caused to many people through the 1960s and into the 1970s. The fact that the Labour party is not proposing to introduce a formula which would allow for restraint in public expenditure by local government means that its ideas could prove disastrous.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): The right hon. Gentleman says that the council tax is an improvement on the community charge. In which way is it an improvement?

Sir Richard Luce: I was talking not about the Labour party proposals, but about the council tax——

Mr. Barnes: Answer my question.

Sir Richard Luce: If the hon. Gentleman will listen, he will see why the council tax is an improvement on anything that we have had in post-war years. It is a vast improvement on the rating system as proposed by the Labour party.

The four factors that must be looked for in a local taxation system are a measure of fairness, some reflection of ability to pay, an adequate measure of accountability and the maximum of administrative simplicity. No one can have any illusions about any form of local government taxation being perfect. It is almost an area in which one cannot win. There is bound to be an element of rough justice. But the Government's council tax proposal achieves a judicious balance of those elements. It may not be perfect, but it is better than any of the alternatives.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): I assume that the alternatives about which the right hon. Gentleman is speaking include the poll tax. If my memory serves me

right, he was a Minister when both poll tax measures went through the House. If he felt that that system was so wrong, why did he remain in that Government?

Sir Richard Luce: The hon. Gentleman has got me wrong. On all the taxation system that we have had since the war, including the rating system and then the community charge—he is right to say that I supported the latter—the council tax represents an improvement. That is all that I am saying.

I hope that, when replying to the debate, the Minister of State will deal with some points that I have to make about the standard spending assessment. But first I have some general comments on the Bill, in particular on accountability. It is important to bear in mind the fact that the Government are allowing local taxation to be increased to the extent of 15 per cent. of total resources. Some would argue that if it is to be at that low level, relatively speaking, we should do away completely with an element of local taxation and fund it all from central Government.

I believe that it would be a profound mistake to do that. For a Government who believe in decentralisation, it would be a damaging policy. I should have preferred a larger element of local funding to central grants and other forms of revenue. Indeed, had not Labour-controlled authorities in the past driven small businesses out of the inner cities and acted in a thoroughly irresponsible way, creating unemployment in those areas, I should have preferred more flexibility in the business rate system. However, experience does not encourage that.

I am glad that the single bill which people will receive under the council tax will contain two elements—property and personal. Constituencies such as mine have large retired populations and I am concerned about the effect of the Bill on widows and single people. They were heavily hit under the old rating system and the position of most of them was eased considerably under the community charge system. I watch with considerable anxiety to see whether they will lose out under the new council tax. I should be grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister will reassure me on that matter when he winds up.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, in two-tier authorities it is important that bills should contain two elements to make it clear to members of the public what element relates to the county, for example, and what element relates to the district. Hitherto, one misfortune of the systems has been that people are not sure who is responsible for certain expenditure.

I have corresponded endlessly with my hon. Friend the Minister and his predecessors on the standard spending assessment. He will no doubt be saying, "Thank God he is leaving Parliament at the next election". Nevertheless, the issue will remain because, under the new council tax system, it is essential that local authorities and the public have absolute confidence in the fairness of the method of or criteria for calculating the standard spending assessment. It becomes even more acute because the Government—rightly—decided to extend the potential to cap authorities spending less than £15 million. The standard spending assessment system must be based on local authorities having as much confidence as possible. In my area, the two district councils of Arun and Adur—one of which is Conservative and the other Liberal—are profoundly concerned about that issue.

I realise that, whatever system we have, it will be complex. The previous system was even more complex and the Government have done much to simplify it. The present system has six major service blocks, ranging from education to highways and maintenance. The "other services" block contains issues such as environmental health. Also taken into account are population factors, commuters, visitors, density and sparsity of population and the social index, which are all designed to reflect the physical, demographic and social characteristics of each area, so it is bound to be fairly complex. I accept the argument that some complexity cannot be avoided and that there will be an element of rough justice, but the experience in my constituency demonstrates that rough justice can go too far. The disparities in the per capita grant received in my district compared with the neighbouring districts of Worthing and Hove have been such in the past two or three years that much injustice has been caused. Anyone who glances at those areas—it is no disparagement of the neighbouring authorities—will see that the social conditions in my area are acute compared with those in neighbouring areas, yet the per capita grant that my area receives from central Government is much lower. Something is wrong with that and the formula is too crude.

Will my hon. Friend undertake, over a reasonable period and before the council tax is introduced, to carry out an independent review of how that works, taking into account the views of a cross-section of authorities? That review should be published and an adjustment to the standard spending assessment should be considered. In the meantime, there are some arguments for suggesting that the smaller the authority, the rougher the justice and the cruder the formula. Therefore, there is an argument for the higher authorities—in my case the county council—to have an element of discretion in dispersing funds so that they can iron out the worst anomalies and disparities between the various district councils. I hope that when my hon. Friend winds up he will comment on that and consider my proposals, which are intended to be helpful, as positively as he can. I give my encouraging support to the Bill.

5.55 pm

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): It must be made clear that the Labour party is not to blame for the poll tax which the Government introduced. The nation should be told about the chaos, poverty and hardship that the Government have created in deprived areas throughout the country. I am not too worried about the new council tax because I doubt whether it will see the light of day. Will the nation vote the Government back in? They will be voted out and it will be a long time before we have a Conservative Government in Britain again.

Let us consider democracy in local government and the three Secretaries of State for the Environment who have had a go at local government taxation. The right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley), the right hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Patten) and now the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) have all been unsuccessful and got it wrong. Who would have thought that, as we enter the 21st century, 7·5 million people would have been served with warrants? Yesterday, the Secretary of State for Scotland made a statement condemning local councils for overspending. The poll tax

[Mr. Jimmy Wray]

collection rate throughout Britain varies from 33 per cent. to 93 per cent. Non-collection is not confined to Strathclyde and Glasgow but applies also to the shires, which collected only 82 per cent. and inner London, which collected only 66 per cent. Scotland is owed some £437 million in unpaid poll tax.

Local authorities should be given some money to get them out of the mess. Although the Secretary of State for Scotland condemned district and regional authorities such as Lambeth, Hackney and Strathclyde, no one could say that they have not tried to collect that money. Strathclyde regional council even decided to hold an auction because the ruthless Government have allowed it to deteriorate. It is nearing bankruptcy and has had to make 720 employees redundant, which is a sorry state of affairs.

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): There are difficulties in collecting the charge. Strathclyde authority undertakes the task diligently, but still faces problems. I received a letter this morning from the social security office stating that it cannot take anything off the income support of one woman who is being pursued for arrears because she is too poor. However, the Government refuse to abandon their policy of making everyone pay 20 per cent. although they know that it costs twice as much to try to collect it as the amount that they actually collect. They penalise poor people such as my constituent.

Mr. Wray: I sympathise with my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey) but surely he has been a Membeer long enough to know that the Government do not care. Conservative Members are not interested in the poor, but are interested only in their own shares and in the rich. During the Government's term of office they have cut £600 million from the Strathclyde budget for services, so that council has to increase its bills this year by 32 per cent. The Government are guilty of mismanagement, gross neglect and maladministration, and should be turned out tomorrow because they are not fit to govern.

It annoys me when I hear the criticisms that come from the Secretary of State for the Environment. He talked about what my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) said. I shall quote a couple of paragraphs to see if anyone knows who said them:

"Once implemented and through transition, I believe the new system will prove enduring and a vast improvement on the status quo."

It was said at the annual conference of the Association of District Councils on 1 July 1988. [HON. MEMBERS: "Who was it?"] Maybe hon. Members will know who it was when they hear the next part. Three years later the same person said:

"I'll tell you about the poll tax. We were bounced into it quickly because there was such a fuss about rates in Scotland and we were bounced without thinking because of the political fuss."

That was said by the Prime Minister. It was easy to see that he was running for his job then.

Why do we have to wait until 1993 before the poll tax is abolished? We know what the position is. In Strathclyde alone, 1·25 million warrants have been issued; many others have been issued in various constituencies. The position is so bad that the sheriff officers are afraid to go into homes. The saddest story I heard was of a sheriff officer going to a door to collect items that were to be sold at auction. He said that the woman in the house had only a table and television, and had spent the night before polishing the table so that it would bring in a wee bit extra to clear her debt. Is that the sort of Government we have? Yes, they do not care.

Why will not the Government abolish the 20 per cent. rule? Why are they allowing the ratepayers and taxpayers of this country to go on throwing money down the drain? It costs the Government 19 per cent. of what they collect if they collect 6 per cent. of the charges. Why do not the Government abolish the whole damn lot and give the people a free run for Christmas? They should do so if they have any compassion.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): They are stony-hearted.

Mr. Wray: Yes, they are stony-hearted.

I have taken a long look at local government finance. The Government collect only about 14 per cent. of the charge and the rest comes from central Government—is it worth collecting it? Some £4·25 billion has been thrown away on trying to get the people out of the mess into which the Government have placed them and £5,795 million has been poured in to try to save the Government from embarrassment. But the people of Scotland and Britain will never forget the sad 13 years in which people have been brought to their knees. The most deprived regions are still suffering from cuts in social services, the police force and education. The Government are hoping to carry on and, according to the Secretary of State for the Environment the people will have to put up with the tax until 1993.

The Government have made a mistake with the new tax from the very start. They have valued the average house at £80,000. They were told months ago when they first set out valuations that they were wrong by between 16 and 26 per cent. Some of the houses that were valued at £80,000 were worth 26 per cent. less and others 16 per cent. less. The Government were warned about their assessments by the Local Government Information Unit and by building societies. When they try to collect the money, with all the various bands involved, they will need the St. Francis pipe band to get out of the mess. They are worried about the people in the top bands and they are ensuring that those in the highest band cannot be made to pay more than three times the amount charged to those in the lowest band. The Government are protecting very wealthy people.

What nonsense it is for the Government to say that they will give a 25 per cent. discount for everyone in every household—25 per cent. for a pensioner in the poorest slum district and 25 per cent. for a millionaire living in a penthouse. If they consider that to be fair they have got it wrong again.

The Government do not want to get rid of capping and have retained it in the Bill. The only reason that they have not capped local authorities as much as they would have liked is because of the word "unreasonable" contained in the legislation to implement the poll tax. However, the new Bill does not contain the word "unreasonable". If that word had not been included in the poll tax legislation, the Government would have capped about 31 local authorities in Scotland for overspending by a small percentage. It is a sad day when the Government put the jackboot into local authorities because of their expenditure—democracy and accountability have gone out of the window. The new

system is a costly business for local authorities because big changes have to be made, computers are brought into education departments and offices which means extra cost. Local authorities also have to consider gearing. When a local council increases a bill by £1, it means a 6 or 7 per cent. increase for the charge payer, which is bad news for them.

The poll tax meant a bonanza for private landlords—the Rachmans in Britain. About one week before the Act came into force to abolish rates those landlords were running about trying to get their tenants to sign to agree a rent increase, and they will do the same thing with this legislation. How will the Government deal with multiple occupations? They will tell the Rachman landlords to collect the money. They might get half the money—the other half will go in the landlord's pocket. There will be no registers. When the properties are valued they will be looked at from the outside so there could be 30 or 40 people inside. I know one place in Alliston street in which there are 20 or 30 people in one room sleeping in hammocks. If valuers do not go inside the properties, how will they be able to value them? In some streets all the buildings look alike although they may contain three, four or even six apartments, and it is unfair to place them all in one band.

The Government say that they will use the services of estate agents. Two or three of them have been out to value my place and have given me three different valuations—none of them right.

Mr. McKelvey: I advise my hon. Friend not to tell us what the valuations were.

Mr. Wray: I certainly will not; I am afraid to.

Even some Conservative Members have been grumbling about the bands and asking for another two or three at the top of the ladder because of the jump from £160,000 to £320,000. But some houses in this city are worth £2·5 million. What band should they come under? I hope that a new Government will come to power so that the council tax cannot be implemented. *[Interruption.]* I am running out of material.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): But my hon. Friend is using it well.

Mr. McKelvey: Before my hon. Friend stood up to speak he told me that it was a scandal that so little time is being allowed for a Bill of this magnitude. It is all the more astonishing that Scottish Conservative Members should not have learnt the lessons from the implementation of the poll tax which they—backed by the legions of Tory Back Benchers who are not here today—thrust on the people of Scotland. They should at least have learnt not to push through legislation like this in so short a time, thereby denying the opportunity to discuss it thoroughly.

Mr. Wray: It is difficult for any Government to justify the type of legislation that has been passed here over the past three years.

The average council tax in England will be £400, in Scotland £270 and in Wales £163—or so we are told. But I think that the figures are wrong. The Government should realise that the time has come to fund local authorities centrally. Democracy has been thrown out of the window by this Government and we shall return to democracy only with the return of a Labour Government pledged to bring in a fair tax system based on ability to pay. Our document takes incomes into consideration; the council tax does not.

I will be glad when a Labour Government are returned to power and we implement the fairer system known as fair rates.

6.13 pm

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said yesterday that, despite the Opposition's fears and unyielding opposition to the proposed council tax, they managed to muster only 20 Members for the debate. I see that that number has fallen still further today—*[Interruption.]* Despite the laughter, only 14 or 15 Opposition Members are able to be here at this early hour for what will be a lengthy debate. What is more, I see that the Liberal Democrats cannot be bothered to be present at all, such confidence do they have in their proposals and their amendment. [HON. MEMBERS: "Where are the Tories?"] I shall not respond to blandishments inviting me to criticise my hon. Friends for not fielding more people. After all, we support the Government. We have no need to summon up armies to support our logic. It is the Opposition who need to oppose our proposals, and that they have significantly failed to do, to judge not only by numbers but by the lack of content in their speeches.

I welcome the council tax, and I find it difficult to understand the reasoning behind the Opposition's staunch refusal to see its virtues. I am forced to conclude that their opposition is comparable to their opposition to the £140 reduction in the community charge, against which many Opposition Members voted. Their opposition derives from a mulish obstinacy which directly harms the electorate; it does not rest on logic or reasoning, and it is not worth listening to.

The council tax, by contrast, responds to the electorate's wish to maintain a tie between local government revenue-raising and housing, thus identifying a centuries-old notion of ability to pay. I suggest that that notion of ability to pay still applies. Most people who live in large houses are more able to pay than those who live in small ones. Whether or not that is an accurate assumption, it became clear in the lengthy debate on the community charge that the electorate wanted us to retain that tie.

Mr. Maxton: It is interesting to hear the hon. Lady stress the centuries-old tradition of the link between property and ability to pay. That being so, why did she support the poll tax, which did not meet that criterion for a local tax?

Miss Nicholson: I do not blame the hon. Gentleman for not listening to some of my statements on the community charge, but I pointed out at the time——

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): Yes, but how did the hon. Lady vote?

Miss Nicholson: I pointed out at the time and in the way I voted—and I say again now—that it is the country's perception that a house provides a notion of ability to pay, even if it is not a truly accurate assumption. We all know, for instance, that under this Conservative Government wealth has been created more readily, so people have had more money to spend, and they do not spend it just on

[Miss Nicholson]

where they live. Their sense of self-worth is not based solely on their dwelling place. They also buy video recorders, tape recorders, televisions by the armful, cars and all sorts of other things. People's wealth is visible in a variety of ways. But, as I said, the electorate at large still believes strongly that the house in which someone lives reflects at least in part his or her ability to pay.

This tax is a light touch on local wallets, since it raises only 25 per cent. of local authority revenue, the remainder being raised from and distributed by central Government taxation systems. I give credit to the Government for this considerable and generally welcome innovation. That leaves the United Kingdom with the second lowest rate of value added tax in the whole of Europe. That is due to our large 25 per cent. of zero-rated items. We are managing an extraordinarily intelligent mechanism to raise more money while still having the second lowest VAT average in the Community. I congratulate the Government on that splendid achievement.

The council tax recognises the duty and the desire of the responsible citizen to contribute to local services. Opposition Members may smile. Some irresponsible Opposition Members did not wish to make a contribution. Several of them had such a desire to duck their contributions that they were found guilty in court. The desire to contribute to services is a badge of civic dignity, and the Bill will help to build a responsible society.

The council tax will exempt or grant a quarter discount to students, student nurses and YTS trainees and will thus build a caring society. It recognises the crucial importance of food production, thus contributing to the building of a practical society. It is thoroughly sensible—and what more could one ask of a mechanism for raising local government revenue?

The Opposition do not wish to be sensible, but that is nothing new. That gives me an opportunity to look at their uneasy and uncomfortable proposals which smack of their obsession with the continuance of the command economy. Perhaps I should say command extravagance and incompetence and, ultimately, the stagnation by command that socialist systems produce. The Opposition propose large-scale meddling in private matters, and that lies at the heart of Labour's obsession with a fair rates system. Their system would not work without an army of snoopers. *[Interruption.]* There is an overlarge army of Scottish Opposition Members. If I had my way, there would be a fair system of Scottish representation. There would be fewer Scottish Members, and none of them would be Labour. *[Interruption.]* The Opposition cannot down a good Conservative.

Labour's fair rates system smacks of that party's usual incompetence and, even more sadly, of their naive and unrealistic belief in the perfection of man-made systems. What does Labour propose? First, in the most incorrigible, sad and old-fashioned belief, it is determined to return to the rating system based on 1973 values, a truly crazy idea. Secondly, Labour proposes a new system of valuation, a second earthquake after its reversion to the early 1970s, and that system will be based on a rolling revaluation of 22 million properties based on four values, the first of which is maintenance and repair costs. Someone will have to call to see whether I have managed to replace my back door with one that has glass panes instead of wooden panels. It is important that maintenance and repair costs are taken into the rolling revaluation on the critical first valuation. How does Labour propose to work out rebuilding costs, the second of its four values? The other two are rental values and insurance values. One can see the chaos and confusion that such a dreaded system would create.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) said that people would pay more than they needed to pay, but that is possible only if one of two events occurs. First, it can happen because of extravagance on the part of those who spend taxpayers' money such as, dare I say it, the councils in Lambeth and Camden where 40 per cent. of the electorate leave every year. Those people vote with their feet and get out. The second cause for people to pay more than they need to pay would be the introduction of a cumbersome mechanism for identifying and collecting tax revenue. The fair rates system smacks of both those matters.

I suggest that Labour's proposals are not even supported by its Front-Bench spokesmen. We do not need to go far to find all too revealing quotes. On 5 October, on "Any Questions", Mrs. Margaret Beckett said——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. We usually refer to hon. Members by constituency.

Miss Nicholson: She said that there was "no question" but that they would replace the council tax with their rates system. On 17 October another Opposition spokesman said that Labour would "amend the council tax" and scrap the 1973 rates stepping stone. A third Opposition spokesman said that Labour

"would . . . repeal it in almost all circumstances",

but might pick up the council tax valuation register.

I think that I am correct in saying that over the past four years Labour has adopted 70 different positions on local government finance. That puts the author of the "Kama Sutra" in the shade. Labour has suggested capital value rates and a twin tax—which sounds like Dracula and his brother—of local income tax and roof tax. It has suggested a floor tax which gives me, and I suggest the electorate, cold feet. I shall tell the Serjeant at Arms about that because we need more floor space in the building for our secretaries.

Labour has been twisting and turning and has offered a variety of local income taxes that puts even Heinz to shame. It has adopted a number of positions that I have already referred to in perhaps an unseemly manner. I could not support those proposals even if I were the daughter of a coal miner. I am the daughter of an MP who actively assisted coal miners and I am remarkably glad to support the Government's sensible and sane proposals.

As I have said, the Liberal Democrats have so little confidence in their proposals that they seem to have left the SDP to carry their banner, which I am sure that that party could do with far greater competence than the Liberal Democrats. The local income tax would be difficult and complex to create and to continue, tasking the Inland Revenue, as it would, as the agent of collection. It offers the horrific uniformity of a rate throughout the year that will be the same for everyone. Thus far does the Liberal Democrat imagination take one, and, lo and behold, it proposes a variety of adjustments at the year end. Is that really local initiative? The Liberal Democrats would tax wealth creation and there would be a little bureaucrat in every town hall. A high local income tax would create debtors, destroy jobs, and drive out wealth creators.

The Inland Revenue operates on the basis of where people are employed and not on where they live. Those of us who have been employed all our lives in real businesses know that. Therefore, the hugely complex computerised Inland Revenue system would have to be recreated. A new collection point would have to be added to the existing system. This new machinery would be created for a fictitious local additional accountability that would give more authority to local councils. There would be a creation of new power bases for no new benefits to the electorate.

Both Opposition parties offer systems that do not help individuals or families—the people whom we, the Conservatives, are pledged to serve. Instead, they offer more bureaucrats.

Mr. David Nicholson: My hon. Friend has made an effective attack on the proposals of both the Labour and Liberal parties, but she has not mentioned one of the greatest weaknesses in those proposals, which is that both parties have consistently voted against the Government's attempts to curb excessive local government spending through the capping mechanism. The Labour party—I should not be surprised if the Liberal Democrats thought this way too, but I have not explored their policy on this—is committed to abolishing the capping mechanism. Would that not leave council tax payers open to the burden of extravagance in local government?

Miss Nicholson: I wholly agree with my west country colleague. We see things sanely and sensibly there.

Both Opposition parties are pledged only to help bureaucracy. In the case of the Liberal Democrats, that is their favourite repository of power—the local council officials. As a result of the Labour party proposals, new armies of snoopers would arise. If Labour Members fail to see the truth of that, then they are even more foolish than I thought. Only the Conservative proposals will raise the necessary sums of money for appropriate local government expenditure with a light touch and with fundamental fairness and sureness. I support the Government.

6.32 pm

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): The kindest thing that I can say about the speech of the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) is that she obviously believes that attack is the best form of defence, although I notice that she did not go into a great deal of detail in defending the Bill.

It may seem a strange charge to level against this Government that they are imbued with the philosophies of Leon Trotsky, but when it comes to local government, this Administration seem to believe in the Trotskyite theory of permanent revolution. We used to have a local government Bill every two or three years, but now we have two or three local government Bills a year. No sooner do we get one system in place and local authority officials beginning to understand it than it is torn up and something new is put in its place.

We should spare a thought for the officials in finance departments in town and county halls who are trying to sort out the last remnants of the rating system while fighting a losing battle to cope with the problems of the poll tax. On top of all that, they are being asked to prepare for a completely different system which is apparently being worked out as we go along on some sort of do-it-yourself basis. Any hon. Member with recent experience of trying to help constituents with poll tax rebate problems knows that the system is creaking badly and is under considerable strain. It is at least possible that it will be unable to meet the timetable that the Government have laid down for this change. If it does, I expect that the resulting quality of service will be pretty poor.

The great tragedy is that the lessons of the poll tax fiasco have not been learnt. Once again, we shall drive complex legislation through the House at breakneck speed, with all the risk of major flaws not being discovered until it is too late. Perhaps there is a more fundamental lesson to be learnt. Once again, Ministers are trying to persuade a bewildered public that they have stumbled on a magic solution to the age-old problem of local government finance. We have seen them waxing lyrical about the Bill. Two Secretaries of State, on two successive days, have been ecstatic about the Bill, but we saw the same fervour and enthusiasm marshalled, a couple of years ago, behind the poll tax. How are we to believe that, this time, they have got it right? The more enthusiastic Ministers become, the more disillusioned the punters will be when the reality of the situation finally comes home.

I may sound cynical, but all my experience at the sharp end of local government, leading a London borough council, in the local authority association and as an original member of the Layfield committee, leads me to believe that there is no ideal solution to the problem of paying for local council services. We can think up no system—fair rates, council tax, poll tax or local income tax—that would be regarded as fair by everybody and that would have no snags, drawbacks, anomalies or defects.

Every time that we change the system, there are gainers and losers. We should by now have learnt that the gainers take their gains and, saying nothing, scuttle away to enjoy them, while the losers complain long and loud. That is an old political truth which I suspect the Government will once again discover when the full impact of the council tax hits their traditional supporters in London and the south-east.

If there is no perfect system, we are looking for the least worst solution, the one with the fewest drawbacks and injustices. I make no apology for saying that, ever since Layfield reported, I have been convinced that the best solution and the one with the fewest injustices is a local income tax. All those Conservative Members who painted spine-chilling pictures of the adverse impact of local income tax should explain why the system works in Europe and, beyond Europe, in North America. Are we so incompetent that we cannot make it work at least as well as it works in other nations?

The injustice of a property-based tax is evident. The value of a home is only a rough guide to the affluence of the person who lives in it and in many cases is no guide at all. We can all think of circumstances in which the value of somebody's home has gone up through no effort of his own. The area becomes fashionable, property values go up and suddenly he is sitting on an asset that does not reflect his income. For example, although the London borough of Hackney is not widely recognised as a centre of gracious living, 70 per cent. of the households there are in bands D, E and F, but in Rotherham, 84 per cent. of households are in bands A, B and C. That shows the impact of London property values on the tax.

Many of the people in higher-banded properties in Hackney, Greenwich, Southwark and other London

[Mr. John Cartwright]

boroughs will be council tenants who have no choice about where they live. They have to go where they are put and accept the property that they are offered. If that property has a high theoretical market value, they will have to pay a high council tax. The only answer that Ministers give to this problem is the celebrated dampener. It protects, to some extent, those in upper bands, but only at the price of imposing larger burdens on those in the lower bands.

I was interested to read the Conservative party's research department document on the Bill, dated 26 April this year. It said about the impact of the council tax:

"There will be no return to the very big bills that characterised the rates."

With considerable courage, it went on to say:

"Indeed, the Government believes that only those who can afford to are likely to have to pay more in council tax than in Community Charge."

Armed with that brave statement, I looked at the impact of the council tax on my constituents in the London borough of Greenwich. The Government have helpfully provided us with figures showing how the council tax can be worked out on the basis of this year's council spending. It makes frightening reading for my constituents. In the London borough of Greenwich, the average home is in band E.

Couples with a property in that average band would this year have been paying £213 more than they are paying in poll tax. Only 2 per cent. of households in Greenwich would pay less than the sum that they pay in poll tax. Single people would be even worse off. Those in average property in band E would be paying double what they are now paying in poll tax. That is £547 compared with £242. No single person in Greenwich would pay less than they are paying now. For many of my consituents, the switch from poll tax to council tax will be turning a crisis into a disaster.

It is not only Greenwich that has high-value property, but I have no doubt that Ministers will say that the outturn lies entirely with the borough's spending. That is true because Greenwich is spending 14·1 per cent. in excess of its standard spending assessment and grants will continue to be based on the SSA. It has been said already that the system is riddled with anomalies.

Does any local authority accept that its SSA accurately reflects its need to spend? I have never accepted that civil servants in the Department of the Environment in Marsham street, however sophisticated their computer programmes may be, can decide better than those on the spot what a local authority needs to spend.

I shall give one example of anomalies in the SSA system. The child populations of the London boroughs of Greenwich, Lewisham and Wandsworth are almost identical, yet the social service SSA per child is set at £271, £437 and £514 respectively. How can anyone accept that the methodology and the system are fair and reasonable when there is that sort of variation?

That leads me to capping. I speak about it with some authority because the London borough of Greenwich—I represent one of the constituencies within its area, and that is where I live—must be in the "Guinness Book of Records". It has succeeded in getting itself capped every year since capping began. It is the only local authority in the length and breadth of the land that can claim such a record. We know something about capping in Greenwich. I accept that the system limits total spending, but it does so at a pretty high level. It does not, however, protect local people from the impact of spending curbs.

The local authority has not been encouraged by capping to make itself so efficient that it can deliver good-quality services at a lower price within the spending limit. Indeed, the reverse has happened. Sensitive services have been cut to some of the most needy groups to enable the borough to make the political point of blaming the Government. That was entirely predictable. Unplanned cuts have been made at the last minute wherever they could be made quickly. As a result, day centres for the handicapped have been closed, the home bathing service has been scrapped and home help services have been cut. Basic services, including the provision of public toilets, have been brought to an end. Grass in parks has not been cut.

Throughout, the council has said, "It's not our fault, guv. It is not us. This is the result of poll tax capping. It is that rotten Government who have made us do all these terrible things." That is the basic problem with capping. It undermines the accountability of local authorities. It gives a poor local authority a perfect excuse to shift the blame off its shoulders and place it on someone else's. In a borough such as Greenwich the result is the worst of all possible worlds—high bills and a poor quality of service.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Does the hon. Gentleman believe that it is significant that Greenwich, which has a Labour council, seems unable to elect any Labour Members? Does that suggest to him that the Labour-controlled council of Greenwich may be the borough's greatest asset?

Mr. Cartwright: That thought often strikes me when I return home after an evening's canvassing. I think that I should sink to my knees and offer a prayer of gratitude to the London borough of Greenwich. Whenever I think I am in trouble, another inspired piece of lunacy comes forward which guarantees that I find more support, especially on council estates. Nevertheless, it is monstrous that we should have a capping system. It produces high taxation and a poor quality of service.

The Bill's epitaph may be "Another Chance Missed". When the Secretary of State for the Environment began this round of local government changes, I thought that at last someone had understood the fundamental error that had found its way into every previous attempt at reform for the past 30 years. The right hon. Gentleman seemed to want to try to find changes that would stick and that would bring some much-needed stability to local government. Once again, however, complex legislation is being driven through the House without any search for consensus and with all the risk that such a speedy process involves.

Once again, it seems that Ministers are convinced that they have found a magic solution to an age-old problem. Once again, we are changing local government finance in isolation from its functions and structures. I do not believe that the proposed tax will turn out to be any better or any more popular than the poll tax. I do not believe that it will work. We have been round the course many times before and I suspect that it will not be long before we have to go round it yet again.

6.46 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): I welcome the opportunity to talk about the Bill. As the House will be aware, one part of it refers exclusively to Scotland. Unlike many others, I have no complaints. I think that we have been presented with a sensible way in which to legislate. Where there is commonality throughout the United Kingdom, Scottish sections should be included in English Bills where that is possible. That removes much of the girning and grieving that is often the result of the timing of legislation rather than its content.

When examining local government financing we must consider the history of local government if we are to understand why we are where we are now. Earlier in the proceedings I intervened in the speech of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) to remind him of the problems that were caused by the Labour Government. I did not do so accidentally. Anyone who remembers the trust that used to exist between local government and central Government will realise that that trust began to vanish rapidly during the administration of the Labour Government and especially during the winter of discontent.

It is not surprising that that trust disappeared. During the period to which I have referred, local authorities were upset because that Government had, properly, in an attempt to control the economy, decided to reduce local government funding and, therefore, local government expenditure. A new set of problems was created and the trust that had previously existed, which all Governments had enjoyed, began to vanish. Against that background, the incoming Conservative Government of 1979 found that Conservative-controlled authorities had followed substantially the edicts and wishes of central Government and had restrained their expenditure, while many Labour-controlled authorities had become profligate to offset the impact of the reduction in support from central Government. The Labour authorities had decided to enable that to happen by increasing the rating burden.

When examining local government spending in 1979 it is essential to understand that central Government had to control the national economy. That was especially important during 1977 to 1979, when the country was rapidly going bankrupt and it was necessary, at the behest of the International Monetary Fund, to introduce measures that had a substantial impact on local government funding and expenditure. That was certainly so in Scotland, the area about which I shall speak.

When the Conservative Government came into office in 1979, there was a Conservative district council in Perth and Kinross and a Labour district council in Dundee. The Dundee council proceeded to spend in every way that it could and, accordingly, pushed up the rates. As a result, the Government had to introduce measures to control local government expenditure. The blunt instrument of cutting central Government grants meant that the pain had to be shared, but the view was taken that the measure should be implemented. Therefore, Perth and Kinross had to share some of the pain with Dundee. At the time, that appeared to be unjust and unfair and my view has not altered. It is sad that that lack of trust between central and local government has resulted in the councillors no longer running the councils. The truth is that the chief executives and the executives run the councils. In Scotland, the councils are substantially being run by NALGO.

We must find ways and means to achieve a balance between expenditure and accountability. I am not 100 per cent. enthusiastic about every dot and comma in the Bill, but I have been assured that I will have an opportunity in Committee to speak about the matters that concern me.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Walker: I am happy to give way to the hon. Gentleman, with whom I collaborate regularly.

Mr. Ross: The hon. Gentleman said that he disagreed with Dundee council's decision to make up for the spending spree of the former Tory-controlled council, which was an attempt to bribe the electorate by spending all the reserves, with the intention of ensuring that the services provided would be reflected in the rates charged. He lauded the actions of the Angus and Perth district councils which did not follow that line. Would he tell the House who has run Dundee, Angus and Perth district councils since then?

Mr. Walker: During the period to which I referred, Dundee council was controlled by the Labour party. I stuck to specific areas and times. The hon. Gentleman is right that Angus district council is currently controlled by the SNP. He and I agree that it is most unsuitable to run anything, especially as it has no respect for the rule of law. Yet again, the SNP is not represented in the Chamber, which is usual when we are debating important Scottish legislation. Indeed, the SNP is even more part time than the Liberal Democrats, who I accused of being part time only the other day.

Although the hon. Gentleman and I rarely agree on political philosophy and thought, I respect his views. He is one of the few people whose views I do respect, because he holds them honourably and he does not trim them for personal advantage. Dundee is fortunate to have a man of his integrity representing it.

Mr. Maxton: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman referred to people not trimming their views. I hope that he will face the fact that he was one of the most loyal and ardent supporters of the poll tax. We should be grateful to know why he is now supporting at least the principle of a property tax. We should like to know how he intends to vote tonight. Quite clearly, this Bill should be called the "Abolition of the Poll Tax Bill". As he was such an ardent supporter of the poll tax, I wonder whether tonight he will vote "Aye" or "No" for this Bill.

Mr. Walker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to put my views on record. He should have at least done me the credit of reading my paper, in which I made proposals for the structure and financing of local government. That is what fundamentally influences my attitude tonight. The Government took on board substantially what was contained in my paper—*[Interruption.]* I do not claim that that was by design; it could have been by accident—[Hon. Members: "Answer the question."] I am answering the question. My attitude to the Bill is conditioned by the proposals and objectives that I put forward.

I want to retain the community charge, but at much lower levels. I want to resolve the problems that resulted from the rebates. My paper dealt with those issues, but that is one aspect that the Government did not take on

[Mr. Walker]

board. However, because they took on board substantial parts of my paper and because I am an honourable man, I feel that the least that I can say is that, although there are some matters with which I am unhappy, I support what they are attempting to do.

Mr. Harry Ewing: The hon. Gentleman has let the Minister off the hook. It is a mighty relief to the Minister to think that the country believes that the Bill is the brainchild of the hon. Gentleman—if that is a correct description of the hon. Gentleman. The Minister has been getting the blame for it for the last six months.

Mr. Walker: It is easy to see that the hon. Gentleman has the "about to retire" feeling. He has lost his edge and his sharpness. There was a time when the shafts of his interventions would have hurt. His shafts tonight were wide of the mark. I do not lay claim to inventing the Bill. I am explaining why it would be churlish of me not to recognise that the Government have accepted my proposals for resolving the problems of the community charge.

The point that I was making is fundamental. In the absence of trust, and where councillors are not really in control of a local authority, much of what they do is restricted by the wishes of organised labour. If the Government of the day, regardless of political complexion, are to control the national economy, they must have levers to control local government expenditure. That was why I intervened on the hon. Member for Garscadden. It was the blunt instruments used by the previous Labour Government that led to the winter of discontent. Labour employees and Labour councillors lost faith and confidence in their Government and the trust that had previously existed was broken—*[Interruption.]* Labour Members do not like it because it is true. Central and local government used to work in tandem and harmony, but that disappeared.

It is because of that history that the House again faces the problem of what to do about the funding and financing of local government. The fact that the local element of the tax which will be met by the community is 11 per cent. of expenditure means that the tax can be contained at levels that everyone can accept. That is important. The problem with the community charge was substantially the level of that charge on individuals. That is why I and others suggested ideas to deal with the problem.

Some people in Scotland, including myself, feel that any tax related directly to property is not based on a sound principle. However, if we can keep the tax at a low enough percentage of the whole, it will go some way to resolving the problem. That is the message that I want to leave with my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Walker: I shall give way in a minute to my hon. and learned Friend, whose views I hold very dear. *[Interruption.]* The Opposition find it funny, but I would never dream of looking into anything to do with Scottish legal matters without first consulting my hon. and learned Friend. There is no question in my mind but that if one wants the best advice that is the place to go.

The important thing to recognise is that any tax will be acceptable as long as it is kept at acceptable levels.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: I am most obliged to my hon. Friend for his compliment. However, let me advise him that if he ever comes to me for advice he must realise that he is coming to a simple fellow who sees his problem simply.

Mr. Maxton: And charges high fees.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: And never receives them.

Let me ask my hon. Friend a simple question. To steal only 11 per cent. of an old woman's possessions is no justification for stealing. How can my hon. Friend justify us going back to a tax on a capital asset called a home which does not bear an income and which bears no relationship to the services that it receives or does not receive, or to the income of the occupants, however many or however few? How can he justify going back to the wrongness of that simple concept?

Mr. Walker: I thank my hon. and learned Friend for putting his finger on the flaw in any property tax. I do not argue with him on the principle. However, I hope that I have made my position clear. As a member of the Standing Committee I shall have the opportunity—I hope that other hon. Members who will be commenting on the Bill tonight will volunteer to serve on the Committee—to address that aspect of the Bill. I promise my hon. and learned Friend that I shall not be silent and he will know from my track record that I am not likely to be.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): In the spirit of collaboration which is pervading the evening, I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on having disclaimed the authorship of the tax which earlier I thought he was claiming. That could have been the worst mistake of his political career. Let me ask him an equally simple question to the one asked by the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn). The hon. Gentleman has said that a vital feature of the tax is its reasonable level. I should have thought that any tax passed at a reasonable level relative to the ability to pay would have been acceptable. But since the hon. Gentleman has decided to distinguish between the two, can he answer this question? Given the same level of reasonableness of the council tax that he is espousing tonight and the poll tax to which he was previously committed, which would he have preferred? If it is the poll tax, and he assumes that the same amount of money could have brought the poll tax to a reasonable level, why is he not voting against the council tax tonight?

Mr. Walker: Obviously I failed earlier when I explained that, because I am a sensible and reasonable chap and because the Government have substantially taken on board what was contained in my local government paper, which includes the structure of local government and other matters, not just finance, and which I believe was important, although I personally would have preferred to retain the community charge, which was never a poll tax —I made that clear to anyone who wished to discuss the matter with me—it perhaps should have been but it was not, it was a community charge—*[Interruption.]* It is not funny. It had nothing to do with the poll tax.

Local government in Scotland has seen a 9·6 per cent. increase in real terms in grants received from central Government over and above inflation since 1979, so all the nonsense that we hear about cuts must be properly addressed. Local government, at the behest of NALGO, is

saying that it will not be able to cope in the year ahead because central Government are cutting its support too much. The facts do not stand up to that. There has been a 9·6 per cent. increase over and above the rate of inflation. During debates on the Bill the Government must make clear the additional support that has come from central taxation in real terms so that we can destroy the myth that somehow there have been cuts. The only real cuts that ever occurred in Government expenditure occurred under the previous Labour Government.

7.5 pm

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): In the last twelve and a half years the British people have become used to the Government's approach of attempting to govern by image management. They are getting used to the Government introducing instant paper initiatives which, with regard to housing, health and local government, are sometimes not even worthy of the back of the envelope on which they are written. There is an illusion of substance, but often their proposals never address the real issues.

No member of the Government has a greater reputation for that strategy than the Secretary of State for the Environment. In his previous incarnation in that job in the early 1980s, he earned his spurs by throwing acronyms at inner cities, publishing Government press releases on urban programme monitoring initiatives, urban development grant schemes and city action areas, all of which fizzled out once the headlines had faded away. It was all done for local effect to create impressions of competence. Now, after twelve and a half years of that carry-on, the British people see through what is put before them.

We were told earlier this year that the Government had turned round completely and abolished the poll tax. During the local council elections I can even recall Conservative candidates putting out leaflets telling people that they would not be getting another bill at the beginning of this financial year. There was even the view that, because the delay to those bills had been deliberately engineered by the Government by changing the rules so often, people would not get those bills until the election was over and so would believe that the poll tax had gone. Sadly, some did, only to discover a few weeks later another poll tax bill.

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): Before polling day in May this year, the Chelmsford local authority was most anxious that those bills should be on the doorstep and, as a result of the £140 reduction in the community charge, we saw for the first time in eight years the Conservative party taking control of Chelmsford borough council and driving out what is now the opposition party.

Mr. Battle: It is interesting that the hon. Gentleman refers to the £140 reduction being received by the people of Chelmsford. Elsewhere in the country people did not receive that rebate. It was a case of buying votes in some areas to protect Conservative seats but making sure that other areas went down. On television and in the media the Government created the pretence that they had abolished the poll tax there and then. But the people were not conned by that argument because the British people are not stupid. They were not prepared to forget who introduced the poll tax in the first place. The chaos caused by administrative changes that were imposed on local authorities only weeks before the end of the financial year meant that only a few could send out their bills on time.

The Government promised that everyone would receive a £140 reduction in their poll tax bills. The problem is that the Government often do not associate local government with social security provision. Because of the reduction in transitional payments, those receiving social security benefit—particularly pensioners—did not receive the full £140 refund. That is the reality; but the Conservatives were prepared to propagate the myth.

Mr. John Marshall: The hon. Gentleman has given the impression that some councils were not able to reduce the charge by £140. Does he acknowledge that all headline community charges were reduced by that amount?

Mr. Battle: It is all headlines for the present Government. There is headline inflation, and now there is a headline community charge. What the £140 headline meant in practice was that many people in receipt of benefit would not actually receive the money. That was an election con. It was a hollow promise, especially for those who bore the harshest consequences of the poll tax burden.

The Government have also blindly refused to tackle the basic injustice that has been inflicted on those who cannot pay. They still insist that everyone contribute a minimum of 20 per cent.; they do not relate the charge to people's ability to pay. The 20 per cent. must be paid regardless of income—or, more precisely, regardless of the lack of income.

I remember the political abuse that accompanied the introduction of the poll tax. Conservative Members tried to create the impression that some people were simply refusing to pay, describing those who receive 100 per cent. rebates as scroungers. The Prime Minister said at the Dispatch Box that the purpose of the tax was to ensure that everyone paid something, regardless of whether they had any money with which to pay. I am glad to see that, in this Bill, the Government have finally conceded the fundamental injustice of the 20 per cent. rule in principle, and have accepted the idea of 100 per cent. rebates.

If the 20 per cent. rule is indeed unjust, however, why can it not be dispensed with now? That would take the pressure from the housing benefit crisis that most authorities are experiencing because of the link between housing benefit assessments and the 20 per cent. minimum. Such a provision should surely be contained in clause 1 of the Bill. It would lift repression and injustice from some of the poorest members of the community, who are currently paying the price of the poll tax experiment.

A *Sunday Times* article, headed

"How we've been landed with a new gentry",

analysed the new squirearchy, and featured a picture of the Secretary of State for the Environment at home wearing plus-fours. The article told us:

"So much does Heseltine play the patrician that he is paying this year's poll tax for his 20 staff."

Why does the Secretary of State feel that it is his duty to relieve his staff of that burden, when it was he who imposed it on them in the first place? The Government are prepared to give—inch by inch—only when put under pressure by Labour and the country.

Not only are the poor paying the price of the poll tax; it is an inefficient policy to maintain the 20 per cent. rule. It costs local authorities more to collect the minimum charge than they receive by collecting it. According to the

[Mr. Battle]

Audit Commission, for every £15 that authorities spend in collecting the 20 per cent., they receive only £6 in return. The waste and inefficiency that the Government ascribe to local authorities is occurring at the centre, and is quite deliberate.

The Audit Commission predicts that, by the end of 1992, the introduction of the poll tax will have cost the country £19 billion. This afternoon, the Secretary of State for Scotland spoke of local authorities' "insatiable extravagance"; but, with the £19 billion that has been spent on a wasteful experiment, we could have tackled all the public and private housing problems in my city of Leeds. We could have dealt with all the derelict land in the inner city, regenerated the local economy, rebuilt and replaced all the older schools in the city, provided an adequate number of home helps for the elderly and ill, introduced measures to make sense of community care, built sheltered housing and day-care facilities, set up an integrated transport policy and provided nursery education for every child under five—and we could still have had money left over. That £19 billion could have been devoted to the real, practical, down-to-earth problems that face local authorities. But, instead of financing much-needed action, the money was spent on the introduction of an instrument to repress local government and reduce its ability to meet local needs.

Clause 54 of the Bill retains the draconian capping powers that were applied to the poll tax. Despite what was said by the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker), who is no longer in the Chamber, the Government are continuing to reduce the amount available to local authorities. They have reversed the previous arrangement under which 60 per cent. of local government resources were contributed centrally. Now, central Government give local authorities only 40 per cent. of what they need, and 60 per cent. must be raised locally. Authorities must squeeze another 20 per cent. out of the poll tax system without capping, simply to stand still. Local budget settlements have yet to be set against the council tax measure; the evidence demonstrates that, so far, standard spending assessments do not measure up to the real needs of the community.

Will the council tax be any fairer than the poll tax? The top band covers property worth £240,000 or more—my constituency does not contain many of those, of course. Although such properties must be worth at least eight times as much as those in the lowest band, their occupants will pay only three times as much as the occupants of properties in the lowest band. I see no redistributed justice there. This is just another hotch-potch provision—another pretence that the Government are introducing a measure of equality.

What will be the local impact of the council tax? Leeds city council cannot forecast that, nor can the Government, because there is so little detail in the Bill. The Department of the Environment knows the number and valuation of the properties in Leeds, but the figures are bound to be affected by the number of single people in the area, the number of people who will receive the 25 per cent. discount and the categories—students, for instance—who will be disregarded. If the local authority cannot anticipate the position, it will be unable to work out its income under the new tax, or the natural impact on local people. How can the Department of the Environment know who lives alone in Leeds, or who is eligible for a discount, unless the local authority can give it the information? Yet the local authority does not have that information.

When the poll tax was introduced, we discovered that registers were costly and difficult to maintain. Between April 1990—when the tax was introduced in Leeds—and September this year, 534,000 amendments have been made to the register. We do not want to go through that nonsense again, but the Bill does not make clear what the position will be.

According to the crude figures that the Government have announced, a single person living in a property in Leeds that costs more than £68,000—band C—will have to pay more than he or she pays now in poll tax. So much for helping single elderly persons living on their own. Many of my constituents will end up subsidising and helping the rich elsewhere.

The Government claim that they are consulting people all the time. When the Secretary of State visited Leeds in February, the local authority advised him not to mix a property tax and a head tax; it would be a nightmare scenario that would cause administrative chaos. If the Bill goes through in its present form, it will be impossible to implement that proposal. That is why we should not allow the Bill to proceed. However, it seems that, sadly, the Secretary of State overrules any consultations that there may have been, in just the same way as he is prepared to overrule genuine consultation here.

Water metering is being introduced compulsorily by water authorities, such as Yorkshire Water. They now insist that all properties built after April 1990 should be metered. The argument is that they cannot refer to rateable values, which were abolished when the poll tax was introduced. The Government propose to return to rateable values, so that argument no longer holds good. Can the Minister assure me that residents in new houses will have a choice and will be able to say to the water authority that they do not want their water supply to be metered? The newly-privatised water authorities forced them to have meters, regardless of their circumstances.

It is still unclear how students in private accommodation—few students in Leeds are in halls of residence—will be treated, or how student nurses—there are many in Leeds, which has a large teaching hospital—will be treated. Schedule 1 defines the word "student." When it comes to nurses, it all depends on whether they are on Project 2000 courses and receive a bursary or whether they are on conventional nursing courses and receive a training allowance. The incomes of the two groups of student nurses may be similar, but the Project 2000 students will have to pay 20 per cent. of the tax while the other student nurses pay the full 100 per cent. Although those nurses may be working together making the same beds and caring for the same patients, when they come off duty one nurse will pay the full council tax while the other will pay only 20 per cent.

As for joint and several liability, will that not live on after the death of the poll tax? Women had to pay their husbands' bills, and vice versa. Under the new council tax and what is quaintly called in clause 6 the "hierarchy of liability", the hierarchy will consist of two tenants who, if they are at the same level in that hierarchy, could become responsible for each other's council tax jointly and severally. A tenant could be held responsible for an absentee landlord, in exactly the same way as couples

living together are held to be responsible for each other's liabilities. That is unfair and unjust. It will also require checks to be made, leading to the return of the iniquitous snooping system in order to decide who is liable to pay.

On close examination, it is evident that the Bill is a hotch-potch. It is a shoddy Bill. It was interesting to hear Conservative Members claim that they are against the poll tax now and that the best thing to have happened since the invention of sliced bread is the council tax. If the Bill is so good, why do the Government have no confidence in it? Why are they not confident enough to discuss it? Why do they have to bludgeon it through Committee? Why are they going to guillotine it in Committee without allowing proper time for discussion?

When the Prime Minister became the newly elected leader of the Conservative party, he said in the *Daily Mail* that the party had been bounced without thinking into the poll tax. In this debate, we are in danger of repeating the poll tax tragedy, this time as a farce. The Bill is not worth discussing further and should be rejected by the House. In the meantime, the reality of the dreadful poll tax will, sadly, have to drag on for the people of this country until there is a change of Government.

7.24 pm

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): I knew the new hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) as a Member of the European Parliament, where he was hard-working, conscientious and a man of principle. I welcome his election to the House. He provides one of the vagaries of political life, in that in 1984 he was deselected as a European candidate because he believed in the European Community, whereas he was imposed as the Labour party's candidate a few weeks ago——

Mr. Harry Ewing: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order that a new Member of Parliament who has not yet made his maiden speech should be attacked in this way by the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall)? A Member who has not yet made his maiden speech should not even be mentioned, far less attacked in the way that the hon. Gentleman is cynically going about it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is not unusual for a new Member to be welcomed, despite the fact that he may not yet have contributed to our proceedings.

Mr. Marshall: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for those words of wisdom. If to tax and to please, no more than to love and be wise, is not given to man, may I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment on seeking to do the impossible. When I tell people that I spent 10 years in the European Parliament, they tell me that I was a hedonist. When I tell them that I spent 17 years in local government, they tell me that I was a masochist. I suspect that I was a masochist twice over.

There is no doubt that the old rating system was based on the nebulous concept of a fair market rent. There has been no free market in residential property since the early years of this century. It was decreed that the old rating system should seek to produce a value based on a free market in property, but the House destroyed that free market in property during the first world war. That is why valuation, under the old rating system, was a most inexact science. That is why it had to be abolished.

Capital values at least have the benefit of being related to a market, although I am sure that many owners will seek to convince their bank managers that their property should be in band H while they seek to convince the rating authorities that their property should really be in band F.

During my 17 years in local government I served as the chairman of the finance committee in Ealing. We were able to boast of having set the lowest rates in west London and of providing sufficiently good services to attract the Leader of the Opposition to Conservative-controlled Ealing from Liberal-controlled Richmond. As a man who spent 17 years in local government I have a sense of shame that yet again there has to be another attempt to reform local government finance, due to the incompetence, extravagance and doctrinaire opposition to competitive tendering of Labour councils.

If Labour councils had listened to the advice of the Audit Commission, if historically they had collected rents, rates and the community charge, we should not be faced with our present difficulties over local government finance. Labour councils, throughout the length and breadth of the country, have delighted in presenting high bills to ratepayers and charge payers and in providing poor services. They are renowned for planning delays, empty council homes and poor education results. All too often Labour councillors dream of monuments to municipal munificence—which, incidentally, bear the name of the councillor who had that dream.

I congratulate the Government on accepting the case for regional banding as between Scotland, Wales and England. My hon. Friend the Minister of State represents an outer London borough and he would be surprised if I did not at least briefly mention the position in the London borough of Barnet. Under the Government's proposals, taxpayers in Barnet will pay a lower tax than they paid under the discredited rating system which the Government abolished and they will pay less than they would under the Labour party's proposals.

I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench to study closely the problems that affect house owners in the south-east and in London. There are great regional variations in house prices, illustrated by the fact that in the London borough of Barnet 1 per cent. of properties will be in bands A and B, 6 per cent. in the three lowest bands and 46 per cent. in the top two bands.

Some people in the Labour party believe that high house prices mean high living standards and affluence. However, the net monthly mortgage repayment in London is £539; it is £478 in the south-east, £263 in Yorkshire and Humberside and £255 in the Northern region. Monthly mortgage payments in London and the south are twice those in Yorkshire, Humberside and the north.

I hope that if my right hon. and hon. Friends cannot accept the case for regional banding for London and the south, they will reconsider the problems that the revenue support grant can produce for London. I am one of those who believe that the revenue support grant makes the Schleswig-Holstein question a model of clarity. There is an undoubted risk that the high bandings that apply in London and the south-east could lead to an outflow of grant. That is terribly important because under the council tax 85 per cent. of local expenditure will be met centrally. As my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) pointed out yesterday, it is important that we get the grant for London and the south-east correct. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to give some

[Mr. Marshall]

commitment to that this evening. We look forward to a generous settlement in a few weeks' time when he might deal with the London Regional Transport anomaly which is afflicting us as Members representing outer London.

It is important to remember that there is a tight timetable for the introduction of the new tax. The difficulties associated with the introduction of the community charge were not caused by the time taken for the Bill to pass through the House, but by the fact that a large number of regulations relating to the charge were passed close to its introduction.

Will my hon. Friend the Minister give us some assurance that regulations relating to the council tax will be in place by the end of this year? Local authorities will need a substantial amount of time to ensure that their information technology is correct and is in place to deal with the council tax. It was not in place to deal with the community charge.

Mr. Battle: If that is to be the case, both systems will have to run parallel, which will be an extra burden on local authorities. So far the Government have not even given a commitment to reimburse the full cost of that.

Mr. Marshall: Of course, there will be the process of introducing the council tax as there would be if we listened to the Labour party and introduced its tax. The trouble with the Labour system is that it would spend many more years trying to introduce it before it could get rid of the poll tax.

I welcome the fact that the Government are committed to capping a large number of local authorities as part of the introduction of the council tax. Every change in local government finance, whether by revaluation or the introduction of the community charge, has been accompanied by a large element of extravagance by many local authorities.

Mr. Allen McKay: There are about 400 local authorities. How many is the hon. Gentleman talking about?

Mr. Marshall: It would be fair to say that a substantial number would be included. In my estimation, the number of extravagant local authorities——

Mr. McKay: How many?

Mr. Marshall: I am answering the question.

Mr. McKay: The hon. Gentleman does not know the answer.

Mr. Marshall: The number of extravagant local authorities would be more than 100.

There are many benefits of compulsory competitive tendering in London, but many local authorities resisted it. The Minister told me the other week that compulsory competitive tendering can produce savings of 8 per cent. in street cleaning in London. Why did not local authorities do that a long time ago? All the authorities that refused to indulge were extravagant. They were putting the jobs of members of the National Union of Public Employees before the good of charge payers and of the local authority. Those authorities that indulged in competitive tendering and got the jobs done more quickly were able to expand the level of services and reduce the cost to the charge payer.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): What about the quality of service?

Mr. Marshall: One need not assume that the quality of service is lower——

Mr. O'Brien: What happened?

Mr. Marshall: I am telling the hon. Gentleman what happened. Yesterday my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment presented an award to the best street cleaner in London. He came from an authority which put the service out to compulsory competitive tender some time ago. The best street cleaner in London does not work in a direct labour department in Hackney, Lambeth or Lewisham. He was working for Westminster council, an authority which went out to tender some time ago. Whose streets are cleaner—Westminster's or Camden's? The answer is Westminster's.

Compulsory competitive tendering provides better services at lower cost to the charge payer in London. Therefore, many local authorities which, as a matter of principle, refused to go out to competitive tender were extravagant high-cost local authorities, unconcerned about the good of their citizens and of the charge payer.

Mr. McKay: My authority went out to tender to test prices long before the House thought about it.

Mr. Marshall: I must congratulate that authority on doing what so many other Labour authorities refused to do. All too often Labour councils were reluctant to go out to competitive tender.

I once sat on a Labour-controlled council which went out to tender and would not accept the lowest tender because it did not come from a direct labour department.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): What does my hon. Friend think of the actions of Derbyshire county council, which refused one low-cost tender because it came in the wrong coloured envelope and ended up accepting a higher tender from its own work force at an enormous extra cost to charge payers?

Mr. Marshall: Am I allowed to use swear words in the House? I suspect not. All that I can say is that the actions of Councillor Bookbinder are so incredible as to defy belief. My hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) is a lucky man. Councillor Bookbinder was his opponent at the last election, if I am not mistaken, and I am sure that he at least doubled my hon. Friend's majority.

Mr. Oppenheim: He trebled it.

Mr. Marshall: The level of arrears of community charge is a side issue connected to the introduction of the new tax. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to tell the House that there will be no amnesty for poll tax dodgers and that however high and mighty—be they Members of the House, Labour councillors or whoever—no one will receive an amnesty for refusing to pay the community charge. As for old-age pensioners, one such Member of the House was slow to pay her community charge bill to the London borough of Barnet, but then a friend paid it for her.

Some of my hon. Friends and the hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray) have suggested that central Government should pay more of the cost of local authority expenditure than the Bill provides for. Although superficially attractive, that would present a huge constitutional problem. If central Government are to pay even more of the cost, there must be greater control over the activities of every local authority. It would be a question, not of capping a minority, but of central Government determining how much should be spent by each local authority and how it should be spent. I do not want central Government to say how many teachers should be at a school in Barnet or how much should be spent on books in Barnet. I much prefer the system of devolved power to individual schools either by their becoming grant-maintained schools or through the local management of schools. If 100 per cent. of local authority expenditure were financed centrally, it would be disastrous for the future of local government and for the linkage of powers between central Government and local authorities.

Later this evening we shall debate a guillotine motion on the Bill, which will provide a chance for a constructive, positive Committee stage. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has always shown himself to be a listening Minister. Earlier in the debate we were told how he listened to my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker), who is no longer here. I hope that in Committee he will listen to the pleas of Members representing Greater London and the south of England because they are dear to my heart and may to some extent be dear to his.

7.41 pm

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): I have listened with great interest, if some difficulty, to the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall). First he supported the legislation and then we heard his special pleading for his constituency. That is precisely what is wrong with the legislation. There are so many anomalies that of the 650 Members who make up this House of Commons, including Mr. Speaker himself, each one of us could present the Government with a list of the anomalies in the Bill the length of our arm.

We are discussing a Bill that will never be implemented. There are two reasons for that. The principal reason is that the Government will be defeated in four or five months' time and be replaced by a Labour Government who will take the Bill off the statute book as soon as they come to power. Even if that does not happen—I am realistic enough to know the vagaries of elections—the legislation will not be implemented in the form in which the House is discussing it tonight. That is my forecast, although I will not be here to see it unfold. The evidence on which I base it is that, within three weeks of the White Paper being introduced in the middle of this year, there were 15 announcements of changes to the proposals now in the legislation. Even since the legislation has been published, it has been made clear that the Government will introduce amendments in Committee—that against the background of the guillotine timetable under which the Committee will operate.

To my colleagues on this side of the House I say that I shall not object too much to the guillotine for one simple reason: I hope that they will take it as a model for the in-coming Labour Government. I hope that they will use the guillotine procedure when they deal with the damaging legislation on the health service, the poll tax and many other matters that Conservative Governments have passed through this House during the past 13 years.

As I shall leave the House at the general election, one of the saddest features of this debate is that the Bill is one more attack on local councillors. In more than 20 years here I have seen many pieces of major legislation which were designed to attack the standing of local councillors. I do not care whether they are Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democratic, independent or, in Scotland, Scottish National councillors. All those who stand for election submit themselves on a sincere platform and with a will to serve the electors from whom they ask for support.

When the hon. Member for Hendon, South attacks Labour councils as he did so vehemently, it is almost as if they were not elected. People voted for them. He must have fresh in his memory the fact that in May this year, not many months ago, the Conservative party lost 500 seats in England and Wales in the local government elections. Despite all the criticisms that he has levelled at Labour-controlled local authorities, it is an inescapable fact that in England, Wales and Scotland Labour-controlled authorities are there by virtue of the democratic decision of the people. That is how it should be but, of course, that is not what the Government want.

If I may, I shall for a minute trace the history of attacks on local government, the constant reorganisation of local government and the uncertainties created for councillors in my time here. In 1972 local government reorganisation in England and Wales set up the Greater London council and the metropolitan borough councils, and brought changes to all local government. It was quickly followed in 1973 by the reorganisation of local government in Scotland. At that time there were also two major housing acts: the Housing Finance Act 1972 for England and Wales and the Housing (Financial Provisions) (Scotland) Act 1972—the Rent Acts as they were referred to. Later legislation abolished major elements of the local government structure that had been set up under the 1972 Act. The metropolitan borough councils were abolished, not because they were not doing a job but because they were Labour. The authorities were abolished to silence them.

I think that it was the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker)—I apologise if I am misrepresenting him—who said that councillors no longer run councils and that councils are run by officials. The simple explanation for that is that when local government was reorganised we reduced by 50 per cent. the number of elected members. In other words, we reduced the democratic element by 50 per cent. It was as plain as a pikestaff, as sure as night follows day, that the bureaucratic element would double. When people complain that local government is being run by bureaucrats, it is simply because there is not enough democratic input.

I do not know what form the reorganisation of local government or local government finance will take in the years to come. However, I do not waver from my belief that the democratic input in local government must increase not only in Scotland—I say that in the presence of the Secretary of State and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton)—but throughout England and Wales. If the House moves further down the road of bureaucracy, all it will do is store up trouble for itself.

[Mr. Harry Ewing]

We are now faced with another piece of major legislation that represents another attack on local government and yet another major reorganisation of its structure—the seventh we have had in the past 20 years. How on earth can any organisation be efficient when it is continually subjected to the type of reorganisation that the House has inflicted upon local government in the past 20 years? There has been no cohesion or consistency of approach.

By and large, councillors do everyday jobs and devote some of their leisure time to try to make conditions better for the people in their locality. It is unacceptable to expect such councillors to adjust to the changes that are imposed upon them by the House in such a draconian way and with such monotonous consistency.

The council tax Bill has its origins in the demise of the former Prime Minister and the loss of 500 seats in the local government elections. It was cobbled together in a hurry, as is obvious from reading it. The hon. Member for Hendon, South has already demonstrated, and far more ably than I could, the deficiencies and anomalies in the Bill.

If any local authority had squandered the amount of money that Ministers are guilty of squandering on the poll tax in the past four years there can be absolutely no doubt that councillors would have been surcharged under local government legislation. How can one try to explain to a councillor how on earth inefficient Ministers can get away with squandering millions of pounds of taxpayers' money? However, if that same councillor is "seen" to squander between £40,000 and £50,000, the Secretary of State for Scotland or the Secretary of State for the Environment would be on his neck like a ton of bricks. The councillor would be surcharged for seemingly squandering that money. However, the real guilty people are Ministers who have squandered billions of pounds of taxpayers' money, but they have got off scot-free.

Those same Ministers then come to the House and with brass neck defend the introduction of a council tax with the same conviction with which they condemned the principle of a property tax when the poll tax was introduced. Recently the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Minister of State went around Scotland attacking the concept of a property-based tax. The Minister said that we would never return to a property-based tax. In fact, the Minister is on record as saying that just three years ago, but the backbone of the Bill is a return to a property-based tax.

I believe that the rating system of England and the revaluations that should have taken place, but never did, were the basis of the problems in England. However, I bow to the superior knowledge of English colleagues in all parts of the House when it comes to the English system.

In Scotland, however, at the time of the 1983 revaluation three factors combined, the effects of which no local taxation system could have withstood—not even the Liberals' proposal for a local income tax. The first factor was the reduction of 12 per cent. in the rate support grant from the Government to Scottish local authorities. The then Secretary of State for Scotland, the right hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger), directed the assessors to switch the burden from industry to the commercial and domestic ratepayers. That was followed by a dramatic increase in the property values valued by the assessors. No system of local government taxation could have withstood those three factors and their combined effect.

What did the Government do? To try to repair the damage that they had done they switched the burden to the commercial and domestic ratepayer. The Government told the assessors to make that switch and they then introduced a system whereby any ratepayer, commercial or domestic, whose rates had increased by a factor of three could get rating relief. A small number of people qualified for such relief, but the Government wondered at the outburst that followed. As a result of that we got the ill-thought-out and ill-fated poll tax.

I am a devotee of the rating system—I speak for myself when I say that—and at the time of the introduction of the poll tax I do not believe that a sufficiently vigorous defence of the rating system was made. Those of us who supported the rating system failed miserably to argue for its retention and development.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert Key): I am listening with great interest to the hon. Gentleman as I respect the fact that he has been a Member of the House for 20 years and a member of a Government for five years with special responsibility for devolution. The hon. Gentleman understands the working of Government and the inter-relationship with local government.

What is the hon. Gentleman's opinion of the current attempts to reorganise local government? I share his frustration at the fact that for many years local government has been considered from a financial point of view only. Local government finance has been reorganised many times, but now the Government are considering that together with local government structure and its functions. The Government are also considering the internal management of local government—how and who makes the decisions. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that such an approach is likely to be more constructive?

Mr. Ewing: To be honest, I would have to study the hon. Gentleman's question before I answered. To study local government finance and local government structure at the same time is not a new concept. The Layfield commission sat at the same time as the Wheatley commission in Scotland—one studied local government finance, the other studied local government structure. Whichever Government are in power—I hope and pray that it will be a Labour Government next time—they must tread carefully when it comes to the reorganisation of local government to ensure that we do not throw the baby out with the bathwater. There is a lot to be said in favour of local government, but because other hon. Members wish to take part in the debate, I will not be led down that path.

I have made it clear that I am a supporter, indeed a devotee, of the rating system. I would be willing to debate that issue in public with any hon. Member and to explain the advantages of the rating system. It had the one major advantage of being collectable; 90 per cent of people paid their rates bills. Nobody could claim that for the poll tax, and the council tax will, I fear, have the same fate. To keep the value of properties up to date, it would have been simple to update valuations each year in line with inflation.

Do the Government wish to be responsible for central economic management, including managing the finances of local authorities? If so, that is bound to lead them to the

100 per cent. financing of local government services. The Government must make up their mind on this issue. Do they wish to decide the level of services that local communities should have? If so, will they use their capping powers to achieve that end?

The Labour Government of which I was a member never used capping powers. We had a system of indicative costs in Scotland. If the Government intend to be responsible for the level of services of local government, they must be prepared to take the responsibility for funding those services. Or perhaps they will do what I would prefer, and that is to allow councils to decide the level of services that their communities should have. If low rating levels are satisfactory to an electorate, that will be expressed through the ballot box. If higher rating levels resulting from the provision of better services are acceptable to the electors, that too will be expressed through the ballot box.

I cannot understand why the Government want to become so involved in the management of the affairs of local authorities. In the last 13 years they have made a big enough mess of the nation's economy. Why do they now wish to get so involved in local authority expenditure? The Bill should go no further and I advise the House to reject it absolutely.

8.2 pm

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): I welcome the Bill. In effect, the council tax will be a modernised and updated version of the rates. One of the biggest problems with the rates was that the system of assessing rates on the basis of notional rentable values created enormous difficulties. Not only was virtually every house rated differently, but problems were caused when people went in for relatively minor improvements to their properties and suffered disproportionate rates increases as a result. Capital value bands will not solve the problem entirely, but the system will address the issue to a significant degree.

All hon. Members must have received complaints, and been told on the doorstep, about the way in which the single person living alone in exactly the same house as that of his or her neighbour paid about the same rates, even though the neighbour may have had a large family with a number of people living in the house. The council tax will, to a significant degree, deal with that injustice which was inherent in the old rating system. I also welcome the protection enshrined in the Bill for students and student nurses, with rebates for those on low incomes, rebates for people in training and a rebate of 25 per cent. for single person households.

Most Opposition Members believe that the rebate for single person households is unfair. I appreciate that the basis of their argument is that the council tax is son of poll tax and that some account is taken of the number of people in households. If they believe it unfair to give a discount, even a small one of 25 per cent., to people living alone, I hope that when he winds up the debate for the Opposition the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) will make it clear that the Labour party is committed to abolishing the single person household discount. I will gladly give way to the hon. Gentleman if he will give a clear commitment to that effect. Does he intend to intervene now?

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): I will make my own speech in my own time.

Mr. Oppenheim: Characteristically, the hon. Gentleman backs off from giving a firm commitment. I do not blame him. After all, a commitment to abolish that discount would be fiercely unpopular in the country, not simply among those who live alone but among those who live in homes containing several people and who recognise the fundamental injustice of people living alone having to pay exactly the same rate as themselves. The country will have noted the failure of the hon. Gentleman to answer my question.

It was commonly said of the community charge that it would have worked if only the bills had been lower. I accept that had the Government limited increases in local authority spending in year one of the community charge, the bills would have been significantly lower, not least due to the gearing of the system, and that may have made the charge more acceptable.

Hon. Members in all parts of the House must face the fact that, whatever system is introduced, if councils, whatever their complexion, spend unwisely—I accept that some Conservative-controlled councils are equally guilty—bills will become high and possibly unacceptably high. In my area, the rates for many years, including the poll tax, ended up being far too high because of the profligate spending of the county council. I shall not dwell on that subject. We accept that priorities in public spending at national and local level are difficult issues because choices must be made and it is difficult to make them. Even so, some priorities appear strange. When a county council has, since 1981, increased its overall staff by 8,000, the largest increase in England and Wales, yet is the only county with fewer policemen in the Derbyshire police force, that is strange.

It is a strange set of priorities for a council to spend millions of pounds pegging school meals to 1981 prices in a way that does not benefit even the children of the least-well-off—because they get free school meals anyway—yet is in the process of sacking hundreds of teachers. It is strange for a council which pleads for more capital for school buildings and repairs to spend £5 million of its capital allocation on the redundancy costs of sacking teachers.

A council has a strange set of priorities when it says that it cannot afford Home Office offers of more policemen, yet can find plenty of jobs for the cronies and friends of the leader of the council, such as the former Labour councillor who got the plush job, at £40,000 a year, of being in charge of the so-called Derbyshire enterprise board, or such as the chairman of Derbyshire Labour party, one David Skinner, who got a well-paid job supposedly escorting Japanese business men around Derbyshire, despite the fact that he had been sacked for corruption by the council in the 1970s from his job as a road ganger. The former Labour Member, Reg Race, was given a highly paid job as a chief executive of Derbyshire county council, despite the fact that most people believed that he was unsuitable for that task. In defence of Mr. Race, I should say that, when he realised the policies that the council was following, he had the honour to resign his post. Unfortunately, he did not have enough honour to refuse the golden handshake which the council offered him to buy his silence about what he had learnt during his brief tenure as chief executive.

Should a Labour Government come to power, would they cap such excesses? The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) has criticised the Government for capping local authorities, yet he said on the "Today" programme

[Mr. Oppenheim]

that a future Labour Government would cap local authorities "in extremis". What did "in extremis" mean? Would they cap Lambeth, Derbyshire or Haringey, or are they not in extremis enough? It should not be forgotten that the Labour party supported Liverpool council against the Government in the mid-1980s. Yet history has shown what a discredited bunch those Liverpool councillors were. Would they have been in extremis enough to be capped by a Labour Government?

I condemn the Opposition's attempts to slay the Bill. Indeed, I do not know how they have the face to do so when, after 12 years in opposition and almost as many changes to their policies on local government finance, they have simply come up with a system that deals with none of the fundamental problems inherent in the old rating system. The individual household valuations which they propose would be extremely complex, and they have already said that they would take no account of single person households. Those are two of the most basic problems of the old rating system which they want enshrined in their so-called fair rates. Above all, they have not said how their valuations would be carried out under their so-called fair rates scheme. How do they have the cheek to oppose the Government's proposals when they have no real alternative? They should be ashamed of themselves.

The confusion goes further, because the Opposition do not even know what they would do if they came to power. On 5 October, the shadow Chief Secretary, the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), said that Labour, should it come to power, would replace the council tax with fair rates. However, 12 days later, the hon. Member for Brightside said that it would not abolish the council tax but would simply amend it. On 27 October, the hon. Member for Dagenham said that the Labour party would repeal the council tax. Clearly the Opposition Front Bench do not even know what the Labour party would do if it came to power. It is confused, is talking at cross purposes and has no real proposals to put before the House.

I welcome the Bill. It offers a relatively simple system that ensures that a high proportion of people will pay but, at the same time, takes account of people's ability to pay. I recognise that no tax will ever be popular. But I do not see how the Opposition can, in all honesty, oppose the Bill when they have called for the abolition of the poll tax and cannot even say what the basis of the valuations that they propose would be. For a party that has been in opposition for 12 years, that is a disgrace. Above all, it shows that it deserves to remain in opposition.

8.15 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): There is something odd about this debate. Those hon. Members who served on the poll tax Committee and were therefore involved in the last great discussions on local government finance, have been represented among Opposition Members but not by Conservatives. Conservative Members who were on the Standing Committee that dealt with the poll tax have deserted the Floor of the House rather than bring their expertise to bear. We had a third day's discussion of this subject during the debate on the Queen's Speech. The hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire), who was on that Committee, turned up on that occasion but he talked about the reorganisation of local government rather than local government finance. So why is there this great peculiarity? Why are the Conservative Members who have tussled with the arguments and listened to the alternatives not around?

When a Bill of the magnitude of the Local Government Finance Bill is presented to us, those who speak in its favour should say how it overcomes some of the manifest defects that need to be altered. In that general context, we need to understand what they are saying about this Bill. That is never done by Conservative Members, with the exception of the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd), who talked yesterday about some of the things that were wrong with the poll tax. People outside will be very cynical about the Government's position if Conservative Back-Benchers refuse to say what they think is wrong with the current situation and why fresh legislation needs to be introduced.

The Opposition know why fresh legislation needs to be introduced. We have constantly said what is wrong with the poll tax. We have expressed our opposition in the House, in debates on the subject, on the guillotine motion that was debated on that measure, in Committee, in Committee debates on statutory instruments, some of which emerged only recently, and in meetings and campaigns. We have strutted the country and argued about what is wrong with the poll tax. I have been to the constituencies of two of the Conservative Members present—the hon. Members for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) and for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin)—to tell people what is wrong with the poll tax. The hon. Member for Amber Valley has already spoken, but it would be nice if the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South would say what he believes is wrong with the measure and needs to be overcome.

Plenty was wrong with the poll tax. It was the worst taxation system that was ever introduced into a democratic society at any time. It was quite unbelievable. Its unfairness was astonishing and led to all sorts of interferences with civil liberties and rights, with knock-on consequences. The Government had engaged in a vast centralising activity, so that the Department of the Environment took over masses of power and local government was run even more centrally than through other measures which the Government had introduced. Conservative Members, who are supposed to believe in great freedoms—freedoms of the market place and decentralisation—could not see that point. If they saw it, they chose to ignore it in their contributions.

Compared with the poll tax legislation, the Bill makes significant changes, which the Government should tell us about. For instance, although there is a minor distinction between the bottom and the top bands—those on the top pay only three times as much as those on the bottom—it is an important principle. The House debated that principle in the so-called Mates amendment. Under the provision suggested by the hon. Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates), people on salaries below taxation levels were to pay half the poll tax and some were to pay the full poll tax, while those on a surtax level were to pay one and a half times the normal poll tax. The difference between the highest and lowest amounts to be paid was a multiple of three. For many Opposition Members that provision did not seem to make a great difference, but it was important to Conservative Members because it

involved a change of principle that could later be extended. If some people were to pay three times the amount paid by others, that principle should have been discussed. In the same way, the property-based aspect of the legislation is significant and should be debated, but we have not heard much about that.

The present Bill also differs from the poll tax legislation in that the exemption list has been improved. Under the poll tax provision, those serving in overseas forces and residing in this country and foreign diplomats are excluded from paying the tax. As far as I understand it, under the new Bill they are not excluded from paying the tax. If I am right, why do we not hear Conservative Members arguing in favour of that change?

The case is being argued in a most cynical fashion. The argument has not been in terms of the principle of local government finance, but merely on the grounds that political difficulties arose in relation to implementing the poll tax and urgent action had to be taken, especially in the light of the election of the new leader of the Conservative party, the promises being made and the general position of the party at the time. Therefore, this measure was introduced and attempts are being made to push it forward as quickly as possible.

We should keep producing within their constituencies the voting records of Conservative Members to show where they stood on the poll tax. Conservative Members who have spoken in the debate have tried to show that they were minor rebels and to imply that some sort of mass rebellion took place. When was that rebellion and when did we eagerly await votes in the House to see which side had won? The voting results were not close, but showed solid majorities.

The Committee that debated the poll tax legislation included three Conservative Members who were liable to rebel at any time, but never rebelled in unison because that might have caused a drawn vote and could have resulted in the legislation being returned to the Floor of the House. The hon. Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) has since repaired his breach with the Conservative party. The mildest of the rebels was the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) and the late Sir Brandon Rhys Williams was probably one of the major rebels. He wanted to have a low poll tax instead of a high one, but was not particularly arguing against the principle.

Where did the Secretary of State for the Environment stand on all those issues? What of his famous rebellion that was supposed to take place in the House? He made three speeches and two interventions on the subject during the 1987-88 Session proposing differing views. When we debated subsequent measures such as statutory instruments he was not present. During the 1988-89 Session and the 1989-90 Session he made no contributions when we discussed measures associated with the poll tax. Where was the rebellion? As the parliamentary record shows, the Secretary of State was not present very often. He was out canvassing for the leadership of the Conservative party and did not take part in many of the votes.

The measure includes some other oddities. Why does clause 117 (5) state that the legislation does not extend to Northern Ireland? The poll tax was never introduced in Northern Ireland, but the argument being used in favour of the new tax is that it is superior and will be the answer to all sorts of problems relating to local government finance. If so, is it the intention to introduce legislation relating to Northern Ireland? We are normally given some sign that that is to happen. It is possible to introduce wide measures via Orders in Council whether by negative or positive procedure. It seems that Northern Ireland will not be touched by the legislation because it still has a reasonable and viable system of raising local government finance which the mass of the people pay. The rating system still applies in Northern Ireland, where they have never suffered the nonsense of the poll tax.

Why does the legislation contain no mention of the changes that need to be made in standard spending assessments? With the exception of an authority in Dorset, my constituency receives the lowest grant per poll tax payer and has the lowest standard spending assessment. Anyone who knows anything about the district will realise that it suffers from social deprivation and requires funds. How can a formula be worked out which does not allow decent standard spending assessments and decent grants for such districts? I have previously explained to the House the fiddles involved and why the conditions of the standard spending assessments hit North-East Derbyshire harder than any other authority, although others are sorely hit. If we are reviewing the whole of local government finance, we should include debates on that subject. It was not just the principle of the poll tax that hit the authorities; the nonsense of standard spending assessments helped to push up the poll tax in many districts because money was not made available to local authorities.

The most important element missing from the legislation involves what is to be done to overcome the harm to electoral registration that was and continues to be caused by the poll tax. A survey carried out by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys revealed that 1 million people are missing from the register. The problem began in Scotland when the poll tax was introduced there and moved to England and Wales. It did not occur in Northern Ireland because it never had the poll tax. What action is being taken to restore 1 million people to the electoral register? What will the council tax do about that? Why are we not spending as much to encourage electoral registration as is being spent overseas to encourage expatriates to register and vote in this country?

The hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) said that the poll tax was not a poll tax because it had nothing to do with the electoral register. It had everything to do with it. We have a little time before the next election in which to put matters right if it is fought on next February's register. In the meantime, what legislation will we pass and what expenditure will we sanction to overcome this greatest of evils? Hon. Members should be more worried about the electoral register problem than about any of the other erosions of our civil liberties. The problem arose because of the unfairness of the poll tax. People dived for cover and kept themselves off the register —an understandable mistake by people facing bills which they could ill afford.

I conclude with an historical analogy and a warning to the Government. It concerns the introduction of the first poll tax, which was promulgated not in 1371, but was introduced in 1367 as a flat rate measure which great masses of the poor did not pay. That is fantastically similar to the modern poll tax. Two years later, in 1369, a further measure was introduced—the poll tax mark II—bearing some similarity to this poll tax mark II. It was to be banded according to differing levels of wealth. On that occasion it was the rich who did not pay and who thus breached the legislation.

[Mr. Harry Barnes]

So in 1371 the country returned to the principle of a flat rate payment and that was when the peasants' revolt broke out. Thank goodness, in this repeat performance we will not have a mark II or mark III version of the poll tax. The legislation for the mark II version may be passed, but because of the coming election it will bite the dust along with the poll tax. Labour's proposed measure will be enacted instead. If it is not, and if Labour does not win the election, the farce that took place in the 14th century may be repeated.

8.32 pm

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): I shall refrain from returning to the 14th century.

This evening we have heard two confessions of paternity. The hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing) claimed to be the father of the Labour party's return to the rates. My hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) suggested that he had some involvement in the conception of the council tax. I shall not compete with him for that paternity because I suspect, along with the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright), that paternity in matters of taxation is to be avoided if at all possible.

There may be some surprise that I, who represent Battersea in the London borough of Wandsworth, should welcome the transfer of local government finance from the community charge to the council tax. In Wandsworth we showed how the community charge could and did work. I am not ashamed of the principles behind the community charge. They were the right answer to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes). But there were good reasons why those principles could not be followed in practice.

The proof of the pudding was in the electoral results in Wandsworth. In my constitutency last year the number of Conservative councillors there increased from six to 18, an increase repeated throughout Westminster, Ealing, Hillingdon and places such as Derby and West Lancashire. That showed that when people perceived that their vote could make a difference to the community charge, they used it in the Conservative cause.

The electors in boroughs such as Lambeth, however, did not perceive that a vote could change control of the council, so they said "Ouch" to the Government, in effect. In Wandsworth the community charge has not even been an issue—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) will pay our zero rates this year, so no doubt he will support me. There is no point in our romping to victory in Wandsworth, with the help of the secret vote of the hon. Gentleman, if our party is not as successful elsewhere.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): The hon. Gentleman seems to feel that his party met with great success in Wandsworth. Would he be willing to agree to the same financial contribution by central Government being provided to my district of Monklands so that we can see whether his enthusiasm will be shared there?

Mr. Bowis: I will not contrast like with unlike, but I can compare like with like in the form of Wandsworth and next door Lambeth, a similar London borough. The grant per head of population from central Government to Lambeth council was £1,500 compared with £1,000 to Wandsworth, in the year when Wandsworth's community charge was £148 and Lambeth's £548. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will learn and inwardly digest those figures and then ask his colleagues in the Labour party why they could not produce the same high-quality services at the lowest cost as those for which Wandsworth—unlike its socialist neighbours—has been known in London.

There are reasons for this change. There have been some anomalies, and this Bill tackles some of them, not least those involving students, student nurses, apprentices and people on youth training schemes. Perhaps, too, we underestimated the involvement of spouses in joint decisions on households and family spending—they were probably more conscious of the costs of local government than we thought.

Some Opposition Members question our failure to abolish the 20 per cent. minimum, but the reason for that is that it is incorporated in income support levels. People on income support in Wandsworth are not particularly anxious that the system should be changed, because if an element for the community charge is incorporated in income support but a person pays zero community charge, he is inevitably quids in. A person living in a high-spending Labour authority begins to suffer, however——

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): Does the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that the majority of people being hauled before the courts for non-payment of the poll tax are the very people who should have paid the 20 per cent. contribution? Would it not make economic sense if the Government acknowledged that and abolished it immediately?

Mr. Bowis: The people being hauled before the courts in Labour council areas are being so hauled because those councils did not keep the community charge low enough for them to afford to pay it. The overspending by Labour councils has been a prime reason for this change. We know that in the year that the community charge was introduced Labour local authorities' spending plans increased by 30 per cent. That is why the system was painful and why we had to find a better way to raise money. Conservatives care not only about the quality of local services but about the cost to the local charge payer because that is as important to the vulnerable as the quality of service.

The Opposition seek to return to the discredited rates system and the hon. Member for Falkirk, East can claim the credit for that. It would be a return to a system in which each property has to be valued and where home improvements are deterred. Its rolling revaluation would be based on a valuation that is 20 years out of date. Labour would insist that 20 per cent. of local government's costs be raised by local taxation. Overnight, that would increase every household bill by 50 per cent.

The Leader of the Opposition is often quoted as having condemned the rating system. I shall quote not the right hon. Gentleman but his right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). Writing in *The Daily Telegraph*, and probably hoping that his hon. Friends would not see it, the right hon. Member for Gorton said:

"The rates are irrational, inefficient and highly resented. The rating system makes no sense whatsoever. The right thing to do is to abolish it once and for all."

I am not surprised that the right hon. Gentleman was banished to foreign affairs.

Much of the debate has centred on whether it is right to cap. It is argued that capping is wrong if accountability suffers, but capping is necessary because of the unwillingness of Labour authorities to be reasonable in their spending. Wandsworth has shown that targets can be met or even bettered. That is why Wandsworth's community charge started at £148, dropped to £136 and was reduced to zero as a result of the Chancellor's £140 grant last year. Wandsworth now provides much better services than before.

I had to look at services in Lambeth during the Vauxhall by-election and I saw dereliction and despair and people who are desperate for home ownership, which has been denied them. By comparison, the neighbouring council in Wandsworth has made efficiency savings that have enabled it to improve the quality of service. Tendering has produced savings of 33 per cent. and even when work remains in-house, tendering results in savings of 25 per cent. Staffing ratios have been cut to 2·1 per 1,000 compared with the inner London average of 3·7 per 1,000. A saving of 50 per cent. has been made in refuse collection. One tonne of refuse is collected per man per day in Southwark compared with 4 tonnes per man per day in Wandsworth.

Library costs have been reduced by 45 per cent. but there has been a 30 per cent. increase in book lending. In the first 12 years of Conservative control in Wandsworth there have been £50 million worth of efficiency savings, and the 123 services provided by that council cost each resident £136 before the change in the last Budget. The results in Labour authorities are quite different. In Hillingdon the Labour council was ousted last year and the new Conservative council dropped the community charge from £435 to £370. In Merton the reverse was the case because on the day after Labour took control it announced that it would double the community charge.

I shall give some more examples of how cost savings do not mean lowering the quality of service. Wandsworth recently took over education from the discredited Inner London Education Authority and is already providing free nursery education for every child. It is spending £71·03 per 1,000 of population on higher and further education compared with the inner London average of £51·50. The inner London average on special needs is £38 but Wandworth is spending £49. The inner London average at the chalk face, the money that goes to schools, is £144 per 1,000 of population but the figure for Wandsworth is £146. Bureaucracy in inner London costs £124 per 1,000 of population whereas Wandsworth spends £50.

That is why we need to consider capping. Overspending does not have to occur because good quality services can be provided at reasonable cost. That is what capping is all about and it is why I welcome the element in the Bill which provides for that and deplore the Opposition's commitment to abolish it.

We must look at income as well as spending. Wandsworth has rent arrears of £4 million. In Lambeth the amount is £35 million and in Southwark it is £60 million. In Wandsworth there are 90,000 housing benefit claims per year and 1 per cent. await assessment, not for weeks, which is the average in inner London, or for months, which is the average in Lambeth, but for two days. Labour high spending is not to improve services as the Opposition would suggest. Labour Liverpool spent £250,000 on councillors' media rooms and the Labour council in Dudley spent £21,000 teaching teachers how to clap. Labour Hackney spent £70 million on new offices and Labour Lewisham sent advisers to the Caribbean for two months to learn about youth and leisure.

London is fed up with Labour's level of service. People support the concept of capping and we support the Government's new proposals for the council tax because, ultimately, it will be fair. According to the Department's figures, in Wandsworth the A to G bands will produce a range of community charge on the same basis as this year —8 per cent. spending below target—of £90 in band A and £224 in band G for a two-person household. That shows that the charge will be manageable, even in an area such as Wandsworth which has shown that the community charge can work. It will be manageable as long as the grant settlement continues to take account of the borough's needs.

I welcome the Bill's provisions for dealing with non-payment. It is not a question of can't pay, but can pay won't pay, and that is deeply resented by law-abiding citizens. In March last year my right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) wrote to the Leader of the Opposition saying that the Anti-poll Tax Federation was Militant-inspired. The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) replied that that was a hysterical smear. He was right. Not only was Militant involved, but Mr. Steve Nally, the organiser, was also a member of the Labour party. About 30 members of the party and many Labour councillors have campaigned for non-payment. Such antics should be penalised when it comes to serving on a council and dealing with other people's money.

I deplore the statement by the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) who, writing in *Marxism Today*, said:

"I do not describe not paying the tax as civil disobedience."

Decent people do consider that to be civil disobedience and unacceptable. That is why I believe that when the people of this country have an opportunity to vote, they will vote against the party that stands for non-payment and for high spending, inefficient, low-quality councils. They will vote for the party producing better quality, lower-cost councils under the council tax system.

8.49 pm

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): The hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) spoke of the "can't pay, won't pay" campaign. In previous debates on the poll tax, I have pointed out that I and almost all hon. Members fall into the category of those who can pay, and should pay, more. What is so morally wrong about the poll tax is that those who are better off pay considerably less, with the consequence that people on the lowest incomes pay more. The people have found that out and that is why the poll tax is so unpopular.

One of the most interesting changes that I have seen in any Parliament—I have been around for far too long—is that which has occurred in this Parliament. Back-Benchers who for years have been loyally supporting their Government are now performing in a different role. They seem to think that they are already in opposition, because they spend all their time attacking the Labour party. Conservative Members supporting the Bill have been signally absent in this debate, probably for a good reason.

As I said, I have been here for some time and I vividly remember the Second Reading debate and the Committee sittings not only on the Bill introducing the poll tax for

[Mr. John Home Robertson]

England but on what became the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Act 1987. We are all familiar with extravagant claims by Ministers in winding-up speeches in Second Reading debates. I have here a quote from a Mr. Michael Ancram, who once represented a Scottish constituency and who has most recently been seen in Devizes, seeking, for the third time, selection in a constituency. He will soon qualify for the golden carpetbag.

On 9 December 1986, in winding-up the Second Reading debate on that Bill, Mr. Ancram said:

"The Bill is no short-term stop gap."

Talking about poll tax, he continued:

"It is no hurried or temporary expedient. It is a well considered and well worked out reform which sets up a new and viable system for financing local government for generations to come. It creates a new balance, a new fairness and a strengthening of local democracy and accountability which will stand the test of time."—[*Official Report*, 9 December 1986; Vol. 107, c. 275.]

He did not stand the test of time and nor did a number of his colleagues. [HON. MEMBERS: "Name them."] I served on the Committee and I remember them vividly. I have the Division list which followed that resounding speech from Mr. Ancram. Those who voted for Second Reading included John Corrie, Alexander Fletcher, Peter Fraser, Barry Henderson, Michael Hirst, Anna McCurley, John MacKay and Alexander Pollock, and Gerry Malone was a teller. They all lost their seats, as did the unfortunate person who chaired the Committee, Sir Albert McQuarrie.

Mr. Tom Clarke: My memory on these matters is not terribly good. Is the Mr. Gerry Malone mentioned by my hon. Friend the same Mr. Gerry Malone who, as a delegate to the Tory party conference, demanded the poll tax for England "now"?

Mr. Home Robertson: That may be so and he may be sorry about that because he will be standing in Winchester at the next election.

What is even more interesting about the list is those who did not vote for Second Reading. The hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) did not vote for it, although he has told us that he supports the poll tax. A significant person who voted for Second Reading was the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine). Some of these people should show a little contrition.

Mr. Foulkes: As my hon. Friend is going through this list of people, can he tell us whether the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas)—Honolulu Dick as he is known—was there?

Mr. Home Robertson: That is erroneous. He was not in Honolulu; he was in Houston on private business. My hon. Friend must not go down that road.

In fairness to the Secretary of State for Scotland, who opened today's debate, he has been remarkably consistent in his attitude to the poll tax. He was supporting it through thick and thin, against all the evidence, until fairly recently. He described it as a great success story, while at the same time describing the council tax as a roof tax, something that he reviled only a few months ago.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) said earlier, the vultures are coming home to roost for the Tory party in Scotland. However, the Tories must not be allowed to forget the misery and chaos of the poll tax, the distress that it has caused to so many of our constituents, of the disruption of local government that it has caused. Above all, they must not be allowed to forget the discredit that the poll tax has brought on the House of Commons and on Parliament. There is something fundamentally wrong with a Parliament that can allow such legislation to be inflicted on our people. Frequently, we hear Tories say that they voted for the Scottish Bill because it seemed a good idea at the time, or because they knew that the Tory party in Scotland was in difficulties and felt that it should be supported. That is the line taken by the right hon. Member for Henley. They did it, although they are now trying to wash their hands of it. They are responsible for the poll tax that has brought such discredit.

Even if the Bill is passed, the poll tax will be with us this year and next year. The poorest people will still have to pay 20 per cent. of that poll tax. To add insult to further injury, the people whom I represent in the Lothian region —this is true of other regions—are heavily penalised by the shamelessly discriminatory system of distributing revenue support grant in Scotland. I know that the same applies in England and Wales.

The quicker and far less risky way out of the poll tax —the way proposed by the Labour party—is a return to the rates. We know that that system can be made to work acceptably and efficiently. I would not leave it at that. Having returned to the rates, we should embark on a wide-ranging independent inquiry into local government finance, including local income tax and any other system. If a consensus were to develop that there was an alternative that should be pursued, we should get on with it.

The Government have learnt nothing. The last local government Act introduced the poll tax. It was a panic reaction to what the Government perceived as a problem arising from the revaluation in Scotland. They legislated from the hip and shot themselves in the foot and they are doing it again. This will be another disaster that will reflect badly on them. If we do not vote against the Bill, it will reflect badly on Parliament.

8.57 pm

Mr. David Martin (Portsmouth, South): No new tax can be considered in isolation from what has gone before. The original Elizabethan rating system, as everyone knows, outgrew its useful shelf time some time during the 19th century. Instead of tackling increasing inadequacies at their roots, Governments from the end of the 19th century until almost the end of this century grafted on to the system changes of monumental and often Byzantine complexity. The one sacred principle until modern times seemed to be the retention of the notional rental system with periodic revaluations—a system which few understood either in its origins or in its modern version.

Government grants, both general and specific, funded out of central taxation took an increasing share of the burden of the rating system as the tasks of local government grew in quantity and depth. The way in which the various grants were calculated and distributed and the way in which they related to the original property element of the rating system meant that local government finance needed the ingenuity of an Abbé Sieyès for detailed explanations of their niceties and of precisely how they worked. Council treasurers began to be looked on almost

as those who in ancient times understood the Eleusinian mysteries. At last the problems were faced radically and head on with the creation of the community charge.

Few people quarrelled with the principle that everyone should pay something. Even now, I find that people's minds have not changed on that. The crucial questions were how much and what was the bottom line in each individual case. If the headline amount of any tax is too much and the rebate or allowance system too miserly or unfairly based, the system will be unsustainable. Fortunately, these objections are met fairly and squarely in the proposals set out in the Bill.

The council tax, with its banding arrangements, does not take an unreasonable amount even at the top of the scale, while the discounts and exemptions are based on reason as well. I thoroughly approve of the transitional arrangements and the capping powers that are designed particularly to stop councils shielding greatly increased expenditure in the first year of the new tax, as happened in the change from rates to the community charge. That was the single most damning feature of the charge on its introduction in Portsmouth and elsewhere. It was expected that the final bill would be under £200 a head and it turned out to be £308·50. Overspending meant that the rebate system was not properly triggered and from then on, if only because of the amounts, the principle underlying the community charge became impossible to defend.

I spoke to a typical pensioner couple with a small occupational pension. Their rebated rates bill had been under £200 and between the two of them they were paying £617 under the community charge without a rebate being triggered. When told of that, I recalled Emperor Tiberius's answer to a governor who had written to him to recommend an increase in the burden of taxation. Tiberius replied that a good shepherd sheared his flock; he did not skin it. The Bill has many features which makes the shearing—it must never be a pleasant operation for the sheep, I imagine—at least defensible.

The Labour party roundly criticises the Bill's provisions, yet Labour Members propose nothing better than a return to the old rating system, without any effective capping on unreasonable expenditure. During the afternoon and evening we have heard examples relating to the likes of Lambeth, Haringey, Hackney, Brent and Derbyshire. Such examples, when added to all the others, would result in a nightmare for London and many other unfortunate areas. However, under the Labour party—I think that it was Anthony Crosland who tried to stop this happening in the 1970s—it would be back in full swing.

I turn briefly to an argument that has been advanced by some of my colleagues, including my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall), for regional banding to be introduced for valuations in London and the south-east. Attractive though such an idea seems at first—who does not want his constituents to pay less, even if it is at the expense of others—the more the practicalities are investigated, the less it appeals. It would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to define a fair boundary of any such region and outside that region there would be many with similarly valued properties who would clamour to receive the same treatment. This would be a fertile area of endless dispute. It would soon be reflected in the ballot boxes, let alone in further legislative changes in the House.

Nor must we fashion a large and significant part of the proposed tax system, as we did with the community charge, around admittedly genuine worries about single, elderly people—they are usually widows—who often remain in highly valued family homes and who will not love us for reintroducing a property tax. The 25 per cent. rebate for a single person is extremely welcome, but who would not wish for more on behalf of his or her constituents?

Even though some will blame us for bringing back a more expensive tax compared with their experience with the community charge, I ask them to compare what they will pay under the council tax with their old rate bills, the rates being a system to which the Labour party has promised to return. I remind the House and those outside that under a Labour Government, bearing in mind all the spending plans of the Opposition, it would not be long before all the valuable contents of many people's homes—for example, the cherished walnut table bought for 30 bob in 1937 that is now valued at over £2,000—would fall to be taxed. Not far from any Labour Government is the desire, after a while when they need the money, for a wealth tax.

Finally, I welcome the sensible arrangements in the Bill for students, which were caricatured ridiculously by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar). I welcome also the recognition of other suitable candidates for special consideration, including student nurses. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister of State to take on board the fact that the relevant provisions will require detailed regulations. In the hope that councils can make progress in setting up the necessary arrangements, including the relevant software, I look forward to the rapid introduction of regulations. It is important that councils know where they stand so that they can pass on the relevant information to our constituents. I know that Labour Members are anxious that that should happen, as are Conservative Members. When the Bill becomes an Act and when Opposition Members find themselves on people's doorsteps, they will face the same questions—this always happens to them—time and time again. These are as follows: "What are you going to do? How are you going to pay for it?" When that happens, the virtues of what we propose will be extremely clear.

9.5 pm

Mr. David Lambie (Cunninghame, South): I wish to make only one or two points in the short time available to me. I am disappointed with the attendance in the Chamber today, as I was with yesterday's attendance. This Bill is the flagship of the Government's legislative programme, and Labour Members are opposing it hook, line and sinker.

Mr. John Marshall: All six of them.

Mr. Lambie: It is a six-line Whip.

The general public and those who watch our proceedings on television must wonder whether we are really fighting. We should have had a general election last Thursday, rather than three by-elections. We have only to look around the Chamber to know that this Parliament is finished; it is dead. A general election last Thursday would have settled once and for all the political policies that the country will follow for the next few years.

The hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) said that he was glad that there was only one Bill covering England, Wales and Scotland. That will not go down well in Scotland. Scotland has its own system of local government that is quite different from that in England

[Mr. Lambie]

and Wales. We have district councils and regional councils. We have a different system of valuation. In Scotland, it is carried out by assessors who are employed by the regional councils. In England and Wales, it is carried out by a branch of the Inland Revenue.

I do not understand why we should be dealing with local government finance in Scotland in a Bill that covers the United Kingdom. The only reason is that after the by-election in Kincardine and Deeside only nine Conservative Members representing Scottish constituencies are left in the House, and the majority of those sit on the Government Front Bench. There would be no Scottish Tory Members to man a Standing Committee on a separate Scottish Bill. That is a disgrace both to this Parliament and to the Tory party in Scotland. If the Government cannot man a Committee, they should draft in English Members. The Scottish people would then realise that it is the Labour party, not the Conservative party, that represents Scotland.

Scotland was the first area to have poll tax imposed on it. Why? I made many speeches during the passage of that legislation. I blame both local councillors in Scotland and Scottish Members of Parliament, from both sides of the House, who were stupid enough to allow revaluation in Scotland to continue after the English stopped it in 1973. The Inland Revenue said that it did not have enough workers to carry out the revaluation in England and Wales, so from that date there were no revaluations of property.

In Scotland, Members of Parliament from both sides of the House and local government employees and councillors stupidly said that they would continue with the revaluation, and so we had five-year revaluations until 1985. The way that the assessors in Scotland attacked the valuation of domestic property led to a revolt among Scottish Conservative voters living in the big houses of Scotland. As the Member of Parliament for my former constituency, I represented the town of Troon, a very Tory town that had more millionaires per head of population than any other area in the United Kingdom.

That was the area that was attacked by the Tory Government in their valuations and that is why we had the revolt. That is why the people of Scotland rose up against the rating system. It was not because the rating system was bad, but because of the way in which the rating system was being carried out, attacking certain areas of domestic property, and, because the English had not carried out a revaluation since 1973, Scotland got out of line. Unfairly, the Scottish domestic ratepayer was badly hit and, in the area near to the constituency of the then Secretary of State for Scotland, the right hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger), the majority were Conservative voters. We had to change and the poll tax was introduced in Scotland a year before it was introduced in England and Wales. Stupidly, the English followed us and made the same mistake.

At present local taxation accounts for only 14 per cent. of local government expenditure in England and Wales and only 11 per cent. in Scotland. This is a point that I have made often in the House and on which I think that I have the support of the Adam Smith Institute which I hope will also be supported by many Conservative Members. Instead of local taxation in Scotland accounting for only 11 per cent. of total local government expenditure, why do not the Government pay 100 per cent.? Why do not we set an example in Scotland, as we did for the poll tax? Why do not the Government abolish local rates in Scotland and pay a 100 per cent. grant to the Scottish local authorities, basing local accountability on the principle that local councillors will determine how that money should be spent?

If we did that, we would do away with all these debates about local taxation, whether we should have the rating system or another system such as the poll tax or the council tax, and we would have a system which, at the end of the day, would give the local people the opportunity to determine priorities. This is one case where, again, I make the point that I am proud to stand here and support the policies of the Adam Smith Institute which every Tory Member should also support, but unfortunately they are afraid to do so because they are facing a general election, knowing that they will be out of power within six months.

9.12 pm

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): During the past two days we have heard a vast number of contributions and I pay tribute to the common sense and foresight of Labour Members who have not only pointed out the inequalities of the system that is still in being but the pitfalls that we see ahead of us.

To begin with, I pay tribute to an intervention made by the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) who, earlier today, rightly pointed out that in a democracy Parliament should be expected to debate a measure such as this in a sane and sensible fashion.

The guillotine motion after 10 o'clock tonight will attempt to preclude sensible contributions, attempt to preclude people from dealing with the difficulties and technicalities in the Bill, and pose a real problem for those of us who believe that local government is not a political football to be kicked about at whim, but an essential part of our democracy for the provision of essential services. The hon. Gentleman was brave to say what he did.

The hon. Gentleman was far more brave than the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) who has adopted the role of reading out central office briefs in the House to apologise for the Conservative party. She invented a new phrase tonight about the council tax being a light touch on people's wallets. I believe that Dickens used that phrase in "Oliver Twist". It will have a similar connotation when people discover what drops through their letter boxes if they are foolish enough to vote Conservative at the next general election.

We have also heard some honest interventions, however, The hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) staggered to his feet to tell us that he did not believe a word of what Ministers were saying. He did not believe in the new property tax; he believed that it would constitute theft from the old ladies living down the road, who would consequently vote against the Tories.

The right hon. Member for Shoreham (Sir R. Luce) thinks that we should change the standard spending assessments. The hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) said the same yesterday, but Ministers were unable to enlighten him about the method that might be used. The previous Secretary of State—the right hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Patten), now chairman of the

Conservative party—had promised two years ago that he would have a look at SSAs; that promise, however, came to nothing, as has every other Government promise relating to local administration.

Yesterday, we heard 10 interventions from the Tory Benches on the Secretary of State's speech. They came from the right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson); from the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall); from the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman), who wanted to retain the poll tax—I do not think that anyone has told her yet that the Conservatives propose to do away with it. The hon. Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark) had some worries. The hon. Member for Norfolk, North (Mr. Howell) said that VAT should be increased: I suspect that he was giving away a secret Tory agenda.

We heard from the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson), and from the hon. Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Butler). The hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) spoke of abolishing the poll tax by April 1992. We could not agree more with that; we proposed it on 13 December last year, when the Government were introducing the Community Charges (Substitute Settings) Bill. A bigger waste of time has never been seen, for that legislation will be overturned by this Bill. We offered the Government time, saying, "Let us not waste each other's time: let us abolish the poll tax now, and get rid of it by April 1992." Would the Government agree? Of course not; at that stage, they were still clinging to the poll tax.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. Hargreaves) also intervened in the Secretary of State's speech yesterday, expressing anxiety about the new tax. The hon. Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) mentioned Derbyshire county council; I remind the hon. Gentleman that Labour took Amber Valley in the local elections in May.

Hon. Members seem to think that the council tax is the best thing since sliced bread, but we know that the sliced bread is extremely stale. This is the same sort of tripe that Conservative Members came out with when they were defending the poll tax; the poll tax was indefensible, and the council tax is going the same way.

As my hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) rightly pointed out, surely it is time for a little contrition. Surely it is time for the present Home Secretary—who started all this in Cabinet, along with the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley)—to apologise. The present Secretary of State for Employment saw the poll tax legislation through its Committee stage; perhaps he too will apologise. Perhaps the current Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and the current Secretary of State for Wales—both of whom were responsible for the implementation of that legislation—will do the same. All those Ministers were promoted as a result of their work in that regard.

The present Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities was still defending the poll tax at the time of the fated Ribble Valley by-election, only a few months ago. I shall not go into details about his speeches; that was done at great length on 12 June, and people can read the speeches at their leisure. The Minister declared, however, that any form of property tax would constitute a betrayal of what was then seen as the Thatcherite mantle, of middle England—Conservative England—and of those who had scrimped and saved to secure their homes. But times change. People stand on their heads and wiggle their feet in the air. Some cannot tell whether people are standing on their heads or their feet, because the same kind of rubbish comes out. That is why we should be receiving apologies tonight from Conservative Members. Some bare their souls on their feet and some bare their souls in the bars.

Behind the scenes, many who sit on the Conservative Benches are betraying their concern even before the Bill has received its Second Reading. They are as worried as we are about the implications for the people of this country. Those Conservative Members and the electorate know that we are not to blame for the mess that we are in. The Conservatives introduced the poll tax and made a mess of implementing it. The British people will hold them to account at the election.

Local government faces nothing short of a catastrophe. Debt stands at unprecedented levels. The debt in England alone amounts to £1·5 billion. Two thirds of the Scottish population have warrants out against them. We expect 7·5 million orders to be issued against people in England. The law is in disrepute. Collection of the tax is in a shambles. Conservative Members, however, have the cheek to suggest that that is the fault of local government, not theirs.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) yesterday asked the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), whether he would consider the abolition of the minimum 20 per cent. contribution. That is to be found at column 860 of Hansard. My hon. Friend said that it should be abolished this year, or at least in 1992-93. The hon. Member for Salisbury got to his feet and made the most amazing pronouncement in the two-day debate. It was one word. He asked "Why?" Why? Because it costs two and a half times as much to collect as the money that is received.

The Audit Commission pointed out that 4 million people would be lifted out of the penury of having to pay it and that it would be possible to concentrate on those who can genuinely afford to pay but who do not. The administrative burden would be lifted from local government; it would then be able to concentrate on the job in hand. The Minister, however, does not give a damn about what is happening to people on the lowest incomes; he does not even understand what is happening to local government.

It is no wonder that Ministers do not understand the problems local government faces in having to prepare for the final year of poll tax, in having to work out how to collect the current year's poll tax, in having to prepare the software for collection of the council tax. Local government is on the verge of collapse, but who gives a damn on the Conservative Benches about that and what it means for local government services? Instead of contrition, instead of apology, constant and unmitigated attacks are made on Labour councils that are struggling, in the most difficult areas of the country, to provide services.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): What about rents?

Mr. Blunkett: Does the hon. Lady wish to intervene? I see that she does, so I shall certainly give way to her.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: It is not only a question of many Labour-controlled councils not bothering to collect the community charge. Many of them do not even

[Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman]

bother to collect rents. Not even the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) can defend their policy not to collect rents.

Mr. Allen McKay: The hon. Lady does not know what she is talking about.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Rubbish.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. Come along now—the hon. Lady has had her say.

Mr. Blunkett: My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) could not have put it better. The hon. Lady's response admirably sums up, in one word, what the council tax is all about —absolute and unmitigated rubbish.

Councils throughout the country are doing their utmost, including court cases that the police will not assist with and that the Home Office will not instruct the police to assist with, to collect the poll tax and, of course, any outstanding rates bills.

We have a system of local government finance which has concentrated its attention on the poll tax payer, bringing in gearing which has resulted in enormous increases in bills, without any material increase in spending or improvements in services. We have witnessed the abolition of the local domestic business rate, the introduction of the non-domestic business rate and the way in which that has concentrated the power of decision-making still further in the hands of Ministers. It is a shambles, which has resulted in local government being undermined and the role of the local community being seen as a threat rather than as a partner trying to rebuild broken economies, help the unemployed and do something about essential services.

Every time that Labour local authorities spend more money on education or social services Ministers claim credit for the increase in spending. Every time that it comes to capping regulations, those same authorities are blamed and pilloried for the spending for which Ministers have happily claimed the credit.

Instead we need a sensible system with decent values, not a tax which assaults families. The present proposal, in all its glory, with the present valuation and discount system is an attack on the family.

I do not know whether Conservative Members have given any thought to what the present discount system is likely to do—it is more likely to accelerate the disintegration of the family than to bring people together. It is the Norah Batty syndrome, if I may be sexist, where far from losing a million people off the register as happened during the last census because of the poll tax, in the next census men will be sent to the shed at the bottom of the garden to keep out of the way. We will have a nation of single widows, with men escaping from the tax and their spouses claiming the 25 per cent. discount.

In the past two days we have heard a lot about students. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) rightly pointed out some of the anomalies that the Minister says he will reply to, such as the marrried student with two children who will receive a 25 per cent. discount but who will be exempt from the tax if he leaves his wife and family and moves in with his student friends down the road. That is the nonsense. Students in halls of residence will allegedly be exempt from the tax. However, many halls of residence will have to pay business rate because many of them undertake business activities in the recesses. Those who know anything about the way in which universities and polytechnics work know that they are businesses and not merely halls of residence. Are we presuming that those students will not be expected to pay anything in the charge that they pay for staying in the halls of residence? If not, will halls of residence pay a business rate only during the recesses? Will it be assessed on a daily basis as the amount of council tax will be? Those are the types of question that need answers before we know what sort of chaos we are going to face with the council tax.

Mr. Oppenheim: As the hon. Gentleman is clearly so hostile to the concept of a single person household discount, will he state clearly and unequivocally whether any future Labour Government would abolish it?

Mr. Blunkett: Our fair rates proposals make the situation unequivocally clear. We say that we will protect single retired people, we will ensure that the rebate system is improved not only to help those people, but to target help on all those who need it and we will ensure that what people pay is based on their ability to pay and not on their status. We are not in the business of giving handouts to the Duke of Westminster because he happens to move out of the present matrimonial home and into a single person's flat. We are not in the business of expecting other people who can ill afford it to pick up the cost of a single person's discount for the rich. We are not in the business of putting on the backs of the poor the cost of the 50 per cent. discount that second homes will be accorded. That, too, is in the Bill.

Every time the Government bring in something to protect the rich, the burden is passed to the rest of us. The poor will pay for the protection accorded to the better-off. That is what the proposed valuation and banding are all about. That is why we are so opposed to the system that charges the richest person in Westminster only £273 a year but the poorest person in Wigan £339 a year. That is why we are opposed to the poorest person in Westminster paying only £3 a week less in council tax than the richest, including some Tory Members.

The banding system and property valuations are devised deliberately to protect the rich at the expense of the rest. That is why we know that people will not only feel that it is unfair and understand that it is unfair, but will at the general election bring home to roost the chickens that many Tory Members will be voting on at 10 pm tonight.

The same applies to much else that languishes in this tax as an alternative to the ill-fated poll tax. Not for Tory Members the speed, simplicty and certainty of the broad-based tax that we should have. Not for them the buoyancy, cost-effectiveness, fairness and progressiveness that "Fair Rates" offers to the British people. Not for them the comprehensibility or even the logic spelt out by the Prime Minister shortly after his election as leader of the Conservative party when he rightly said that there was something wrong with a tax that resulted in 50 per cent. of the population having to receive a rebate or discount on the amount that they paid. Yet that is exactly what the council tax will involve.

With the intricacies, unfairness and technicalities, it is no wonder that the Secretary of State for the Environment has declined to serve in Committee. No wonder he will not

join us three days a week from now until Christmas. Instead, he will have a fortnightly visit to Brian Walden on Walden's weekly interview. *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) corrects me: it is rather that Brian Walden will visit the Secretary of State for lunch and take the cameras with him. No wonder the Secretary of State has been given a roving brief across Europe. He fails to understand even the one that he has.

Mr. Oppenheim: Get on with it.

Mr. Blunkett: A Tory Member shouts, "Get on with it". That is not surprising because it is difficult to protect the Secretary of State from his own inadequacies. As my hon. Friend the Member for, Garscadden said earlier this afternoon, the Secretary of State has to rely on his Minister—the AA man, as he was described in the *Financial Times*. Although the Secretary of State knows nothing about the Bill, he knows the man who does, and that man does a good job.

In the 40 minutes that we shall have to debate each clause it will be difficult to point out to Tory Members the Bill's inadequacies. It will take us until clause 100 before the poll tax is abolished. It will take more than the three weeks to reveal the confusion that abounds, but we shall do our best.

We know that if, in the introduction of the council tax, the Government inflict on the British people what they did with the poll tax—the £10 billion that it has cost us, the increase in VAT to manipulate it and the innumerable changes to make it more acceptable—local government and the British people will face the same sort of inadequacies and misery.

We have heard Conservative Members talk about the necessity of capping. We were told that capping would be necessary until the poll tax was introduced as that would bring accountability. We were then told that only a handful of high-spending authorities would be capped. Then we were told that when the poll tax really bit, capping would not be necessary. Now we are told that universal capping is necessary because the Secretary of State and his colleagues are frightened of trusting local people to make local decisions under the new banded system. No wonder they are frightened, because the way in which the council tax will be implemented will confuse people to the point where they will be unclear about who is paying what and who is making the decisions.

The gearing procedure will result in a 1 per cent. increase in spending, incurring an average increase of between 7 and 8 per cent. in the local tax. The proposed national business rate will ensure that the narrowness of the domestic base under the council tax will inflict misery on local people. That is why our "Fair Rates" proposals offer a different solution.

The 20 per cent. contribution will be abolished, the rebate system will be improved and single retired people will be protected. All that will ensure that the tax is fair and progressive. It will also ensure that it has a broad base and that the business rate is decentralised. We will introduce rebates for small businesses to protect those who are setting up in business or struggling to stay in business.

The Labour party believes in fairness and justice. In the weeks ahead it is therefore beholden upon us to get across the message that, once again, the Government have got it wrong. We are witnessing the third change in three years, a change that will produce further misery and confusion.

My colleagues and I do not believe that the British people will be fooled a second time—one can take a horse to water but one cannot make it drink. The general election will be the opportunity for which we have waited. That opportunity has been delayed too long. That general election will be fought not simply on fair rates, but on a fair Government. The people of Britain will understand clearly that to achieve that they must vote Labour.

9.36 pm

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. Michael Portillo): We have reached the end of the third full day's debate on the council tax. We had one day on the Queen's Speech, and now we have had two full days on Second Reading. I am bound to say that I do not believe that this debate has reached the level of fizz that one might have associated with a Bill that was to be fought doggedly tooth and nail by the Opposition.

At the climax to the debate a few minutes ago the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Lambie) was addressing a single Labour Back Bencher. During much of the debate we have had no representation from the Liberals or the Scottish Nationalists. Indeed, when the wind-up began this evening there were no Liberals or Scottish Nationalists present.

It has been an exhausting three days for the Labour Whips as they trawled the corridors of the Palace to try to find people who they could wheel in to speak in this debate. None the less, fortunately there have been fine contributions to the debate from the Conservative Benches. We have had such contributions from my hon. Friends the Members for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) and for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker). My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) included in his speech one of the pithiest denunciations of the rates that I have ever heard. We also heard fine contributions from my hon. Friends the Members for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) and for Battersea (Mr. Bowis), who has a quarry of good stories from the London borough of Wandsworth.

My hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin) provided us with a model of how much can be put into a brief speech. My right hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Sir R. Luce) asked me to consider the standard spending assessments. I assure him that we look at them every year, but he is aware, as he said during his speech, that there are two different objectives: one is to make the assessments as simple as possible; the other is to make them as fair as possible. The two objectives do not necessarily lie in the same direction.

The Opposition raised the canard that some sort of register is required under the council tax. We have denied that categorically. It can only be obtuseness or a refusal to believe that can still lead the Opposition to make that claim.

The basis of the council tax is, first, a property element. In that respect it is like the rates. We want to give discounts to single people—the Labour party does not—and single people will have every incentive to make themselves known. It is not like a council tax register with people not wishing to make themselves known. Single people have every reason to come forward and declare that they are

[Mr. Michael Portillo]

entitled to a discount. But if they do not come forward, there is no penalty. There is no statutory requirement to hold a register of such people. There is all the difference in the world between finding out who the single people are and having a statutory register as we have under the community charge.

There is no difference in principle between what we propose for finding out about single people and what is proposed in the so-called Bill put forward by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), in which he would need to identify pensioners, pensioner couples and people on low incomes. There is no difference, either, between what we have under the community charge and under the rates in respect of identifying people who are entitled to help through social security benefit, if they are on low incomes.

There has been a misunderstanding of the Government's plans from the point of view of social security benefits. Just as with the rates, when people in receipt of social security benefit had living with them someone who was not in receipt of benefit, there was a system known as non-dependent deductions—the hon. Member for Brightside will be well aware of that system —so, too, under the council tax it will be possible for the claimant—the person liable to the tax—simply to let us know, through a single declaration, about the other people in the household who may not be eligible for income support and who may be eligible to make a contribution to the council tax bill.

There has been some confusion—I do not know why there should have been because it was made clear last night by the Secretary of State for Wales—about the position of students. There are two issues. First, students should not be counted as adults when we are deciding whether the single person discount should be given to a household. Students, including all student nurses, YTS trainees and apprentices, will be invisible. In other words, they will not count as though they were adults in a household. They will not stop a single person who is not in one of those categories from being able to qualify for the single person household discount.

The second issue is that, if a household is composed entirely of students, it should be exempt. It is easy to do with halls of residence, but it is also easy to do where students are living in digs or even when they are the owners of properties. Where they are all students, they will be exempt and no payment will have to be made. In this case we include student nurses on Project 2000 because they are, like other college students, not eligible for social security benefit. In this second category we do not include other student nurses, YTS trainees and apprentices because all those people are entitled to social security benefits.

If their incomes are low—if, for example, a student nurse has a low income—there will be no difficulty; she will be able to claim social security benefit, so there is no reason why she should be entitled to the exemption available to other students. I hope that that puts the matter beyond doubt, and I believe that my hon. Friends will greatly welcome that important development in the new council tax.

The Government have chosen to have regional banding for Scotland, Wales and England. The council tax is composed 50 per cent. of a property tax. I sometimes think that some of my hon. Friends who would like to see the tax in some way equalised between one place and another are hankering after a tax which this tax is not. With a tax based on property, it follows as night follows day that the amount people pay will vary according to where they live and the properties in which they live. Those who would like the tax to be the same for everyone, no matter where they live and no matter what property they live in, will be disappointed by the council tax because, frankly, it is not that sort of tax.

Being a property tax—there is not now any contention between the two main parties about that—we can either tax the kind of house and say, for example, that all three-bedroom properties shall be taxed the same, in which case my hon. Friends should be aware that we would soon have tremendous anomalies as the same tax is placed on a Mayfair flat as is put on a flat in a mining village, or we can have regional banding, and then there must be boundaries between regions.

There are no natural boundaries between property price regions, so let us assume that one would use the standard regions—the south-east, the east midlands, the west midlands and so on. There would then be extraordinary anomalies. For instance, taking a semi-detached house worth £60,000 in Milton Keynes and a semi-detached house also worth £60,000 in Northampton, the household in Northampton would pay £88 more in tax simply because it happened to be across the regional boundary. Hon. Members should try to explain that to people in Northampton and Milton Keynes.

Alternatively, people in an average house in Southampton would pay £89 less than people in Salisbury. I doubt whether my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) would be amused by that. People living in a semi-detached house in Cambridge would pay £89 more than people in a similar house in Oxford simply because they were in East Anglia rather than the south-east, even though the semi-detached house in Oxford had cost much more.

Therefore, the only basis on which we could have a property tax and valuation would be on a national banding system because that would be understandable and objective. I agree that such a tax system based on the capital value of houses, on a national banding system, would be unfair unless we had taken care to provide for compressed rates of taxation. We do not say that if a house is worth eight times as much as another the tax bill should be eight times as much. That has been the position of Labour speaker after Labour speaker, but we could not tolerate such an unfair system. For people living in the same area, those in the most expensive properties should pay not more than three times as much—the maximum variation—as those in the least expensive properties.

However, that is only part of the answer. The other part is what has already been done—the massive and permanent shift in funding from local to central taxation. In future, 15 per cent. of local spending will be raised in local taxation only in England and 11 per cent. of spending will be raised in local tax only in Scotland. My hon. Friends may fear that in some parts of the country we shall return to the oppressive and unfair bills which people received under the rates system. That is certainly not the Government's intention, and the Bill does not provide for that.

For example, in Barnet, the borough of my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South, the rates bill on a four-bedroomed detached house used to be £986. We now propose a council tax that would have produced a bill this year of £617. Last year, two of my hon. Friend's constituents in such a house paid £676 in community charge, so this year's council tax would have been cheaper for them—*[Interruption.]* My right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) takes the prize, because the rates bill in Brent on a four-bedroomed house was £1,826. The council tax bill would have been £706, making the bill £1,120 less under the council tax. We heard yesterday from my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes). A four-bedroomed house in Harrow, West was charged £1,137 in rates. The council tax would have been £588, a reduction for his constituents of £549. My hon. Friend the Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark), whose rates bill on a four-bedroomed house was £1,280, would have received a council tax bill of £510—a reduction of £770.

Mr. Gould: The Minister is giving extremely persuasive and interesting figures. Given the huge disparities which are of such enormous benefit to those at the top of the scale, who will pick up the bill? Who will bear responsibility for paying every penny of savings gained by top people?

Mr. Portillo: I have already explained that the most important change that we have made is to shift the balance between what is paid centrally and what is paid locally, so I can answer the hon. Gentleman's question. If he fears that in some houses lurk people on high incomes, those people will pay vast sums in income tax, VAT and corporation tax to provide the grants for local government.

Mr. Gould: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Portillo: This is my speech, not the hon. Gentleman's, and I warn him that if I give way now it will be for the last time.

Mr. Gould: In what the Minister has just said, I detect exactly the same argument that he and many others used to justify the flat rate principle of the poll tax. Is he not conceding and making clear something that was always true: the 2·5 per cent. VAT required from everyone who buys anything, which is paid to local government taxpayers, is entirely for the benefit of those who are most wealthy and best able to meet the bills?

Mr. Portillo: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the people who spend most on VAT are those who spend most on goods that attract VAT; they are not the poorest in society. Children's clothes, food, transport and fuel are all zero-rated under the VAT system. Is the hon. Gentleman saying that, if he were in power, he would repeal the increase in VAT? He spent much time today and yesterday denying that he would increase from 14 to 20 per cent. the proportion paid by local taxpayers. He now appears to be saing that he would repeal the increase in VAT. If he is not saying that he would repeal the increase in VAT, he is simply speaking out of both sides of his mouth at the same time.

Mr. Gould: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Portillo: No.

Mr. Gould *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that I heard the Minister of State say that he would not give way.

Mr. Portillo: We have just heard from the hon. Gentleman that all our proposals for discounts for single people and alleviation of the top rates of the tax are anathema to the Labour party, which wants to return to the full rigours of the rates. Under Labour, people in a house worth £200,000 must pay five times as much as people living in a £40,000 house, regardless of regional disparities or anything else.

Wherever the Labour party detects that there might be someone who could pay more under the rates, it wants every last penny out of that person. That is what we mean when we say that the Labour party is advocating an envy tax. We have just heard the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) dismiss the argument that people pay more income tax and VAT if they are on high incomes.

What about the discounts? We have heard many Labour arguments against them. The Labour party fears that somewhere there might be a single person who is also a millionaire who could benefit from a single person's discount, so it is absolutely against the proposal. Under a Labour Government, there would be no relief to widows, single mothers or young people starting out in life who live on their own. According to the hon. Member for Brightside, under Labour's proposals there is to be a discount for single retired people, even if they are billionaires.

There have been 70 changes of Labour party policy. I do not include in that 70 the number of occasions when the hon. Members for Brightside and for Dagenham have said contradictory things. I have always assumed that Brightside had it right and Dagenham was merely contributing a series of Gouldisms to the discussion.

Among the many popular items in this Bill is the provision that councillors who will not pay their community charge or their council tax will not in future be entitled to vote on setting a budget for their local authorities——

Mr. Blunkett: Come on.

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman says that because there is a lingering interest among Labour Members in people who have avoided the community charge. We heard it yesterday from the hon. Member for Dagenham, who referred to the community charge register as a threat to civil rights. He talked of the hundreds of thousands who traded away their votes so as not to register for the community charge. The Labour party cloaks under expressions such as "attack on civil rights" the fact that such people have not registered for the tax and have been indulging in tax avoidance, a practice for which the Labour party still shows some sympathy.

The Government are accused of changing their mind over local authority finance. I am accused of that; I am even accused of changing my hairstyle because of my attitude to local authority finance. Certainly I defended the community charge, which gave Labour councils in many areas the fright of their lives. I am asked whether I am sorry. I am sorry that we did not manage to pin the overspending of Labour authorities on those authorities and that we did not have a chance to repeat across the

[Mr. Portillo]

country the electoral triumphs that we enjoyed in Trafford, Southend, Brent, Hillingdon, Ealing, Wandsworth and Westminster.

So I am happy to say that the Government have changed their mind on local authority finance, but the world still goes round and the Conservative party is still a Conservative party. Has the Labour party ever changed its mind? Has it changed its mind on unilateral nuclear disarmament, or on the Common Market, or on nationalisation, or on trade unions, or on the free market? [HON. MEMBERS: "Yes."] Has the Labour party changed its mind on capitalism, or on the Soviet Union? Is there anything on which the Labour party has not changed its mind? [HON. MEMBERS: "Yes: the poll tax."]

One principle has been rescued form the wreckage of socialism—the principle that local authorities should not be capped and should be allowed to spend and spend as though there were no tomorrow. For the Labour party, there is no tomorrow.

Is there one honest man left in the Labour party? Perhaps it is the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), who fought an election on an honest programme and was defeated. Then there is the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist), who is willing to go to prison for his views. Perhaps it is the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), who is willing to continue to enunciate the principle that there is no such thing as a free lunch. And what is the uniting feature of all these people? I have discovered a dress code among Labour party members. If an hon. Member's jacket and trousers do not match and his clothing in general does not reach the heights of elegance, we know that he is an honest man. The dark suits of the Labour Front-Bench spokesmen betray those who have turned their coats.

The council tax is based on a new distribution of local and central finance. It consists of a property element and a personal element. It is fair and will be accepted as fair by the people. We shall take it through the House, despite the Labour party's opposition.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House proceeded to a Division——

10.2 pm

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford) *(seated and covered)*: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I understand that there is a bomb scare, and that hon. Members are finding it difficult to get access to the Lobbies. Will you advise us as to what can be done?

Mr. Speaker: I am aware that there is some difficulty in getting into the building. I am having the matter looked into, and I shall make a statement about it in a few minutes.

Later——

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley) *(seated and covered)*: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The time has elapsed when the doors should be locked. We all know that there is some disturbance outside—you have already said that you will make a statement on that—but it is unusual for the doors not to be locked by this stage in a Division.

Mr. Speaker: There is a slight problem. There is some difficulty in Members getting to the House because a street has been closed. I propose to allow a further 10 minutes before the doors are locked.

The House having divided: Ayes 334, Noes 245.

Division No. 4] **[10 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'l'a)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Egger, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James

Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Huw
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*

Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar Ashok
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Nicol
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mrs. Llin Golding.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills), That the Bill be committed to a Committee of the whole House.—*[Mrs. Margaret Ewing.]*

The House divided: Ayes 241, Noes 322.

Division No. 5] **[10.24 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Huw
Enright, D. A.
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, A.
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*

Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, N. R.
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Andrew Welsh and
Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy

Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown, and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

Question accordingly negatived.
Bill committed to a Standing Committee.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Ways and Means Motion and the Motion relating to Local Government Finance Bill (Allocation of Time) may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

10.38 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The whole House will feel that what happened between 10 o'clock and 10.20 pm was unsatisfactory. I appreciate that it was extremely difficult for you to decide what to do in the circumstances of some hon. Members being unable to get into the House. The information that you had extended the Division time by 10 minutes was available to those of us in the House, but not to those outside it. As I understand it, some hon. Members could not get into the House before the Division was completed. Could you give some thought to what happened? We hope that it will never occur again, but if it does, may we have clear guidance so that those outside the House will know that if the police warn that it is unsafe to come into the House the Division either will or will not be extended? The present situation is unsatisfactory. I hope that clear guidance can be given in case this happens again.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I raised a point of order earlier. I recognise the difficulty of your position and the difficulty that arose. May I ask you to consider what happened in case it should recur, which we all hope it will not? Surely a Division should be brought to a conclusion only when hon. Members have unimpeded access to the House in accordance with the Sessional Orders. If there is any question about that, the extended time limit tends to be arbitrary, so I ask that consideration be given to the matter.

Mr. Speaker: I shall reflect carefully on the matter. I had to exercise my discretion and I decided in the light of the report from the Serjeant at Arms that 10 minutes was an adequate period. I hope that this will not happen again. If I had decided to call the Division again, up on the screen would have gone the sign "Division Off" and Members would have drifted away. I have to exercise discretion. If hon. Members know that there is to be a Division at 10 o'clock, they should get here well on time.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE BILL
[MONEY]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Local Government Finance Bill ("the Act"), it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) the remuneration of, and any expenses incurred by, listing officers in carrying out their functions under the Act (including the remuneration and expenses of persons, whether or not in the service of the Crown, to assist them);

(b) any sums required to enable valuations to be carried out in accordance with the Act;

(c) any expenses of the Secretary of State incurred in consequence of the Act; and

(d) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other enactment.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

WAYS AND MEANS

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE BILL

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Local Government Finance Bill ("the Act"), it is expedient to authorise the payment into the Consolidated Fund of—

(a) any sums received by the Secretary of State in consequence of the Act; and

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable into that Fund under any other enactment. —*[Mr. Wood.]*

Local Government Finance Bill (Allocation of Time)

10.41 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): I beg to move,

That the following provisions shall apply to the remaining proceedings on the Bill—

Committee

1.—(1) The Standing Committee to which the Bill is allocated shall report the Bill to the House on or before 5th December 1991.

(2) Proceedings on the Bill at a sitting of the Standing Committee on the said 5th December may continue until Eight o'clock, whether or not the House is adjourned before that time, and if the House is adjourned before those proceedings have been brought to a conclusion the Standing Committee shall report the Bill to the House on 6th December.

2.—(1) The Standing Committee to which the Bill is allocated—

(a) shall meet on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays at half-past Ten o'clock and half-past Four o'clock; and

(b) shall allot 18 sittings to the consideration of the Bill.

(2) The proceedings to be taken on each of those sittings shall be as shown in the second column, and shall be brought to a conclusion at the time specified in the third column, of the following Table—

TABLE

Sitting	*Proceedings*	*Time for conclusion of proceedings*
1st	Clauses 1 to 5 and 70 to 74 and Schedule 5	—
2nd	Clauses 1 to 5 and 70 to 74 and Schedule 5 so far as not disposed of	—
3rd	Clauses 1 to 5 and 70 to 74 and Schedule 5 so far as not disposed of	—
4th	Clauses 1 to 5 and 70 to 74 and Schedule 5 so far as not disposed of	10.00 p.m.
5th	Clauses 6 to 13 and 75 to 80 and Schedule 1	—
6th	Clauses 6 to 13 and 75 to 80 and Schedule 1 so far as not disposed of	—
7th	Clauses 6 to 13 and 75 to 80 and Schedule 1 so far as not disposed of	—
8th	Clauses 6 to 13 and 75 to 80 and Schedule 1 so far as not disposed of	Midnight
9th	Clauses 14 to 19, 81 to 83 and 97 and Schedules 2 to 4, 6 and 8	—
10th	Clauses 14 to 19, 81 to 83 and 97 and Schedules 2 to 4, 6 and 8 so far as not disposed of	10.00 p.m.
11th	Clauses 20 to 29 and 84 to 92	—
12th	Clauses 20 to 29 and 84 to 92 so far as not disposed of	8.00 p.m.
13th	Clauses 30 to 52, 65 to 69, 93, 95, 96, 98 and 99	—
14th	Clauses 30 to 52, 65 to 69, 93, 95, 96, 98 and 99 so far as not disposed of	Midnight
15th	Clauses 53 to 64, 94 and 100 and Schedule 7	—
16th	Clauses 53 to 64, 94 and 100 and Schedule 7 so far as not disposed of	10.00 p.m.
17th	Remaining proceedings	—
18th	Remaining proceedings so far as not disposed of	8.00 p.m.

Report and Third Reading

3.—(1) The proceedings on consideration and Third Reading of the Bill shall be completed in two allotted days.

(2) The proceedings to be taken on each of those days shall be as shown in the second column, and shall be brought to a conclusion at the time specified in the third column, of the following Table—

TABLE

Allotted day	*Proceedings*	*Time for conclusion of proceedings*
First day	New Clauses	10.00 p.m.
Second day	Remaining proceedings on consideration	8.00 p.m.
	Third Reading	10.00 p.m.

Procedure in Standing Committee

4.—(1) At a sitting of the Standing Committee at which any proceedings on the Bill are to be brought to a conclusion under this Order the Chairman shall not adjourn the Committee under any Order relating to the sittings of the Committee until the proceedings have been brought to a conclusion.

(2) No Motion shall be made in the Standing Committee relating to the sitting of the Committee except by a member of the Government, and the Chairman shall permit a brief explanatory statement from the Member who moves, and from a Member who opposes, the Motion, and shall then put the Question thereon.

5. No Motion shall be made to alter the order in which Clauses, Schedules, new Clauses and new Schedules are taken in the Standing Committee.

Conclusion of proceedings in Committee

6. On the conclusion of the proceedings in any Committee on the Bill the Chairman shall report the Bill to the House without putting any Question.

Dilatory Motions

7. No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of, proceedings on the Bill shall be moved in the Standing Committee or on an allotted day except by a member of the Government, and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

Extra time on allotted days

8. If an allotted day is one to which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) stands over from an earlier day, paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings on the Bill for a period of time equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

Private business

9. Any private business which has been set down for consideration at Seven o'clock on an allotted day shall, instead of being considered as provided by Standing Orders, be considered at the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bil on that day, and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the private business for a period of three hours from the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill or, if those proceedings are concluded before Ten o'clock, for a period equal to the time between Seven o'clock and the conclusion of those proceedings.

Conclusion of proceedings

10.—(1) For the purpose of bringing to a conclusion any proceedings which are to be brought to a conclusion at a time appointed by this Order and which have not previously been brought to a conclusion, the Chairman or Mr. Speaker shall forthwith put the following Questions (but no others)—

(a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed (including, in the case of a new Clause or new Schedule which has been read a second time, the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill);

(c) the Question on any amendment or Motion standing on the Order Paper in the name of any Member, if that amendment is moved or that Motion is made by a member of the Government;

(d) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded;

and on a Motion so made for a new Clause or a new Schedule, the Chairman or Mr. Speaker shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

(2) Proceedings under sub-paragraph (1) above shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

(3) If an allotted day is one on which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) would, apart from this Order, stand over to Seven o'clock—

(a) that Motion shall stand over until the conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order, are to be brought to a conclusion at or before that time;

(b) the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order, are to be brought to a conclusion after that time shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

(4) If an allotted day is one to which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 stands over from an earlier day, the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which under this Order are to be brought to a conclusion on that day shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

Supplemental orders

11.—(1) The proceedings on any Motion made in the House by a member of the Government for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after they have been commenced, and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings.

(2) If on an allotted day on which any proceedings on the Bill are to be brought to a conclusion at a time appointed by this Order the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before that time no notice shall be required of a Motion made at the next sitting by a member of the Government for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.

Saving

12. Nothing in this Order shall—

(a) prevent any proceedings to which this Order applies from being taken or completed earlier than is required by this Order; or

(b) prevent any business (whether on the Bill or not) from being proceeded with on any day after the completion of all such proceedings on the Bill as are to be taken on that day.

Recommittal

13.—(1) References in this Order to proceedings on consideration or proceedings on Third Reading include references to proceedings at those stages respectively, for, on or in consequence of, recommittal.

(2) On an allotted day no debate shall be permitted on any Motion to recommit the Bill (whether as a whole or otherwise), and Mr. Speaker shall put forthwith any Question necessary to dispose of the Motion, including the Question on any amendment moved to the Question.

Interpretation etc.

14.—(1) In this Order—

"allotted day" means any day (other than a Friday) on which the Bill is put down as first Government Order of the day, provided that a Motion for allotting time to the proceedings on the Bill to be taken on that day either has been agreed on a previous day, or is set down for consideration on that day;

"the Bill" means the Local Government Finance Bill.

(2) Standing Order No. 80 (Business Committee) and Standing Order No. 103 (Business sub-committees) shall not apply to this Order.

The House has already had three days of debate on the Bill, so hon. Members will understand why it is so important. Let me now spell out why the timetable motion is necessary.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and my hon. Friend the Minister have made clear, the community charge is to be replaced at the earliest opportunity. The council tax is a fair, balanced and carefully thought-out approach to local government finance which builds constructively on previous attempts at reform and takes full account of the consultations that my right hon. Friend initiated a year ago.

Following a full day of debate on the Loyal Address and two days on the Second Reading of the Bill, the country is none the wiser about what the Labour party proposes on local government finance, save in one crucial respect: we now know that it is committed to ending all control on local authority expenditure. Its one positive policy is to allow high-spending Labour local authorities to impose a crippling burden of local taxation on those areas where they operate, on top of the crippling burden on national taxation which its £35,000 million of extra spending commitments would impose on all taxpayers.

We want to ensure that the Bill is taken through Parliament with appropriate speed, yet allowing full time for debate, for one simple reason: local authorities and local taxpayers need to know where they stand. For local authorities to set their budgets in good time for the start of the financial year, they expect as much advance notice as possible of the level of central Government grant and how the total is divided between the various local government services. They need that information before they finalise their budgets. They also need to know how much they will have to finance from locally raised taxation—from the community charge or its replacement, the council tax. How much more important, therefore, to give them as much time as possible when we are changing the whole basis of the local tax and they will have to collect the council tax for the first time.

It is crucial to understand one issue in order to understand the need for the motion. We all agree on the abolition of the community charge at the earliest possible moment. At least that is what we thought we had agreed, but we now seem to be in some doubt whether that is what the Labour party wants. Before the Opposition changed their mind on the need for speed, or appeared to do so, they sometimes taunted us by saying that we should have already moved ahead with the replacement of the community charge. That shows how little the Opposition understand the practical realities.

First, we had to undertake consultation and then frame the legislation. Now the parliamentary consideration of the legislation will commence. There then follows a crucial practical stage on which I wish to dwell—publishing the regulations following the Royal Assent to the Bill and the preparation by local authorities for the introduction of the council tax.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): I am sure that my right hon. Friend will agree that one of the most important aspects of parliamentary procedure is to allow proper consultation between the various stages at which a Bill is read. How much time will there be between the end of the 18th sitting of the Committee and the Report and Third Reading? Can my right hon. Friend satisfy the House that there will be a genuine attempt to

[Mr. Nicholas Budgen]

allow local authorities to consider what has been done in Committee and to make their proper representations on Report?

Mr. MacGregor: That is a fair point. We shall ensure that between the Committee stage and Report the normal time is given——

Mr. Budgen: How long?

Mr. MacGregor: We will give the normal time and we will come to that when we come to it.

Mr. Budgen: How many days?

Mr. MacGregor: The number of days is stated in the motion that we are debating.

Mr. Budgen: I apologise to my right hon. Friend, but plainly I did not put my point with sufficient clarity. I am talking not about the number of days on which the 18 Committee sittings are held, but the number of days that elapse between the last of the 18 sittings and Report.

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot tell my hon. Friend the precise number of days because we never can at this stage. We will observe the normal rules. I am sure that my hon. Friend will appreciate that I misunderstood him. *[Interruption.]* I thought that my hon. Friend was talking about the number of days for Report, which is mentioned in the motion. My hon. Friend sought to correct me from a sedentary position, but I now understand from the intervention made in the normal way that he was talking about the number of days between the end of the Committee stage and Report. I have already said that we will follow the normal rules, but at this stage I cannot say exactly how many days will elapse. *[Interruption.]* If the Opposition do not want to hear the arguments for the guillotine, it is up to them. I shall not be drawn further because one is never so far ahead when announcing the business of the House. It is also important to remember that there will be a great deal of time for consideration of the Bill in another place.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): My right hon. Friend, I am sure inadvertently, has given the impression of being disingenuous on this matter. I thought that the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) was perfectly clear. My hon. Friend asked how long there would be between the conclusion of the Committee stage and the beginning of the Report and subsequent stages of the Bill. Is it not the normal practice of the House that there should be a week, often two weeks, between the various stages? My right hon. Friend is more expert in such matters than I, given that he is the Leader of the House. Can he therefore tell us what that interval will be, because the Government must have planned for it?

Mr. MacGregor: I did not understand and I was not being disingenuous. We will follow the normal rules for the period between——

Mr. Budgen: How many days?

Mr. MacGregor: Just a moment. We will follow the normal rules for the period between the Committee stage and Report. I cannot say at this stage, given that we are talking about December, exactly what the business will be that week and I shall not be drawn further on that matter.

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): Answer the question.

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman knows that one does not announce now the business for December. There is nothing unusual about that and I have been absolutely clear.

Mr. Gould: Surely the Leader of the House can at least give his hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) a sensible answer. We would understand it if some emergency occurred which made his answer invalid, because of the circumstances that arose. But he must be able to answer in terms of the Government's current intention about the length of time they think would be appropriate between the two stages.

Mr. MacGregor: We shall follow the normal rules—*[Interruption.]*—and I cannot be clearer than that. It is perfectly straightforward.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. MacGregor: We are wasting time.

Mr. Budgen *rose*——

Mr. MacGregor: I must get on because I have made the position clear.

Mr. Budgen *rose*——

Mr. MacGregor: I will not give way again. As for the suggestion that it would be reasonable to announce now the business of the House for December——

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I will hear the hon. Member, but at present four or five hon. Members are on their feet.

Mr. Douglas: Perhaps you can help us and the Leader of the House, Mr. Speaker, as the learned Clerks are present. Can you explain what the normal procedure is? The right hon. Gentleman does not seem capable of telling us.

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for me.

Mr. MacGregor: The House knows what it is. We shall provide the normal period of two weekends for consideration of the Committee stage. That is perfectly obvious.

Mr. Budgen *rose*——

Mr. MacGregor: No, I must get on, having made the position clear.

I had only started to develop the argument on why it was essential to have this motion. We all agree that 1 April 1993 is both the earliest and latest date for the implementation of the council tax—the earliest because we cannot do it earlier and the latest because we want to have the council tax in as quickly as possible. The Opposition have not faced up to the practical implications of that.

There was a delay of one year and eight months between getting Royal Assent for the community charge and its introduction. That shows the formidable task that

will face the Department of the Environment and local authorities in implementing the council tax, when it is in place.

There are at least a dozen major areas for regulations, several of them involving more than one set of regulations. We intend to consult on the most important before Christmas and to have the regulations ready shortly after Royal Assent. We are also trying to speed up the introduction of the regulations by not giving the usual two months after Royal Assent before the Bill starts to come into practical effect. That is designed to assist local authorities. Others of the regulations will be tabled in the summer of 1992. I have a list of all the regulations that will be required, or at least the major areas for them, and they are quite formidable.

If we did not get the Bill until towards the end of May, for example, it would be serious for local authorities. Only when Royal Assent is achieved can both the Department and local authorities have an assurance about the ways in which they can proceed on the implementation of the council tax.

Mr. Douglas: What investigations will take place between the Scottish Office and sheriff officers about their role? It is becoming clear that the role of the sheriff officers in Scotland is extremely unsatisfactory. Does the Scottish Office intend to have such consultations and to make a report when, in particular, schedule 8 comes before the Committee?

Mr. MacGregor: That is a matter for debate in Committee rather than for this debate on the timetable motion.

Local authorities now say that they need a year after the major regulations have been made available to them, so there is a clear need for speed in this legislation if we are to give local authorities enough time to implement the council tax effectively and meet the 1 April 1993 deadline. Indeed, in the internal discussions now taking place between the Department and the local authorities, the latter are saying that they want the draft regulations and guidance on them as soon as possible and the formal regulations as soon as possible after that—*[Interruption.]* They need both. We intend to get the draft regulations on the major issues out for consultation before Christmas, but local authorities need the formal regulations as soon as possible so that they know exactly where they stand.

Local authorities need the regulations for a variety of reasons, such as the introduction of the computer system. As anyone with experience of introducing a major computer system will know, it involves a huge number of man hours. Therefore, local authorities need to know many details as soon as possible before they can begin that. They also need them for the administrative systems —working out who is entitled to discounts—to set up the benefits and collection systems and for information gathering. The Department needs to have much of the feedback from local authorities by September so that it can work out grants, central Government expenditure implications of discounts, RSG distribution and so on. That is a clear reason why we need the Bill to move quickly.

For all those reasons, we cannot meet the April 1993 deadline unless we move on the timescale that we have proposed to the House. We want to get on with the Bill quickly, but, at the same time, we want plenty of time to press the Opposition as hard as we can for an explanation of their policies on local government finance and to carry through the detailed consideration of the Bill.

I suspect that the Labour party will oppose the timetable motion. Is that because, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State asked, they want to keep the community charge? Labour Members say no. They say that they have promised co-operation in repealing the community charge, but everyone knows that one cannot repeal one form of local government tax without replacing it. Now that we have a replacement in the form of the council tax, where is Labour's promised co-operation in getting rid of the community charge?

I have already stated clearly why we need to follow the timetable to get the replacement in place by 1 April 1993. I suspect that Labour's opposition to the timetable motion is mainly to do with the absence of a clear policy on their part. Instead, they complain about the parliamentary proceedings that we are following. The timetable motion breaks new ground and I have explained the fundamental reason for that. It concerns the implementation of the council tax. However, I was also asked about the procedural point. I believe that this way of proceeding ensures a properly structured debate, which is in the best interests of the House and the country.

Mr. Budgen: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. MacGregor: I have not yet elaborated my argument. Once again, I am not allowed to do so before my hon. Friend asks me to give way, but I always give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Budgen: Does my right hon. Friend agree that all that talk about a properly structured debate simply means that the Government are taking away from the Opposition their right to put proper pressure on the Government and to clear the Government's minds about which points are important and which points can be conceded?

Mr. MacGregor: No, I do not agree. Since 1979-80, we have had timetable motions on Bills after they have started in Standing Committee on 27 occasions. In so many of those, the guillotine motion was proposed after the Committee stage had started, but often at a point when no reasonable progress has been made.

Our practice in the House as regards timetable motions has been to fall back on them as a response to much time being taken in Committee on the first few clauses of major Government Bills. Inevitably, with the pressure of other legislation on the time of the House, that means that discussion of what is left of timetabled Bills is taken at an accelerated pace. I am not making a party political point, because there are examples from both Labour and Conservative Administrations.

In 1967-68, the Transport Bill, which had 169 clauses, took 91 hours in Committee to reach clause 38 before a guillotine was imposed which allowed a further 100 hours for the remaining 131 clauses and 18 schedules.

In 1974-75, the Petroleum Submarine Pipe-lines Bill, which had 49 clauses, took 60 hours to reach clause 19 before a guillotine was imposed which allowed a further 22 hours for the remaining 30 clauses. A long time was spent on a few clauses and a short time was spent on the remaining large number of clauses. Exactly the same pattern has been followed with some of the most important Bills since 1979. In 1984-85, the Local

[Mr. MacGregor]

Government Bill, with 98 clauses, which was not very different from this year's Bill, took 86 hours to reach clause 16 before a guillotine, which allowed a further 59 hours for the remaining 82 clauses.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): The Government are being shifty on the poll tax and the council tax. Local councils are facing terrible problems trying to collect money and people are having enormous difficulties paying their poll tax. The Government are now talking about giving a 100 per cent. rebate on the council tax. Why will they not give us time to debate the matter so that if the council tax comes into operation it will at least eliminate the problems of people who genuinely cannot pay and the difficulties faced by local authorities because of the subsequent lack of money? Will we have the chance for such debates, or will we continue to have such shifty debates when we do not discuss the fundamental issues?

Mr. MacGregor: We are not having shifty debates. The hon. Gentleman's point can of course be debated in Committee. If he wants the 100 per cent. rebates which he mentioned to be implemented, he must want the Bill to be enacted as quickly as possible, which is another reason for moving on with the Bill.

Many Bills, including the Local Government Finance Bill of 1987-88, spend a long time in Committee where a few clauses are discussed, the guillotine is then used and a much shorter time is spent discussing a much greater number of clauses. This Local Government Finance Bill has 117 clauses and 14 schedules. The timetable motion provides for just as much time to be spent, proportionately, on those clauses as did all the other Bills from the outset.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): I was a member of the Committee that discussed the Local Government Finance Bill in 1987 when 182 clauses were proposed by the Government. More than 200 Lords amendments were proposed, with the result that the final legislation was thoroughly bad—so bad that today each and every Member encounters problems with the poll tax in their surgeries. Will those problems be repeated with this legislation because of the guillotine? That is what Members from all parties are afraid of and that is the nub of the problem which the Leader of the House should resolve.

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman should address the point that I made earlier: if he wants the council tax to be in place in April 1993, it is essential to follow the sort of timetable that we are suggesting.

I should like to make a point that I have proposed as a personal point of view to the Select Committee on Sittings of the House chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling). It seems that the best use of precious parliamentary time is to ensure that the whole of a Bill of such importance is subject to adequate discussion and scrutiny and the timetable motion allows for precisely that. It will be for the Standing Committee to determine how long it spends on the various parts of the Bill. The timetable motion establishes a framework designed to guarantee that the whole Bill is given adequate discussion in Committee, despite any attempts to delay and filibuster on particular clauses.

The times specified in the motion for when the knives fall on various groups of clauses merely determine when the Questions are put in Committee. If the Committee so wishes, there is nothing to stop it carrying on after that point on the next group of clauses, thus increasing the time available overall for discussion.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): The right hon. Gentleman is missing an important point about Committees. It is all very well cramming all the hours in Committee into one week, but Oppositions depend on outside bodies—local authorities, local authority treasurers and local council leaders—to give them information about Bills. There will not be enough time for that with this Bill and that is a denial of democracy.

Mr. MacGregor: I understand that, but there has been prolonged consultation on these proposals and the Bill has been available for a considerable number of days.

We have to strike a balance between parliamentary consideration, which will take several months, and the need to get the council tax into operation by April 1993——

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): Given that the Committee will meet three days a week, starting at 10.30 am and breaking in the afternoon, does the right hon. Gentleman really believe that discussion after midnight is the right way to apply detailed scrutiny to legislation of this sort? We all know about the difficulties of debating at that time of night. Would not a debate held so late at night be more about mice and pumpkins than about the legislative framework for a sensible, democratic Parliament such as ours?

Mr. MacGregor: I well recall debating Finance Bills introduced by the last Labour Government well after midnight in Committee. I repeat: we must endeavour to strike the right balance between a reasonable amount of time for parliamentary consideration and getting Royal Assent in time to introduce the council tax——

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): One danger of the timetable motion is that, because the Bill has not been thought through properly by the Government, they will use the Committee stage to table large numbers of their own amendments to try to improve the Bill. The Chair will then give those amendments precedence over Opposition amendments. So the bulk of the time will be taken up with trying to clear up the mess that the Government have created.

Mr. MacGregor: I can only repeat that we must strike a balance between parliamentary consideration and putting the council tax in place. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Bill has been thoroughly thought through.

A timetable motion along these lines enhances the consideration of any Bill. That is why in my memorandum to the Select Committee on Sittings of the House I made clear my view that a much greater use of timetabling, as recommended by the Procedure Committee—the Chairman of that Committee is in his place this evening—would be an important improvement in the effectiveness of our procedures.

If the Labour party opposes this motion, it can only be for one of three reasons. Perhaps Opposition Members fear the amount of time that we shall provide to expose the bankruptcy of their policies on local government finance; or perhaps they wish to deny the House enough time to debate the Bill in a structured way; or perhaps they wish to prevent the council tax from being properly prepared and implemented by 1993. That is why it is right to present the motion and to ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to support it.

The details of the motion are self-explanatory, but I should like to repeat one important point. As I have already made clear, nothing in the motion prevents the Committee from sitting after the guillotine falls in order to spend extra time on the clauses in what could be described as the next compartment. Ministers would obviously reflect the views of the Committee as a whole in deciding when to move the adjournment. I assure the House that, if it wishes, the Committee can sit much later into the night. Thus the total number of hours provided by the motion is very much a minimum. The times at which the guillotine falls have been agreed following discussions, but I am sure that none of us would wish to lay down to the Committee exactly how much time it must take.

The proposals in the motion provide adequate time for debate to ensure that the whole of this vital Bill is subjected to proper parliamentary scrutiny. We must ensure the minimum amount of time for the regulations to be promulgated, for guidance to be given to local authorities and for them to make the detailed preparations for the introduction of the council tax. If that is not done, the tax will not be in place by April 1993, which is what most hon. Members want and what we should like. I commend the motion to the House.

11.11 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): The Leader of the House started his speech with an error and made a totally unconvincing case for the motion. He started by saying that the Bill has already had three days of debate. Presumably he was counting a day of the debate on the Gracious Speech which took place before the Bill had been published. He cannot say that the House had a day's debate on a Bill that it had not seen.

Mr. MacGregor: I am afraid that, uncharacteristically, the hon. Gentleman started with an error himself. I did not make an error. The Bill was published on the Friday before the debate on the Gracious Speech.

Dr. Cunningham: The right hon. Gentleman went on to say that he was following normal procedures. The motion owes everything to the Government's failed election strategy and nothing to the proper scrutiny of legislation that will affect every home in the land.

Once again the Government are setting unenviable records with their summary attitude to important legislation. We have seen and heard it all before. For a decade the Government have offered local taxpayers salvation. First, there were the targets and penalties set by the Secretary of State for the Environment when he formerly held that office. Local Government Finance Bills came thick and fast throughout the 1980s and guillotines fell upon them with monotonous regularity. Targets and penalties, rate capping, retrospective legislation and the poll tax were all guillotined and railroaded through the House in the so-called interests of local taxpayers. They were all said to be the final solution to the problems of more accountability and a fairer deal for ratepayers. Here we are again with the latest Tory tax.

The Conservative justification for those actions makes hilarious reading. *Hansard* is replete with justifications for the need for haste and change and the reason why the latest piece of Conservative manic legislation would put everything right. It never did. The consequences for local taxpayers, local services, local authority jobs and, of course, for local government in general are not funny. It was all incoherent opportunism then and it is all incoherent opportunism now, but it is again about to be given the force of law.

The Government still lack any coherent philosophy on local government, or any principles on which to base their approach to local government in Britain. The poll tax—their flagship—is now to be ignominiously scrapped, but not for at least one more year.

We have heard the same hollow arguments and transparent claims paraded by the Leader of the House and his right hon. and hon. Friends—a fairer system; it must be guillotined; it must be on the statute book as soon as possible. No one believes any of this any more. We have had too many bitter experiences. This time, the Tory imperative is not to save the taxpayer but—a vain attempt—to save their political skins.

There were three lines about the poll tax in the Tory manifesto at the last general election. They cost the people of Britain £15 billion—£5 billion a line. When the Bill to introduce the poll tax was guillotined into law, the Secretary of State for Energy, who was then Leader of the House, the right hon. Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Wakeham), praised it. He said:

> "Our proposed community charge will introduce the accountability which is currently lacking . . .The Bill will achieve those objectives through the replacement of domestic rates by a fairer community charge, the introduction of a simpler and more stable system".

Who believes that any more? He continued:

> "Local electors and local businesses are crying out for a change from an unfair system of local revenue raising to a more equitable one that will increase local government accountability and strengthen local democracy."—[*Official Report*, 22 February 1988; Vol. 128, c. 28-32.]

All that is to be thrown out of the window now. The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities actually said at the Tory party conference that the poll tax would be a vote winner. If it is so wonderful, why the headlong rush to get rid of it?

When he was Leader of the House, the right hon. Member for Colchester, South and Maldon adduced in support of the guillotine the fact that the Conservatives had a mandate for the poll tax. This is the first time that I can recall—it is probably a constitutional and historical first—a Government using a guillotine not to get their manifesto commitments in but to get their manifesto commitments out. That is what the Leader of the House is asking the House to do.

It is instructive to reflect on how the House treated the poll tax Bill or, more fairly, the way that the Government treated it. On Second Reading, it had 131 clauses and 12 schedules. By the time that it came out of Committee, because of huge amendments and additions, it had 164 clauses and 16 schedules. It then went to another place, where it stayed for quite some time, and came back with

[Dr. Cunningham]

417 new amendments on 66 pages. They too were railroaded through the House of Commons in a few short hours.

The Leader of the House and his right hon. and hon. Friends no longer have any credibility on these matters, and they have the brass neck to come to the House and ask us to put up with it all again. Several times the Leader of the House spoke of following normal procedures when he is recommending abnormal procedures.

Mr. Budgen: Is it not plain that the Leader of the House was saying that he hoped to have the minimum possible period between the end of the Committee stage and Report? That may be a legitimate way to deal with a non-controversial Bill that does not require a great deal of consultation, but this is a major constitutional Bill on which we want the responses not only of officers in local government but of locally elected people and the population generally. There ought to be not a bare minimum but a proper period of national consultation.

Dr. Cunningham: The hon. Gentleman is right, and I know that in truth the Leader of the House shares his view. Recently the right hon. Gentleman attended a sitting of the Select Committee on Sittings of the House, which is chaired by the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling). In evidence, he said:

"The Opposition must have adequate opportunity to oppose, and its legitimate rights must be sustained."

That is what the right hon. Gentleman said only a few days ago. Yet here he is flattening at one fell swoop by means of a guillotine motion the Opposition's right to oppose. The right hon. Gentleman cannot face both ways, one way in the Chamber and in an entirely different way when giving evidence to the right hon. Member for Westmorland Lonsdale and others. As my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) said, there will not be adequate time and opportunity for Government Back-Bench Members to obtain briefing on amendments, let alone Opposition Members.

There has been talk of normal procedures. As the proposed Committee will sit on three consecutive days each week and sometimes, on the admission of the Leader of the House, late into the night, will he guarantee that Committee *Hansards* will be available in the normal way for Committee members to scrutinise what Ministers have said in debates that may not have finished, or in debates that may be germane to subsequent debates and amendments? Will the right hon. Gentleman give us the assurance that the reports will be available? Would he like to give us that assurance now? Come on! The answer is no answer at all. That is the response of a Minister who a few moments ago was telling the House that normal procedures would be followed. We know that no precedent for the procedures that we are discussing has ever been proposed before by any Government on any Bill, not even on a tuppenny-ha'penny Bill of no consequence let alone a Bill of the magnitude and significance that we are discussing.

The Government's proposals would be easy to understand if they had a reasonable record on these matters, but I have made clear briefly that their record is abysmal. The hon. Member for Enfield and Southgate (Mr. Portillo) and others have abandoned their commitment—this certainly goes for the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) and most Conservative Members—to the poll tax. All of them—I say that unless a Conservative Member wants to intervene to say that he opposed it—marched through the Government Lobby in support of it, and did so on many occasions. They supported also guillotine motions that related to it. They seem to have changed their tune somewhat tonight.

The poll tax legislation was guillotined in and it will be guillotined out, but it will not entirely disappear until we have a Labour Government after the next general election.

We face a familiar scene but one that has a new twist. There is to be unprecedented forcing of legislation through the House. It is clear that when the political future of Tory Members is at stake they care little about the proper scrutiny of tax proposals and the expenditure of public money.

The poll tax Bill and the new Tory tax Bill bear some comparison. The earlier measure had 131 clauses and 12 schedules when it began its tortuous journey through the House. The Bill that is before us has 117 clauses and 14 schedules. The previous measure was in Committee for 72 hours before it was guillotined. Unlike that which the Leader of the House implied, there was no question of any filibuster. I led the opposition to it on behalf of the Labour party and, far from filibustering, I recall that the Government tabled more amendments in Committee than the Opposition. We were anxious to proceed to the important parts of the Bill. In total, that Bill had 136 hours in Committee. For a Bill of not dissimilar length and importance, the Leader of the House is suggesting 80 to 100 hours for scrutiny, yet he has the nerve to say that he is proposing normal procedures. In fact, he is breaking with all precedent, and he knows it.

This guillotine motion is symptomatic of a Government who have come to treat the House of Commons, and, for that matter, the British people, with total contempt in their approach to local government finance. It is a Government who cannot be trusted with the reform of local government finance, just as they cannot be trusted with the future of the national health service, our children's education or the handling of the economy.

The timetable for the council tax Bill has been determined by one criterion above all others—the panic-stricken attempt by the Prime Minister to hang on to office, with a discredited group of Ministers hanging on to his coat tails. That is the real reason why we are here tonight. The motion makes a mockery of the procedures of the House and its proper role in the scrutiny of Bills. We should not be surprised by the way the Government are acting in forcing through yet another of their ill-conceived pieces of local government legislation, because that has been the hallmark of their time in office.

Why is the House being asked to accept the unprecedented step of having a Standing Committee for a major Bill that sits on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays and, from what the Leader of the House implied, could be in almost continuous session?

The Prime Minister should seriously consider the proposal of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, which is rightly concerned that poll tax collection will become even more difficult in coming months because of the mess and confusion that the Government have created. The AMA has suggested a national advertising campaign drawing the public's attention to their liability to pay the poll tax, which is not yet even abolished. There could even

be a large poster sited across the road from 10 Downing street for the Prime Minister's benefit. After all, the Government have always been more than ready to spend millions and millions of pounds of taxpayers' money on lavish advertising campaigns to promote other aspects of Government policy, so why should not they do so on this occasion?

The unpalatable fact remains for us all that every person who gets a poll tax bill in this financial year will find one dropping on his doormat next financial year as well. No one is in any doubt about where the responsibility lies for that. In spite of the bluster of the Leader of the House, my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) and others have repeatedly offered to co-operate, as we did in the last Session of Parliament, on Bills to abolish the poll tax immediately. The delay in abolishing that piece of Tory folly is entirely due to the Government's unwillingness to co-operate in getting rid of it as quickly as possible.

Try as the Government might, fiddle with the evidence as they might, the Government will not escape, first, the responsibility for poll tax itself, and, secondly, their unenviable record in railroading rotten legislation through the House. For those reasons, we shall certainly oppose the motion.

11.28 pm

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg (Hampstead and Highgate): The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) enjoyed making that speech and the House enjoyed some of his remarks. The trouble is that many of them were carbon copies of speeches made from that Bench over the past 20 years.

I and many hon. Members in the House tonight have listened to a vast number of guillotine debates. They are predictable. I have not participated in one before, but I thought that it was perhaps worth making a contribution on this occasion, for a variety of reasons—*[Interruption.]* If my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) bothered to listen, he would discover why I am making this speech. I shall listen to his speech without the discourtesy of interrupting him.

What clearly emerges is that the Government want the Bill to go through. Every Government wants its legislation to go through. Every Opposition express their anger at the contempt with which the House is being treated and the contempt with which local government is being treated and always accuse the Government of flagrantly abusing the processes of democracy.

It is easy to make the sort of speech that the hon. Member for Copeland made. He merely has to look back at speeches made by hon. Members from both sides of the Chamber during the past 20 years, changing the quotations, the odd word and the title of the Bill. In that way he can make his speech without any preparation. He adapts the words of his predecessors and the Government spokesman does the same. The tragedy is that none of the speeches will alter a single vote when it comes to the Division.

Mr. Budgen: Does my hon. Friend appreciate that in the whole of the period between 1945 and 1951, when the House was considering the most major social changes, there were only three guillotine motions, and that in 1988 there were 13? Does not my hon. Friend think that at the very least he should address the allegation that the Government have got into the habit of bashing their legislation through under the guillotine?

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: Some of us were elected to carry through legislation detailed in election addresses, and I propose to continue to do that. As for the other point that my hon. Friend made, that is such a hoary chestnut that it has been answered over and over again and I do not propose to waste the time of the House repeating ad nauseam the arguments which, if he had been present, he would have heard on previous occasions.

The purpose of the motion is, as my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said, to give enough time to discuss each clause sensibly. Let me now say why I decided to speak in the debate. My first experience of participating in a guillotined debate was when I was a junior Minister with responsibility for housing in 1979-80 when we put through the right-to-buy legislation. We sat afternoon and night, ploughing on, wasting time on early clauses until the macho characteristics of the Opposition had been sufficiently satisfied and the Government business managers had been sufficiently satisfied to table a guillotine motion. The trouble was that much of the argument was useless because it was addressed to unimportant clauses and many of the important clauses were not properly dealt with. That was not the way to proceed.

Timetable motions always lead the Opposition to claim that not enough time has been given. Let me draw the attention of the House to the report of the Select Committee on Procedure which was published on 23 April 1985. On page 25, it says:

"Timetables on controversial bills"—

no one would argue that this is not a controversial bill—

"should be introduced much earlier than at present. To this end there should be a Legislative Business Committee . . . of thirteen Members appointed by the Committee of Selection".

It goes on to say that that Committee

"should consider all Government bills committed to a Standing Committee. If it considers that a Bill is likely to require more than twenty-five hours in standing committee"—

I guess that everyone thinks that—

"the LBC should recommend a maximum number of hours for consideration of the Bill by the standing committee."

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has recommended a minimum, not a maximum, number of hours. It goes on to say:

"Such recommendations . . . should be implemented without debate."

That report was carried by eight votes to one with the support of Labour, Liberal and Conservative Members. That is the point that should be addressed. I am speaking of the considered view of the Procedure Committee, not some decision made by a fly-by-night business managers' Committee. The Procedure Committee is a very distinguished body.

Mr. Wilkinson: No one is casting aspersions on the Procedure Committee, or disputing its merits; I am sure that it was both distinguished and wise. None the less, we must conduct our affairs according to the procedures that are currently in place.

Furthermore—if we are to deal with hypothetical examples—it could equally be said that a pre-legislative Select Committee should be established to take evidence from experts. My hon. Friend's remarks derive from a recommendation based on the proposition that a

[Mr. Wilkinson]

pre-legislative Committee should decide how much time should be allocated. No such consensus is involved in our procedure, however; we must decide on the merits of the motion that we are debating.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: The Leader of the House has read the Procedure Committee's report, and has decided that this is how we should proceed. I remind the House that among the members of that Committee was the right hon. J. Enoch Powell, who gave his approval—and there was no stauncher defender of the rights of Parliament. My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) is another great expert on these matters. Such people will not be bludgeoned into presenting foolish proposals.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): The hon. Gentleman misses the vital point that the Select Committee is composed of Members of all parties. This pig's ear of a motion has been decided by hon. Members on only one side of the House—perhaps by only one or two people. That is a negation of our responsibility to decide, as a House, what the House should do. It should not be a case of the Secretary of State's deciding what the Opposition should do. It is one thing for a special Committee, perhaps a Select Committee, to make a judgment; it is another for a motion such as this to be rammed down our throats.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: The hon. Gentleman puts his case very reasonably, but I cannot agree. If the Procedure Committee, having received masses of evidence, weighed that evidence and reached a conclusion with the support of all parties in the House, says that a maximum number of hours should be laid down, and my right hon. Friend proposes a minimum number, it is clear that he has gone beyond what the Committee proposed. I think that that is more than reasonable.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): The hon. Gentleman has omitted a vital point. He has not told us what happened when the House received the report from that—as he described it—distinguished Committee. What did the House do about it?

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: Alas, like so many Select Committee reports, it was not adopted. Long ago, I served on that Committee. It produces extremely good reports, but, unfortunately, they are not always given debating time, and they are not always accepted. I hope that, when the House accepts the motion later tonight, a precedent will be set.

Let me be frank. I should like all legislation to be timetabled. That was hinted at in a review of legislation presented a long time ago by Sir David Renton, which was warmly supported.

Mr. Budgen: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: I promise that I shall do so when I finish this passage; I would not dream of not giving way to my hon. Friend.

There is no point in the House deciding that it will examine the hours during which it sits and the conditions in which it works if it does not intend to reform the structure of legislation. That is why I hope that the passing of the motion will create a precedent. It will affect both sides of the House. Governments become the Opposition and the Opposition become the Government. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, Hear."] Of course. I am looking ahead to the year 2000. On this occasion, though, I am trying not to be too partisan; it is too important an issue. We must try to ensure that the House is given sufficient time to consider legislation so that all the clauses can be considered properly.

Mr. Budgen: Does my hon. Friend agree that respect for the authority of the law arises not because the Government have bashed legislation through but because that legislation has been subjected to the full procedure then in force, so that by the time it has been considered each and every one of us can be said to have given our consent to it? The danger when dealing with legislation of this sort, which has been the subject of contempt and non-collection, is that those who pay reluctantly may feel that the legislation that comes out of this truncated procedure has not been accorded the proper majesty of the procedure and that in some way it can be treated with contempt, as though it were lesser law.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: It is a pity that my hon. Friend prejudices his case by using the words "bashed through." They are not words that his predecessor would have used. Moreover, I do not believe that what he has said is relevant to the debate. The mere fact of having three times the amount of time to consider the legislation would not necessarily make it any better. We might hear more speeches from my hon. Friend, but the legislation would not necessarily be improved in any way. Therefore, the House would be well advised to pass the motion. We know from the start exactly when each clause will be given time and we shall be able to decide how much time we want to spend on individual clauses.

I have tried to get away from the usual quoting of five guillotines in one night and X number of guillotines in 1945. That is not the point. The point is whether this is the way to space out the legislation, giving sufficient time for consideration of each clause. What we do not want to do, as so often happens, is to find that 10, 20 or 30 clauses have to go through on the nod because the knife has come down and that we have to leave it to the other place to do our work for us. By this means we shall do our work in a more efficient way than we have done up to now.

11.42 pm

Mr. David Bellotti (Eastbourne): At the beginning of the speech of the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg), I thought that the Government had written his script, but as he proceeded I realised that even the Government could not have written it for him.

After listening to the debate, it seems to me that the Government are in a very large hole which they continue to dig. There has been no consultation on the timetable with the Opposition parties. They may have wished to suggest how the Government should proceed. No Opposition Member likes the council tax, but we dislike the poll tax, too, and we are only too willing to help the Government get rid of it at the very first opportunity. However, having introduced the poll tax and inflicted such suffering on the people of this country, the Government

are only too pleased to grab at the first thing they see in an effort to get themselves off the poll tax hook as quickly as possible.

The proposed timetable is absolutely crazy for the size of the task. Local government finance is one of the most complex issues that the House will ever have to debate. Although we shall have 75 hours plus—depending on the time that some of the sittings finish—the proceedings will have to be concluded in just two weeks and two days. There will be little time for reflection between one Committee sitting and the next. There will be little time to consider something that is very important, such as whether a particular clause that was considered at the previous sitting will have an effect on following clauses.

Why are the Government rushing the Bill through in such a way? If the council tax has merit, surely they will want to persuade hon. Members and the general public that it is worth looking forward to. But no, the reverse is true. This must be a deliberate act by the Government because they do not want people outside to realise what the tax will be like for them.

Conservative Back-Benchers have shown their dislike for the council tax in the debate on Second Reading. If they showed such dislike at that stage, clearly there will be considerable disputes in Committee and even more disagreement when the general public learn about the tax. That is why the Government have to rush the Bill through before too many people realise what the tax will be like.

The rush also displays the Government's attitude towards local government. I was first elected to a district council in 1979—a very significant year. Every year since then the Government have attacked what that local authority, on which I sat for 12 years, has tried to do, whether it be the delivery of services, or raising the resources to pay for them. The Government have centralised control and in some cases they have inflicted a vindictiveness which is not merely unwelcome but which stops the local authorities providing some of those services.

Central Government should be working in partnership with local government. The Bill should be discussed until local government reaches the consensus that it also believes that local taxation is the right method to pay for the services that they and not the House have to deliver.

When one considers the costs that the Government are prepared to allocate to set up the council tax, all is revealed. They will meet only three quarters of the cost, in the same year that local government will continue to lose millions of pounds of poll tax which they cannot collect as a result of action by the same Government. Not only will millions of pounds be lost, but millions of people will lose out under the council tax because the charges will be greater for them than they were under the poll tax.

The Government have already got many of their sums wrong. They have over-estimated the value of properties and, as a result, the tax will go up. The Government still have not answered some questions to the satisfaction of the House—including some Conservative as well as Opposition Members. For example, if they are going to exempt the majority of students and those on income support from 1993, cannot they exempt everyone from the 20 per cent. of the poll tax that they have to pay from 1992? That could be provided for in a clause in the Bill. We could pass it with the timetabled Bill and we could stop some of the suffering. A number of right hon. and hon. Friends have suggested that during the past two days of debate, but we have heard nothing from the Government about it.

It will be necessary carefully to study some of the clauses in the 163 pages of the Bill. The Government believe that students will be exempt, but there is a grey area. What happens if some students live in a property with some working adults? The Government have not answered that question, so we shall need to debate it and table amendments.

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. Michael Portillo): I provided the answers.

Mr. Bellotti: I was here for the winding-up speeches and I am not satisfied with the answers. We shall have to consider the matter carefully in Committee and there may be a case for some amendments.

Another grey area is the right of entry to property. It cannot be right that the House could pass a law that would permit estate agents to enter homes at 24 hours' notice to ascertain what they are like inside. That right is in the Bill. There need to be more safeguards and the 24 hours' notice needs to be extended. Is it right that banks, building societies and other institutions should be required, with 21 days' notice, to give information about valuation of properties? The contract between an individual and a bank or building society will be deviated from because the Government could require that information to be given to a valuation officer. Many aspects of the Bill will require serious consideration in Committee and the timetable motion does not provide the time necessary.

Dr. Norman A Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Does not the timetable motion simply make plain the Government's contempt for this place? At a moment when there is growing uncertainty about the power of this place vis-à-vis central institutions of the European Community, the Government make matters worse by treating the House so disgracefully.

Mr. Bellotti: The hon. Gentleman makes a telling point. The Government want to centralise decision-making and keep power here at Westminster. They do not want local authorities to have powers to raise funds or to deliver services. That is the crux of the Bill and all the local government legislation that the Government have introduced since 1979.

There is another reason why the motion is so necessary and it becomes clear when one looks at how the council tax will affect individuals. I shall give one example, although there are dozens. Hon. Members will understand why I choose West Oxfordshire. Under the poll tax two people there pay £481, but under the council tax that sum will increase to over £500. In the south-east, in particular in Eastbourne and Sussex, there are dozens of such examples. The majority of people will be worse off under the council tax.

Obviously, the Government are trying to rush the Bill through Parliament as quickly as they can, hoping to attract as little attention as possible, and to get the general election over with in the hope of being returned. They are in for a shock. People are waking up. After the poll tax fiasco, they will look carefully at the council tax. They will not allow it to pass as they did the poll tax.

The Government had other opportunities that they could have taken, but they turned their face against them.

[Mr. Bellotti]

As an hon. Member said earlier, this is another missed opportunity for local government finance. The Government made great play of accountability, but local government can be made accountable in other ways—not to the House, but to the people who elect them to deliver services. There should be and is no need to cap a local authority. One could introduce a fair voting system. Whatever system we have, councillors should be accountable to their local electorate, not to this place.

I am disappointed that the Government have not yet seriously considered the one tax that has been proved to work in other European countries and the north Americas, and that is a local income tax. No one can dispute that it is easy to collect. It is cheap to administer—certainly cheaper than the rates, the poll tax or the council tax. We will not have an opportunity to debate that in Committee, so it is right to draw attention to it now. Above all, to use a phrase which the Government, Opposition and general public have used many times, a local income tax is certainly related to the ability to pay. It, too, could be in place by April 1993—the exact timetable that the Government have for the council tax.

The Leader of the House began by saying that the proposals were carefully thought through. I cannot understand how he can stand at the Dispatch Box and say that when, clearly, they have been rushed. He said that the proposals were balanced, but they are unfair. People will find it an unfair tax. The proposals are certainly not well thought out. The Leader of the House said that they were. Does that mean that there will be no Government amendments in Committee? That would be interesting.

The Bill and the guillotine come from a Government who are on their last legs. With the poll tax the Government shot themselves in the stomach. With the council tax they will shoot themselves in the head.

11.54 pm

Mr. John Biffen (Shropshire, North): I do not believe that the House, confronted by a Bill of this complexity and contentiousness, can be altogether happy about the arrangements for its consideration in Committee. However, I know that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House is operating under constraints and that he feels that those arrangements represent the best way to proceed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) demonstrated characteristic generosity in trying to elevate the nature of the debate into a consideration of timetabling generally. We know that procedural reform is now in vogue and that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has a strong disposition towards general and automatic timetabling. It is a disposition with which I wholly agree.

On this occasion the House is entitled, given the nature of the automatic timetable, to stop for a moment and to put a question mark against whether the organisation of automatic timetabling should be within the gift of the Whips' Office—the usual channels, that immaculate organisation whose skill and credibility is admired by all —or whether the House, perhaps in a mood of self-survival——

Dr. Godman: Generosity.

Mr. Biffen: It depends on how one judges such things. Would the House seek to be the authority for such automatic timetabling?

This evening the usual channels, through my right hon. Friend, are the authors of the automatic timetable. I accept that, but the House would be well advised to suspend judgment on whether that authority should lie with the usual channels or, more generally, with the House.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) mentioned what was said on this subject in the excellent report produced by my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) and his colleagues. The words of *Hansard* speak little, but the Division lists say it all: they are padded with payroll. The House may well wonder why. Were all the Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State turned into constitutional enthusiasts? I suggest that the usual channels have a strong interest in seeing that they control this important piece of procedure. That may be what the House will accept, but let the House be fully aware of the nature of the decision.

11.57 pm

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): I am glad to have the chance to follow the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen), whom I certainly regard as far and away the most successful Leader of the House in all my time here. It was following the right hon. Gentleman's removal from that high post that the Government fell apart. I accept that it has taken a few years for the process to be completed, but everyone who studies the history books will be able to trace the downfall of the Thatcher Government—as some may still call it —to the time when she was foolish enough to remove the right hon. Gentleman from the duties that he was carrying out so successfully.

Because I have such regard for the right hon. Gentleman, it makes me all the more discontented to disagree with him about the proposition of permanent or automatic timetables. Of course, if such a procedure were adopted by the House it would be better to have it subject to agreement between the usual channels than merely on the diktat of the Government. That would be an improvement. Even so, there is a great deal to be said against timetable motions. I have attended more debates on these matters than any other hon. Member and I vividly recall many of them. But on none of those occasions did I put the case in the way that the Leader of the House put his case tonight, making it all the more necessary for us to oppose him now.

I never put the case for a timetable motion on the ground that we should make it a permanent feature of our parliamentary procedures. I took that view for many good reasons, partly because I always believed that it would play far too much into the hands of the Government. All Governments like to have the opportunity of introducing guillotines at certain times, but that desire should be resisted for the good reasons put forward by the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen). That is why we should be cautious about proceeding in the way proposed by the Leader of the House.

Although I listened with interest to the case adduced by the hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), the Chairman of the Procedure Committee which has made the recommendations, I still believe that the House would

be making a great mistake to accept the motion, for it would add to the automatic nature, as it were, of debates and would play into the hands of the Government of the day, thereby strengthening their position over that of the House.

Let us not forget the experience of the past 10 years, during which time we have had more experience of guillotine motions than in the whole of the previous history of Parliament. The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West contrasted that with what was done by the great reforming Government of 1945, who put through the House a huge weight of measures. That Government were able to carry through virtually all that legislation with hardly any resort to guillotine motions.

It was, of course, more difficult in the 1970s, when Governments did not have majorities of that nature. Such circumstances add to the temptation on Government, and sometimes the temptation must be accepted. But progressively more guillotines have been introduced. They have also been introduced earlier on measures and Ministers have come forward, as though it is a matter of no significance, to recommend new guillotine procedures, some in novel circumstances. That poses a great danger to the House.

The right hon. Gentleman made the weakest speech in favour of a guillotine motion that I have ever heard from a Leader of the House and that is saying something. He really had no case—*[Interruption.]* I repeat a proposition that I made to a previous Leader of the House. If hon. Members would like to debate the five guillotine motions that I introduced, I should be happy, if the Leader of the House was prepared to give us time, to debate those matters. Hon. Members would then see what good measures I introduced and with what democratic reticence I did it, which is more than the Leader of the House can claim for the way he adduced his case tonight. At the time when those measures were being skilfully and carefully introduced, we were also carrying through a whole range of highly necessary reforming legislation. Had the right hon. Gentleman followed that example, he might have put forward a better case tonight.

Mr. Douglas: Will the right hon. Gentleman reconsider the generosity he bestowed on the former Leader of the House, the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen), who moved the guillotine motion on the original poll tax measure applying to Scotland? Some of the strictures of the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North should, perhaps, be considered again.

Mr. Foot: I did not know that the right hon. Gentleman had that black mark on his past, and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for pointing it out. It shows that none of us is perfect, not even the right hon. Gentleman. I hope that it will be a lesson to him in future. It is a reason not for more guillotines, but for fewer.

The truth of the matter was expressed by the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd), who has spoken so well on such questions in recent years and protested each time the Government resorted to fresh guillotine motions. He said that, together with the Bill, the Government had presented

"the most extraordinary guillotine that has ever been introduced into the House"—[*Official Report*, 11 November 1991; Vol. 198, c. 858.]

That is a perfectly good description, especially as this is not just a procedural matter. How the House conducts its affairs, particularly on questions affecting taxation of our constituents, is of great importance.

The Government have introduced a tax that has not been a triumphant success. I do not wish to embarrass the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo), who thought that the poll tax was a winner. He is an extremely agile performer. Indeed, he needs to have that agility to defend such contradictory positions on subsequent occasions and it is noble of him to come along tonight and not insist that his leader, the Secretary of State for the Environment, who called it the "Tory tax", should be present. It is a disgrace that the Minister responsible for the Bill is not present for such an important guillotine motion. I am sure that, when the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North was Leader of the House and presented a guillotine motion, he always sought to ensure that the Minister responsible was present. I cannot recall an occasion since I have been in Parliament when a Minister sent along an underling, however agile and accomplished he may be. The hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate is indeed accomplished in defending all those propositions.

It is an additional insult to the House that not only has a motion been introduced in extraordinary circumstances, but it has been brought in to deal with a tax that will affect all our constituents. People throughout the country will ask what hon. Members had to say on each clause. In the poll tax debates we were told, "Of course the country is in favour of it. The arguments are overwhelming. We'll push it through under the guillotine." My hon. Friends and I warned the Government what would happen if they tried to push through legislation in that fashion, but they would not listen. They said that they knew best and had to get their legislation speedily on to the statute book to ensure that local authorities would have the maximum time to deal with it. Now, they have had to eat their words on every aspect of that legislation.

One would think that a Government responsible for one of the worst Acts of Parliament ever introduced in the history of Parliament, and having introduced it so recently, would, in trying to remedy the situation, at least invite both sides of the House to give their views on the subject. Several Conservative Members have shown that they know much more about the Bill than does the Secretary of State, who does not even dare to come to the House and deal with the questions himself.

This is a unique case because the Leader of the House implies that, if he gets away with the motion this time, the Government will introduce more and more such motions. Although there will be few opportunities for the Government to do so, I hope that no future Government will agree to the permanent timetabling of motions.

Such a system would reduce a power of Back Benchers to oppose the Executive and it would be wrong for us to embark on it. Therefore, I hope that all Members, not just Opposition Members, will throw out this motion. The Leader of the House could make a great contribution if he were to say that, having listened to the debate, he had decided to withdraw the provision on his own authority without giving a fig for what the Cabinet might tell him tomorrow morning.

12.10 am

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): It is always great fun to follow the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), particularly when he uses such a charming argument that every guillotine motion moved by the socialist Government is marvellously democratic, and every such motion moved by the Tory Government is to be condemned and thought to be absolutely useless. The right hon. Gentleman suggested that there was no need to have guillotine motions in 1945 when the Labour Government were proposing a massive legislative programme. In those times, the House sat more frequently until 9 am, having sat all night, than at any other time in the history of the House this century. It is an attempt to overcome such problems that Governments of different parties have moved towards using timetable motions in order to enact legislation.

Mr. Budgen: Does not my hon. Friend agree that such sittings impose a good discipline on the House, particularly from a Tory viewpoint? We used to believe that it would be good to have less legislation. If legislation is inconvenient for the House of Commons, there may be less of it and it may be better considered.

Sir Peter Emery: The interesting fact is that the amount of Government legislation has decreased during the past four parliamentary Sessions—we are working towards exactly what my hon. Friend was urging. That is not a bad proposal for all of us to accept.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the Government who were elected on the claim of taking legislation from people's backs has produced much more delegated legislation than the previous Labour Government? While the Conservative Government may have taken business off the Floor of the House, they have handed it to Ministers to produce orders and regulations which, as the hon. Gentleman knows, receive very little scrutiny.

Sir Peter Emery: The hon. Gentleman knows that he and I would agree absolutely that the amount of delegated legislation from all Governments has greatly increased over the years and, I believe, should be decreased.

It is of interest to consider which issues the House should address when deciding whether to proceed with a timetable motion. Whether or not we like it, there has been a major move among Members towards dealing with legislation in a sensible manner and using timetable motions. Such a movement never existed when I entered the House in the late 1950s. John Silkin, a former Labour party Chief Whip, told the Procedure Committee that he had been massively against any timetable motion when he took the post, but was persuaded absolutely and he gave evidence to the Committee that the best way to deal with legislation was to move more and more towards sensible timetabling.

I take the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) about the danger of leaving timetabling only in Government hands. He will know that, after the Government turned out a greater number of Ministers, Parliamentary Private Secretaries and Whips to defeat the Procedure Committee's recommendations on a one-line Whip than on any three-line Whip that Session, the Procedure Committee reconsidered how to deal with the matter.

It was then recommended that each Committee should nominate at the time of selection a number of Members who if necessary could act as a sub-Committee and who would decide after 12½ hours whether there was any need to appoint a date when the Bill should be ordered out of that Committee. If they decided that the Bill was proceeding normally, no action was to be taken. If it was thought, however, that there was undue delay, a date was to be stipulated. If after another 12½ it was still seen that the Bill was not proceeding sensibly, the timetable was to be put into operation by the Members considering the Bill, to ensure that every clause of the Bill was considered before it was reported. That would have put the power in the hands of the Committee itself, and it would be very much better than leaving the matter in the hands of Government—but the system does not obtain now, which is why this motion has been tabled.

Mr. Maxton: At long last the hon. Gentleman has got to the point. His speech so far would have been fine had we been discussing the procedures of the House and a Select Committee report on them—but tonight we are debating a specific motion on a specific piece of legislation which the Government are railroading through the House.

Sir Peter Emery: That is precisely because the Procedure Committee's recommendation was not implemented. Now the Government have to decide when the legislation should be on the statute book to allow local authorities to operate it properly. Having made that decision, it is right that they should try to ensure that every part of the Bill is discussed by the date that they have set.

Do the Opposition really suggest that it makes sense to spend the first 12 or 15 sittings debating clauses 1 to 5, followed by a guillotine and then six or seven sittings on the whole of the rest of the Bill? That is how guillotines have worked in the past. It is bad for legislation, bad for procedure and bad for the House.

Mr. Wilkinson: If that happened, it would not necessarily be a bad thing, certainly in the case of this Bill. In most legislation, the early clauses are the most important, and subsequent clauses are virtually consequential. Clause 5, on banding, is crucial to the interests of my constituents, and it merits much more time than is allowed for it in this motion.

Sir Peter Emery: I can understand my hon. Friend's point, but four days of debate, three of them to run to any hour, have been allowed for the sort of debate that he wants.

Mr. Budgen: Long debates on the earlier stages of legislation are usually held in the knowledge that there will be a guillotine. If there were no anticipation that the Government were going to resort to the guillotine, it would be in the interests of the whole Committee to consider the parts of a Bill that were not contentious quickly and then to concentrate on the politically sensitive issues, on which the Government would have to make concessions from time to time. It is because Governments have so frequently recently resorted to guillotines that they have distorted and corrupted the way in which Committees consider Bills.

Sir Peter Emery: I do not accept my hon. Friend's judgment. In a perfect world what he suggests may be the case, but this is not a perfect world. In practice, most of the

time before a guillotine is spent on a few clauses because the Opposition, in trying to prove their virility, stage a long debate at the beginning of the Bill to try to force the Government to impose the guillotine. It was the same when we were in opposition.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Peter Emery: I should like to deal with one intervention before I accept another.

After the imposition of the guillotine the rest of the Bill frequently goes to the House of Lords with major parts of it not debated. That cannot be right.

Mrs. Fyfe: When did the hon. Gentleman last serve on a Standing Committee?

Sir Peter Emery: In the year before last.

Having decided when the Bill should be ordered out of Committee, the Government will try to ensure that every part of it can be properly debated. The Opposition might want to spend more time on the Bill, but do they not want every part of the Bill to be debated? If they do, and if the Government want the Bill to leave the Committee by a set date, the guillotine is justified.

It is much better to have the guillotine at the start of the Bill than to introduce it after eight or 10 sittings, causing the remainder of the Bill to be rushed through. Such a rush would be most unsatisfactory for the Opposition and for organisations which wish to have their case presented by the Opposition. I am not necessarily in favour of a guillotine on the Bill, but as there is no better way it is preferable to introduce it now than to leave it until later.

12.22 am

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): The Chairman of the Procedure Committee, the hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), was somewhat unconvincing. If he had said that, as a matter of principle and policy, we should make the changes that he advocated rather than saying that we should make them in a pragmatic and opportunistic way on a specific issue, we might have taken a different view.

The House is being treated almost with contempt because of what the Government see as necessary in terms of their election date strategy. The legislation has nothing to do with the role of local government in a democratic society, with the provision of vital local services or with the contribution of local people. It is being hurried through because of the Government's political difficulties. That is not the best way to approach important procedural matters.

Shortly before I came to the House in 1982 I was active in local government. I remember sitting in the Visitors' Box and listening to a debate on the rate support grant settlement for Scotland, and being appalled that an order on something that affected every house, family and ratepayer in the land was rushed through in an hour and a half, and decided on the basis of the payroll vote.

If I was appalled then, I am even more appalled tonight. The Government are attempting to railroad through a measure that does not take on board the spectacular failure of their last attempt to deal with local government finance—the poll tax. They might have had the modesty, before coming to the House with a Bill such as this, to ask whether the system set out in it will work. I humbly suggest that it will not. Rushed through as it was, the poll tax had immense repercussions that included not just the removal of the Prime Minister but difficulties in one local authority after the other so that dedicated people of all political parties had to spend their time not as they wanted, serving their electorate in committees and departments, but in coping with the agonies of an undemocratic system that could not be administered, does not work and has failed to collect £370 million over the past two years. Now we are asked by the Government who introduced that system to accept a banding arrangement that is based on hostages to fortune and is clearly aimed at helping the better-off. Ability to pay has been forgotten.

When the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) rebuked the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen), he said that both stood on the same election manifesto, and implied that that meant that they were both committed to the poll tax. If that is so, and if the Government are changing a major part of their platform at the last general election, the people of Britain should be asked for their opinion.

The Government are trying to push through a major policy change that does not take on board, as every councillor in the land would be entitled to argue, the importance of relating local government finance with local government structure. In Scotland, the Secretary of State refuses to appoint a commission and to involve himself in real consultations, although he is a party to these changes. In the debates on earlier major changes—in England with the benefit of the Maude report, in Scotland with the Wheatley report, and there was also the Layfield committee, to which I gave evidence—there was an attempt to tie together the two issues of finance and structure. However, that is not being done in the proposals in the Bill.

I was glad that the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) spoke in the debate. For all his faults, he attempted to be a genuine leader of all the House. I am sorry that the Leader of the House is temporarily absent and cannot hear me say that he would do well to emulate the pattern set by the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North.

He would have given more thought to these issues. He would have involved himself in more consultation with hon. Members on both sides of the House. Bearing in mind that the Leader of the House should serve right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House, I do not believe that the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North would have made the personal attack on my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Dr. Kumar) that was made by the Leader of the House last week. Clearly the right hon. Gentleman felt that it was necessary to do so, but the House is not being well served by him. If it were, the proposals that are before us would not be debated in this way.

My right hon. and hon. Friends have rightly put up a fight for local democracy. They have reminded the House of the importance of the relationship between itself and local government. It is crucial that we retain good local services, but the best people to decide how good or how bad their local services, should be are local electorates. The Government's further attempt at centralising these matters is unacceptable. Local authorities are facing enough problems as it is. There has been the colossal problem of coping with the poll tax, along with the problems of warrant sales, debtors' legislation and all that has arisen from the Government's policies.

[Mr. Tom Clarke]

Many right hon. and hon. Members will have shared my experiences in their surgeries. I find that one of the main issues is safety on the streets—law and order. Some of my colleagues and I met the new chief constable of Strathclyde, who made it plain that the service is grossly undermanned. How can Coatbridge, a town of 50,000 people in my constituency, be serviced by six policemen for an entire weekend?

The Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart) *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: If the Minister wishes to intervene, I shall be happy to give way.

Mr. Stewart: Will the hon. Gentleman explain why Strathclyde regional council has consistently employed a policy of keeping its police force below the Scottish Office authorised establishment, a policy that is followed by no other regional council in Scotland, including all the other Labour-held regional councils?

Mr. Clarke: I thought that the hon. Gentleman would advance that argument and so I was delighted to allow him to intervene to enable him to do so. Strathclyde regional council gave the answer to the chief constable. If the Minister gives a little of his time to talking to the chief constable, as my colleagues and I did——

Mr. Stewart: I have done that.

Mr. Clarke: If he does so, first, he will learn that Strathclyde represents half of Scotland, and inevitably has greater difficulties than the smaller regions, and, secondly, he will understand that it has to match the resources that are made available from the Scottish Office. If the Government are hammering Strathclyde day after day on these issues, the problems will not disappear.

If the Minister is lucky enough to be re-elected, he will find himself on the Opposition Benches. He knows, however, as he sits on the Government Front Bench, that the revenue allocation for the policing of the whole of Scotland this year was £9 million, half of which was taken up not by Strathclyde—the largest authority that represents half of Scotland—but by Dumfries and Galloway. That arose because of the revenue consequences of capital expenditure. Let us not pretend that the Minister, the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), can blame Strathclyde for its problems and for those of other parts of the country. Is it suggested that the Government can implement their health service policy, including the rundown of the mental health sector in greater Glasgow, without causing problems for the social work department in greater Glasgow and the housing departments in the 19 districts?

In a case in Hamilton today, the sheriff very reluctantly sent a man with mental health problems to prison for two years, and he made it clear that it was because he had nowhere else to send him. That is community care in Strathclyde. The Government time after time make it difficult for local authorities by reducing rate support grant and housing support grant, by introducing legislation with a guillotine, by changing social security arrangements, by being mean-minded over housing benefits and so on, and the consequence is the sort of case that occurred in Hamilton today.

Lord Pym had a point when he said that a landslide victory could be abused. A large number of hon. Members may support the Government tonight, but they will be unhappy. To be fair, some of them have made that clear, including the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen). They will be even more unhappy in a few months when the public reach their conclusions. Even more important than that, if we believe in parliamentary democracy, in a positive role for local government and for duly elected local councillors, and if we see a future in Europe—whatever the arguments—it cannot be right that the Government again and again should bully local authorities into taking the sorts of decision that are clearly as unacceptable to them as they are to the most vulnerable of their electorate.

What is happening tonight is another exercise in the arrogance of intellect and the brutality of power. Because that is so unhealthy, the British people will reject it, and they will do so before very long.

12.36 am

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): I shall not detain the House in arguing about the proposals that were put forward by the Select Committee on Procedure and then rejected by the House. I shall make just one observation about that. If those proposals had been approved by the House, they would have given much greater power to the Government of the day, and there is no doubt that the House would have balanced that granting of greater power in one direction by checks and balances in other directions. My right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) had an idea of how that greater power might be checked.

Many of my right hon. and hon. Friends will be uncomfortable if they support the guillotine motion tonight. I shall offer a few words on two points, perhaps to increase their discomfort. Many of my right hon. and hon. Friends must feel some embarrassment about their personal position on what is now openly described as the poll tax. It is now said by those who give guidance to the press that there was no genuine majority for the poll tax in the Cabinet. It is also said that there would have been no genuine majority if there had been a free vote in the House. I do not know whether that is so. However, while the people who guide the media are offering those words out of the corners of their mouths, they might reflect that it would be good if there were at least open discussion in the House of the substitute for the poll tax.

That is particularly important because of the way in which the public have scandalously disregarded the law on the collection of the poll tax. That is not a small matter. I may speak as a pompous lawyer, but the disregard of the law that has occurred in relation to the poll tax is a serious matter. Surely respect for the law involves the belief in the public as a whole that the procedures of law-making have been meticulously followed. If not, there is a danger that the law will be seen as "Major's" law, "Heseltine's" law or "Thatcher's" law and will not have the authority that it should have as emanating from Parliament, after a period of discussion, consultation, argument and voting upon all the issues. That must be important on this tax.

The more one looks at the way in which my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House gave what was a rather unfortunately vague answer when he was asked about the time lapse between the end of the Committee stage and the

Report stage, the more it becomes obvious, does it not, that those who will have to enforce the tax will not feel that they have been properly involved in the legislative procedure?

Who are the people who will be involved in enforcing the tax? They will be, for instance, police officers. We hear that at present the police are telling the magistrates courts that they are sorry but they do not have time to chase up poll tax defaulters. That is an unfortunate attitude for the police to take.

If there is no proper period of consultation, how, for instance, will the land and house agents feel—those in the private sector who will be involved in the assessment of the bands? How will the councillors feel if they have not been properly consulted? Shall we just have some response from the various associations of metropolitan authorities, the umbrella organisations, without any proper consultation?

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): My hon. Friend has expressed concern that some of his colleagues may feel some discomfort later this evening. We should be concerned if my hon. Friend were to suffer any discomfort later this evening. Therefore, so that we know that he will not be suffering such discomfort, perhaps he would like to take this opportunity to confirm to the House that he only voted for the poll tax reluctantly, with his arm twisted firmly behind his back, and that when the timetable motion for the poll tax was tabled, or any such motions, he voted against those as well.

Mr. Budgen: I voted for the timetable motion on the poll tax and, of course, every hon. Member compromises to some extent on those measures which they support and those which they oppose. I am not pretending for a moment that my record of fearlessly and carefully considering every piece of legislation that comes before the House is better than that of anybody else. But my point is that the performance of the Conservative party generally in relation to the poll tax is not one of which most of us are frightfully proud and most of us who feel slightly embarrassed by it all would say that at the very least on this second attempt we might try to consider it rather better.

As most Conservative Members have a certain amount of scepticism of Governments and of the legislative procedure, we take the view that we few prejudiced party politicians do not encompass the wisdom of the nation. It is not a bad plan to have at any rate a few of the views of the ordinary people who will be paying the tax and of the professional people who may be enforcing it, whether they be estate agents, local government officers or councillors. Our embarrassment, surely, should make us slightly more respectful of other, different opinions.

Those of us who are Unionists are particularly anxious for the authority of this Parliament to be recognised in Scotland. We do not concede the argument that the Tories have no mandate to rule there; but the Tories, and the present Government, have a mandate only for such time as they follow the procedures of the House and are genuinely able to tell the people of Scotland, "The procedures of the House—which are rarely truncated—fully take into account your minority views, your support for Labour candidates and the fact that there are so few Conservative Members in Scotland." When we truncate those procedures, as we are doing tonight, we damage the rule of law and the authority of the present Conservative Government; and, in my view, we misbehave in a very short-sighted way.

Those splendid gentlemen who are saying, out of the corners of their mouths, that there never was much support for the poll tax are also saying that there is now a new spirit within the Government: a spirit of consensus, good manners, listening to others and not shouting them down. In other words, there is a general negation of both passion and rudeness. There is undoubtedly much to be said for consensus and politeness. Although I am not good at either myself, I fully recognise the advantages of that style of political leadership.

Surely, however, the high point of what I suppose even the Tory papers described as Thatcher triumphalism occurred in 1988—and 1988 marked an all-time high in the number of guillotine motions. There were no fewer than 13. As I have said, only three were needed to achieve the great socialist revolution that took place between 1945 and 1951.

If the current Administration wish to demonstrate that they have some concern for views with which they disagree, I suggest to the Prime Minister that that is not best achieved by means of, for instance, a well-publicised meeting with a leader of the homosexual community. It is best achieved through respect for the House of Commons; through tolerance of the boredom and inconvenience of debate; and through not regarding the legislative procedure as though it were a kind of factory.

Above all, we should demonstrate our wish to conciliate—and our understanding of different points of view—through a recognition that the proper following of the procedures of the House, unwillingness to truncate debate and the acceptance of passion and inconvenience can show that we truly accept that ours is a divergent society, in which many views exist and all must be respected.

12.48 am

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) said that he was not frightfully proud of the Government's record on the poll tax. I think that I have just learned what understatement really means.

The hon. Gentleman said that the Government's mandate in Scotland would be lost when they refused to follow the procedures of the House. He should appreciate that the Government are doing precisely that by not implementing Standing Orders and forming a Scottish Select Committee. In the hon. Gentleman's own language, the pass has already been sold.

This is a major measure that will affect every man, woman and child, because of the nature of local government services, and every local authority throughout the length and breadth of the land. Therefore, it is incredible that the Government advocate the minimum amount of discussion rather than the maximum amount of scrutiny of the measure. The last occasion when similar arguments were put forward about curtailing the debate on local government finance was when the Government introduced the poll tax. They got it wrong then; they have got it wrong now.

The Leader of the House described the Bill as fair, balanced and a carefully thought out approach, based on experience. Actual experience amounted to rushing

[Mr. Andrew Welsh]

through the poll tax legislation, which was an absolute disaster. The Government made a hash of it then by adopting these tactics. They are repeating the same mistakes now. The Leader of the House was clearly flustered and unable to explain the timetable and the Government's real reasons for acting in this fashion. With Christmas approaching, this measure is being rushed through the House as quickly as possible—the very opposite of cool, clear consideration of a fundamental measure that will affect everybody in the land.

Mr. Marlow: These are important issues and I am interested in what the hon. Gentleman says. How does he react to the fact that the legislation on the poll tax and the legislation on this Bill will probably take up about ten times as much parliamentary time as the legislation that comes out of Maastricht, which is probably 10 to a hundred times more important than these very important issues?

Mr. Welsh: This is a massively important issue that deserves the closest scrutiny. As a Scottish Member of Parliament, I find it ironic that important Scottish measures are lumped in here, at the back of what is basically an English Bill. It is intolerable and unacceptable that my country should be treated in this way by the House of Commons.

Mr. Maxton: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. I, too, find intolerable the way that Scotland is being treated, due to the fact that there is no separate Bill for Scotland. However, the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends opposed the poll tax on the basis of a non-payment campaign in Scotland. They withdrew from the non-payment campaign on the day that the Government announced that they would introduce the council tax. In other words, they withdrew their opposition to the poll tax on the basis of the council tax. I do not understand, therefore, why they oppose this measure.

Mr. Welsh: I can understand the hon. Gentleman's confusion, because his party is thoroughly confused on this issue and has backslided at every opportunity in carrying out the behest of a Tory Government. My party's stand has been absolutely clear. As a result of the campaign that we fought we not only defeated the poll tax but we brought the Government out. If the hon. Gentleman looks at his own party's record, he will find that it is not one of which he can be proud.

By means of the guillotine motion the Government seek to curtail debate and scrutiny as they throw their second attempt at local government finance reform at us. I want the poll tax to be abolished and thrown where it deserves to be—on the scrapheap of history—but its replacement has to be better scrutinised than this. Local government finance is to be fundamentally altered by the ridiculous procedure of a rushed guillotine timetable. The Government got it totally wrong last time. I have absolutely no confidence that they will not get it equally wrong this time.

The Government had no mandate to introduce the poll tax, and they have no mandate for this Bill or for the guillotine. The Scots have rejected the Conservatives in opinion polls and at elections, yet this new tax is to be imposed without proper discussion. This so-called listening Government seem to be amazingly deaf when it comes to by-elections, but the people of Scotland, and elsewhere in the United Kingdom, are telling the Government exactly how they feel about measures such as this.

I find it even more ludicrous that this situation should arise as the Government's power wanes at the tail end of a Parliament. They are determined to squeeze the last ounce out of their waning power and are frightened to face the people to get a new mandate. When that day arrives I am sure that they will not get a mandate.

If we allow this timetable to happen, it is not democracy in any shape or form; it is simply a large majority being forced through by a whipping system, irrespective of how the people feel.

This legislation is typical of the unrepresentative nature of the House when dealing with Scottish matters. Scottish clauses are being lumped on to legislation that is basically English, with minimal time for scrutiny. It is not good enough and it is certainly no way to run my country.

Past mistakes are being repeated and if the Government had any sense they would realise what they are doing. They are lumbering on without learning from what they have done. In Scotland they tried to change local government structure massively by altering it before they altered national Government. Sensible reconstruction of local authorities in Scotland can take place only once the national parliamentary situation has been sorted out.

Similarly, the Government got local government finance wrong with the poll tax. Now the self-same Tory Gadarene swine are rushing towards an unworkable council tax. The Government should have learnt. The poll tax was thrown through without proper scrutiny or discussion and the council tax is being treated in exactly the same way. In the case of the poll tax the result was that the Government put an immense burden on to local authorities, which could not cope with an unworkable, uncollectable and vastly unfair taxation system. I have no faith that the Government have learnt their lesson and will get it right this time. This is simply a Government panic. Here we go again—half baked, poorly scrutinised, guillotined legislation is being churned out against the wishes of the people.

Local authorities are reeling under the effects of the ghastly poll tax. They are telling the Government that the council tax is unworkable and badly conceived but, once again, they are not being heard. In spite of that, the tax will be speeded through Parliament and through the local authorities in the same pathetic way that gave us the poll tax fiasco.

When Scotland needs to be protected against ill-thought-out and totally inappropriate legislation, tonight's guillotine does entirely the opposite. If anything, it illustrates the need for a Scottish Parliament, where we could consider the real needs of our country in the required detail and produce appropriate and workable legislation. The House cannot do that.

This legislation is being produced by a House of Commons that is prepared to ignore its Standing Orders and will not set up a Select Committee for Scotland. The tax is perfect material for consideration by such a Committee, or surely we could send the Scottish clauses to the Scottish Grand Committee to be debated thoroughly and be given more time, or a Commission could consider

it. However, none of that is happening because of the Government's procedure which is producing minimum scrutiny of this legislation.

The only guillotine that counts is the one that will soon fall on the Government, when they are at last forced to meet the people, and to face up to their responsibilities and past actions at the next general election. Tonight's action —using Whips and their majority and stopping scrutiny —does not stop criticism, nor does it stop the Government from again making fundamental and costly mistakes. If they will not listen to us, perhaps they will listen to some of their Back Benchers, who are telling them where they are going wrong.

The amendment tabled by the Scottish National party was not selected but we are certainly against a council tax Bill which does not base the level of taxation on the fundamental principle of ability to pay, which perpetuates the bureaucratic expense and the complexities of the poll tax and which does not abolish the basic minimum 20 per cent. charge levied on the poorest and most vulnerable sections of society. The council tax continues that section of the law on diligence in Scotland that allows the continuance of warrant sales, which are abhorrent to modern democracy.

The Government are again making fundamental and unnecessary mistakes. The guillotine shows that in their dying days they are intent on not listening to the people, but the day of reckoning is fast approaching and I look forward to it.

I am

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Tonight the Leader of the House, whose arguments are normally replete with Scottish intellectual rigour, was unusually laid back, almost blasé, in his proposal of this guillotine motion. He said that the guillotine was a normal procedure and went on to adduce the argument that it was in line with the recommendations of the Select Committee on Procedure. The Government, by use of the payroll, voted down those recommendations. It would have been more appropriate for him to use that argument had he first tabled a motion and sought consensus across the House and our approval of those recommendations. Indeed, he departed from his usual good-humoured, earnest desire to please and his main intent seemed to be to get this embarrassing, awkward business out of the way as soon as possible.

I did not vote against the Second Reading of the Bill. After all, it is, if one dares use the metaphor, the flagship of this parliamentary Session. Moreover, the previous flagship, the poll tax, was launched with its torpedo tubes open. We do not want to repeat that performance. We need to learn from the mistake of the passage of the poll tax into legislation without appropriate consideration.

The Bill has 117 clauses and 14 schedules. I very much doubt whether they can be properly considered within the timetable laid down. The poll tax legislation had 19 days in Standing Committee. This Bill has but nine and it is certainly no less complicated. Indeed, experts on local government on both sides have said that local government finance is perhaps the most complicated subject that we have to address in the House of Commons. If it is so complicated, most of us who are neophytes or certainly relatively inexpert will need proper time to address the matter sensibly.

Mrs. Fyfe: The hon. Gentleman is right to point out that the poll tax legislation had about twice the length of time in Standing Committee as this Bill will have. Moreover, the Scottish Bill preceded it, so the Government had the opportunity of a learning curve, yet still they managed to make an unholy mess of it.

Mr. Wilkinson: The hon. Lady makes her arguments in her own way and they are relevant.

Not only are we to have but nine days in Standing Committee, but we are to have only two for Report and Third Reading. I take it also from the reluctance of the Leader of the House to spell out how much time there will be between Committee and Report that the period will be relatively short.

On Report those of us who were not members of the Standing Committee will have only a short time in which to deal with the serious issues raised in that Committee and, perhaps more significantly, with those that have been brought to our attention in the brief interval between the Committee stage and Report.

We are assured that the council tax will be fairer. I wonder whether people outside will consider it to be fairer if it has not been considered properly. Their experience with the poll tax was a painful one and that tax was not considered properly.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Might the explanation for the Government's haste simply be that they have no confidence that the House could ever improve a piece of legislation that comes from the draftsmen?

Mr. Wilkinson: I do not believe that to be the case. The real reason is that given by my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Leader of the House. I wish my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his team well with the Bill and the last thing that I want to do is to make their task more difficult. The reason for the haste is that the Government must allow sufficient time for the Bill to be implemented in 1 April 1993. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House says that that date is the first and last day for implementation—the alpha and the omega. I hope that it is not the dies irae for the British people.

I am not sure that the precedents are wholly reassuring. In the previous Session we had a guillotine on the Dangerous Dogs Bill—I acknowledge that it was before the Second Reading—and a guillotine on the Community Charges (General Reduction) Bill. Perhaps of more significance is the guillotine, again after Second Reading, that was placed on the Counter Inflation (Temporary Provisions) Bill—the incomes policy legislation—in the 1972-73 Session. That Bill proved fatal for the Administration of my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath). In the 1977-78 Session we had a post-Second Reading guillotine on the Wales and Scotland Bills, the devolution measures, which was fatal for the Administration of Lord Callaghan.

I hope that my right hon. Friends will think again. I was not seeking to be reactionary when I said that our old procedures have some merit. I argued in favour of front loading—for more time, which is the normal state of affairs—for the earlier clauses of the Bill even if we have to face a guillotine on the later clauses.

Clause 5, which relates to banding in England and Wales, and clause 74, which relates to banding in Scotland, are to be taken together with other clauses in two days. I

[Mr. Wilkinson]

know that the sittings may go late, but that does not necessarily mean that the difficult subject of banding and how to secure equity will be addressed sufficiently in the time available.

I know that my constituents, if they are in band E or above—that is nearly all of them—will pay more under the council tax than they do under the poll tax. It is proposed that clause 11 and the other discount provisions relating to single people living alone—perhaps retired people and single parents—shall be discussed in only two days. I also question whether that will prove sufficient time.

With the best will in the world I wish the measure success and hope that the council tax proves fair. No legislation could be riddled with more inconsistencies than the old poll tax and I appreciate that need for its abolition. But the guillotine which is proposed is a bad precedent for the House and I doubt whether such a tight timetable will give our constituents confidence in the Bill. Although I voted in a positive spirit for the Second Reading, I cannot vote for the timetable motion tonight.

1.11 am

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): The poll tax was introduced because at a conference the Prime Minister, shooting from the hip, decided to get rid of the hated rates. When the poll tax measure was in Committee, objections were raised by Opposition and Conservative Members. The Government decided that no Opposition, and few Conservative, amendments would be accepted. The result was the poll tax mess that we predicted would occur.

Almost the same thing is happening with the council tax. The Government promised to get rid of the poll tax in the way that they promised to dispose of the old rating system. The result is this pig's ear of a Bill, which is being rushed through. Normally, a guillotine is introduced after parts of a measure have been debated in Committee, with the understanding of both sides of the House and with both sides agreeing on the clauses that should be debated in the time available.

When any measure is debated in Committee, the Opposition rely on advice from various outside bodies. When we debated the poll tax in Committee, hon. Members on both sides put forward constructive arguments, our constituents having made representations. The timetable motion as proposed will not permit that to happen, even though the Leader of the House said that we could sit through the night, every night.

If we are to debate the council tax on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays through the night, how shall we be able, with such a continuous performance, to take advice from interested parties and at the same time represent the interests of our constituents? In other words, the Government are not allowing hon. Members to pursue their duties on behalf of their constituents. It is no ordinary Bill. It will affect every citizen. We shall not have time adequately to represent the wishes of our constituents.

In the poll tax debates my hon. Friends and I were accused of wanting to retain the rating system. Time and again the Government quoted stories about little old ladies paying more rates than others. I asked the treasurer of my local authority what would happen under the council tax system and discovered that everyone, even the little old ladies, would pay twice as much, even four or five times more than, as they are paying in poll tax. Had the rating system been in force, 70 per cent. of my constituents would have paid less.

Some of those aspects should be reflected in the Bill, but we shall not have the time. Because of the interest in the Bill, which affects all hon. Members and their constituents, hon. Members on both sides of the Committee will want to enter the debate. Normally, before a Bill is guillotined the Government ask their side to be quiet so that they can get the Bill through, but once a Committee debate is guillotined, the Bill starts to go through. The normal time element for opposition to a Bill does not exist purely because Conservative Members, quite rightly, want to take their full time, knowing that the guillotine rather than the normal channels will stop the debate.

I am also concerned that a precedent is being created. People will not forget how the House has been treated. I am afraid—I hope that it will not happen—that other Ministers will take a cue from the Secretary of the State for the Environment and guillotine Bills before they reach their Committee stage. I hope that a Labour Government will not use this precedent when introducing their legislation because it is against democracy. People look to this place to be democratic and they will judge how the House has been treated. That, in turn, is how people outside are treated—by not having their views fully explained.

1.17 am

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): There were few apologists for this measure in the debate—I counted perhaps one and a half. That is hardly surprising, given the draconian nature of the guillotine and the weak and unconvincing case that the Leader of the House made in its support.

The motion leaves the House and the Committee bound and gagged. It denies the Opposition their proper role and prevents proper debate of this important measure. Moreover, it reduces to vanishing point the chance of properly scrutinising the Bill.

The debate has not been about the principle of automatically timetabling legislation, although an interesting debate could be had on that question, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) and the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) said. Rather, the debate is about the precise measure, which does not just truncate debate or structure it to suit the Government, but compresses that debate into just nine days, and those nine days into a total period of just 16 days. That compression damages the proper process of the House and makes the Committee's work impossible. That was the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) in an intervention.

People outside the House may not fully understand our objections. They may think that we are objecting to long hours and hard work—far from it. Hon. Members should know that, if a Committee is to do its work properly, its members need time to think, consider and respond to Ministers. We need time to draft amendments and prepare the arguments. Above all, we need time to consult outside interests and organisations that have views to express, as well as time to deliver speeches and conduct the debates.

That is to say nothing of the time that will undoubtedly be taken by Government amendments because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) pointed out, the poll tax Bill was substantially amended by the Government. Indeed, that is one of the bad habits that the Government have got into. Not only have they formed the habit of introducing guillotine motions—26 since they took office in 1979 and 13 in a single Session—but they have also fallen into the bad habit of introducing literally hundreds of amendments to their own badly drafted Bills.

The motion shows a complete misunderstanding of one of Parliament's major roles—a point made by the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen). One of the functions of the House is to act as a sounding board, a public forum and a means by which debate can inform the public who can then influence the debate. Unless we have time for that process, the hon. Gentleman is surely right. He described a difficult issue in a delicate and sensitive manner—the baleful way in which the poll tax has reduced respect for the law. That respect can hardly be increased if the successor to the poll tax is yet again rushed through the House without proper debate.

Why is the measure being advanced——

Mr. Douglas: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gould: No, I am sorry, but we are short of time.

As many hon. Members have said, a guillotine motion is usually introduced in response to delaying tactics from the Opposition which have resulted in a failure to achieve reasonable progress. However, that is not the case with this measure. There has been no opportunity for delay as today and yesterday are the first two days of proper debate of the issue in this Session of Parliament. There has certainly been no opportunity for the Opposition to delay matters; the guillotine motion was prepared and programmed long before Second Reading.

It cannot be argued that the Government are forestalling what they fear might be delaying tactics. The Opposition have always made it clear—and I say it again directly and with all the sincerity that I can command—that the Opposition have no interest in filibustering. We have always made it clear that we would be prepared to consider and talk to the Government about a reasonable timetable that would not jeopardise the Bill's passage. The Opposition have never been given the chance to discuss those subjects with the Government. We were simply told of the timetable peremptorily and unilaterally, and informed that it would be enforced by guillotine.

As the Leader of the House and the Secretary of State for the Environment have to their discredit sometimes tried to pretend, Ministers might wish to make themselves buffoons by suggesting that the Opposition want to keep the poll tax. I do not believe that anybody could seriously believe such a ridiculous assertion, but it does nothing for an already disreputable measure when Ministers take refuge in such patent and ludicrous dishonesty.

The Government's next excuse is that it is necessary to truncate debate to meet the timetable required to get rid of the poll tax. If that were true—I do not believe that it is—it would be nothing more than the Government yet again entering a plea of guilty. Who created the need to act so quickly and in a manner which abuses the House? The Government who created the poll tax are now in a panic to dissociate themselves from the measure. They turned down the most direct and sensible way to get rid of the poll tax on a reasonable timetable. The Government saddled themselves with the timetable and the need to abuse the procedure of the House as they now propose.

It is not true that there is a need for speed on the Bill if the 1993 timetable is to be adhered to. All the local government experts agree that that goal is virtually unattainable, but the obstacles to it have nothing to do with the legislation; they have to do with the administrative burdens now borne by local government. Those problems include having to deal with the dying days of the poll tax and, as the Prime Minister says, having to collect an uncollectable tax. The difficulties relate to setting budgets and responding to capping levels which have not yet been announced. If the Government are sensitive to the needs of local government, why have they delayed making those announcements and thus increased the problems facing local government treasurers? The delays relate to the difficulties in preparing the necessary software highlighted by the software companies and to the new valuation registers—matters which are certainly not dependent on the Bill. The delays also relate to the preparation of lists, whether or not they are called registers or are required under the Bill.

Given the doubts and the difficulties, it is little wonder that there is a real question whether the 1993 date can be met. But none of that is relevant to the case for forcing through this Bill. The real reason for the unseemly haste, as my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) pointed out, is the Government's electoral timetable. They dare not face the electorate without this Bill on the statute book. It matters not whether it is implemented, or whether there are lengthy delays. Just in case the Government should, one of these days, summon up the nerve to face the electorate, perhaps in March or April, they have to have the decks cleared and this measure enacted into law. That is why this ridiculous timetable is being forced on us.

Another and even less reputable reason for the haste is that the Government know full well—there has been ample evidence of it already—that if the House is allowed to do its job properly, there will be time for proper debate and time for concern in the country to grow—for knowledge about the Government's proposals to spread, for public fears to find their expression, for hon. Members to understand their constituents' problems, for responses to be made to the excuses and explanations offered by Ministers. The haste is just as much to gag Conservative Members as to gag the Opposition.

This is a breathtaking piece of irresponsibility. What was it that went wrong with the poll tax? Surely no one now defends the poll tax, or pretends that it was anything other than an unmitigated disaster—for local government, for millions of people and families, and for respect for the law. Have Conservative Members forgotten all the confident and optimistic predictions made about the poll tax—those blithe assurances, the refusal to listen, the arrogant sweeping away of objections, the scorning of the doubters, the pressure put on the rebels; and then, as the true scale of the disaster became apparent, the gradual wringing out of concessions, the prices paid to buy off the Opposition, the late changes rushed through, the chaos that ensued, the billions of pounds thrown at the problem, the political upheaval which did for a Prime Minister and brought about a change of leadership in the Conservative party? Have Conservative Members learnt nothing from all that? Are they prepared to go through it all again,

[Mr. Gould]

accepting the assurances, blocking their ears, listening to no criticisms? I cannot believe so. Surely they will not accept all those assurances and predictions again.

There can be no excuses this time, no pleas of innocence. Conservative Members will not be forgiven if they allow through yet another hastily prepared, ill-thought-out, disastrously applied piece of legislation. Yet that is the risk that we probably now run. To those with any regard for good government, this measure is a disgrace. It will shame all who vote for it. There is an increasingly notorious offence which I understand is called ram-raiding. This measure is certainly an example of ram-raiding. There is only one defence against this sort of action by a Government. Hon. Members on both sides of the House should do their job and meet their responsibilities. I ask them to do precisely that.

1.28 am

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. Michael Portillo): During the debate, the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) referred, not unkindly, to my junior position in the Government. I hope that I approach the debate with due humility, given that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House and two former Leaders of the House have contributed to it. My right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) led us into consideration of questions such as whether Bills should be timetabled from the outset; and, if so, whether such decisions should be in the hands of the Government or of a Select Committee. He was right to raise those weighty issues, although they are not issues on which I wish to give an opinion now. My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) reminded us more than once that we should speak to the motion.

The House was privileged to hear from the "Big Daddy" of the guillotine motion, the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent. No debate on such a motion is complete without him. Like the Flying Dutchman, condemned for ever to roam the world's oceans, the right hon. Gentleman is condemned for ever to attend debates on guillotine motions in an attempt to expiate his past sins in that area. I listened with great attention to the right hon. Gentleman and agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) that it was a most disappointing experience. His reasons for using the guillotine in the past, which were appropriate at the time but are inappropriate now, were apparently that Labour legislation was very good and his guillotine motions showed the requisite democratic reticence. The House found that an unconvincing explanation.

We have spent three days debating the council tax. The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) made a shaky start by saying that the first of those days, during the debate on the Gracious Speech, was before the Bill was published. That is wrong because the Bill and the Local Government Bill were published before that. During those three days the Labour party engaged in a great struggle to get people to fill the Opposition Benches and to speak. It has been an exhausting experience for the Opposition, who, although they imposed a three-line Whip, have not been able to keep the House on their side. Many Opposition Members who will obey the three-line Whip and vote against the motion will do so with a heavy heart. That is because they believe that the correct way for the House to organise its procedures is to have a timetable motion from the beginning.

Mr. Blunkett: That is a different matter.

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman's intervention gives away the identity of at least one hon. Member who agrees with that view.

Mr. Budgen: Surely that is a proper attitude for a Labour politician. Labour believes in legislation, in plenty of state intervention in everybody's affairs. Generally speaking, that is not the attitude of Tories.

Mr. Portillo: I was asked to concentrate on the motion and the Bill and that is what I intend to do. I want the Bill to be properly debated. It was breathtaking to be told by the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) that we should have approached the Opposition to see whether we could negotiate a deal. I did that and was told straight away that no deal was possible. I would not normally reveal such matters, and do so only because the hon. Member for Dagenham, who was not present at the discussions, was nevertheless involved in putting out a press release after the discussions. No deal was available and we are proceeding with the guillotine.

Dr Cunningham: I am reluctant to intervene, but I cannot allow the Minister to get away with that. He is misleading the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. I am sure that even at this late hour the hon. Gentleman will wish to withdraw that.

Dr Cunningham: I withdraw my comment about misleading the House. The Minister is not being candid with the House. Neither the Minister nor the Leader of the House made any attempt, nor was an attempt made through the usual channels, to hold any serious discussions about the passage of the Bill.

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman is not being candid. My version of events is that the Labour party said from the outset that it would be unable to negotiate a deal. The hon. Member for Dagenham was not there, so he cannot comment on it. I do not blame the Labour party for not being able to reach a deal with us on that. However, the hon. Member for Dagenham should not say that there was no effort to do a deal. There was an offer of a deal, but I understand why the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) could not accept it.

Mr. Blunkett: It is important that we get the facts on the record. I have a simple question for the Minister: is it true that the Government said that, whatever the deal might be, they intended to get the Bill through the House by Christmas?

Mr. Portillo: Yes, and that is our absolute intention.

We have been addressing two audiences throughout the debate—the outside audience, whom the Opposition want to convince that this is a shock horror experience, and the audience in the House. It is known in the House that the reality is a choice between many hours in Committee characterised by filibuster and slow progress, and a number of hours in Committee in which we make reasonable progress.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West said that there were three guillotines between 1945 and 1951 and 13 in 1988. That tells me much more about the behaviour of Oppositions than about the behaviour of Governments. It would not have been possible for the Government of 1945-51 to get through the legislation if they had faced the delaying tactics that have characterised the progress of Bills in the past 11 to 12 years.

For example, in 1988, the Local Government Finance Bill was going through its stages in the House. After 61 hours in Committee, only 16 clauses had been considered. Consequently, the other 115 clauses had to be handled in 62 hours. After 58 hours in Committee, only nine clauses of the Water Bill had been considered. Consequently, the other 171 clauses had to be considered in 61 hours. Only five clauses of the Football Spectators Bill had been considered before the guillotine was introduced. Although I am sure that he did not intend it, it sounded as though my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West was saying, "Never mind the quality, feel the width." What matters is not how long we spend in Committee, so that we can report those hours to people outside, but what we achieve in that time.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): I was struck by the Minister's litany of the hours kept by the Committee considering the Local Government Finance Bill because I served on the Committee. Before the guillotine motion, the longest speech in those proceedings was by the then Minister of State.

Dr. Cunningham: Two hours.

Mr. Portillo: If the Minister spoke for two hours, that means that in the other 59 hours the Committee considered 16 clauses, so the hon. Gentleman's intervention does not alter my point.

The timetable has been organised in such a way that the divisions in the debate—knives as we call them—fall in places that allow the most time in debate to be given to the most contentious issues. Furthermore, the divisions will allow the Scottish points to be taken with their English equivalent so that we can have a single debate on common issues.

Mr. Maxton: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Portillo: Let me finish my point. One of the great advantages of this method of proceeding is that we can guarantee a debate about Scottish questions. We do not risk, as we would have done if we had handled the Bill in any other way, leaving those matters which come at the end of the Bill—as the Scottish provisions do—not to be debated fully. As a result of the way in which the knives fall, all the Scottish provisions can be thoroughly debated, although they will not be debated separately.

Mr. Maxton: Will the Minister allow me?

Mr. Portillo: Three weeks is not a long time to debate a Bill, but the number of hours that we can devote to the Bill during that period will be perfectly adequate.

Mr. Maxton: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for a Minister to lay down to the House how the Chairman of the Committee that has been established will decide how the debates in Committee will take place? That is what the Minister has told us.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Barracking the Minister is not benefiting the debate. The House should listen to what the Minister has to say in the last few minutes of the debate.

Mr. Portillo: I am convinced that we shall have adequate time to discuss the Bill and that because we have organised the time and allocated it we shall have a higher quality of debate. More issues will be debated fully and the Bill will be better scrutinised than many of the measures that have been cited as precedents. I believe that the public want us to get on with abolishing the community charge and replacing it with the council tax. We owe them that and I think that the House should approve the guillotine motion.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 293, Noes 233.

Division No. 6] **[1.40 am**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'T's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Grist, Ian
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*

Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Edwards, Huw
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kumar, Ashok
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*

Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Nicol
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ken Eastham and
Mr. Martyn Jones.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Benefits (Student Entitlement)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

1.53 am

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): This debate is taking place in the early hours of the morning, but the presence of so many of my hon. Friends underlines the importance which the Opposition attach to it, which contrasts starkly with the importance that the Government attach to it.

The debate is officially designated

"the subject of loss of student entitlement to housing benefit and income support".

I do not think that there can be any quarrel with those terms. I suspect that not only would the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security concede that students have lost their entitlement to housing benefit and income support; she would probably boast that it is the Government's official policy that students should lose such entitlement.

On 23 August 1991 the Minister wrote to me setting out clearly the Government's attitude. She reiterated the Governments view

"first expressed by us in 1985 that the majority of full-time students should not have access to benefits as a means of supporting themselves whilst studying."

That view—first expressed six years ago—has now been given effect, and it is universally accepted that students are denied housing benefit and, in the majority of cases, housing support. The disagreement between the two sides of the House arises in regard to the effect that that has on students.

The Government would have us believe that students have never had it so good. In a letter to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson), the Prime Minister said that the Government's introduction of student loans had given students more money to cover their living costs—25 per cent. more in 1990-91 than in the previous year. He described that as a substantial real-terms increase and a generous package of support.

The Prime Minister is not alone in making such claims. They are made by all Ministers who are confronted with allegations of student poverty and hardship. In a "Dear Colleague" letter circulated to all Members of Parliament, the Secretary of State for Education and Science warned us earlier in the year to beware of students who came to us during the recess pleading poverty. He went on to repeat the Prime Minister's bland assurance that, far from experiencing poverty, most students were better off than they had ever been before.

The Secretary of State acknowledged that some students might be genuinely worried about their finances. He asked students, "Are you really trying hard enough to get jobs during the vacation? Don't just look for a job in jobcentres"—after all, the Government have closed down most of them—"but get out and actively look for temporary work elsewhere."

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): "On your bike".

Mr. McAllion: As my hon. Friend says, it was a variation on the advice offered to the unemployed by a former Tory Minister. Such advice is becoming as offensive, ignorant and out of touch as it was when first uttered by the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) many years ago. The Government's claim that

[Mr. McAllion]

students are better off as a result of student loans simply is not true; nor is it true that loans make up for the loss of income support and housing benefit.

Let us look more closely at the Government's argument. In his "Dear Colleague" letter, the Secretary of State referred to the benefit that students could previously have claimed. He lumped together housing benefit, income support and unemployment benefit, arriving at an average benefit entitlement over the summer recess of £327. He did not explain how he arrived at that figure, but it turns out —conveniently—to be £93 less than the £420 student loan that the Government are now making available.

The Secretary of State concluded that students were now being more than compensated for the loss of their benefit entitlement. But how does he arrive at that figure of £327? Others have arrived at very different sums. Using the Government's own figures, the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux has calculated that an unemployed claimant aged between 18 and 24—as most students are—would have received £31·15 a week income support during the 12-week vacation: a total of £373·80. That is a much higher figure than the one given by the Secretary of State.

The association also calculated that, over and above income support, the same claimant would have received £360 in housing benefit, on a typical rent of £30 a week. It calculated that a typical out-of-work student entitled to housing benefit and income support could have expected to receive £733·80 over the 12-week vacation. It is that position of fundamental weakness and poverty that forces them to apply for the Government's student loans.

Ministers will try to hide from the reality. In his "Dear Colleague" letter the Secretary of State tells us that the uprating of student grants in 1990-91 was over and above the extra money made available through student loans. They say that an additional £420 in student loans and an uprating of 5.5 per cent. in grant is the basis for their claim that students have never had it so good—that they are getting more money now than ever before.

I have already dealt with the £420 loan, which does not even come near to compensating students for the loss of £733 in housing benefit and income support. But what about the 5.5 per cent uprating? When it was introduced in September of last year, the rate of inflation was almost twice 5.5 per cent.: it was 10.9 per cent. Admittedly we should compare the average rate of inflation for the whole of 1991 with the previous year. When we do so, we find that the inflation rate comes down somewhat, but it comes down to 7.9 per cent., which is still 2.5 per cent. above the Government's so-called uprating. The reality is that, far from being an uprating over and above other increases, this is yet another real terms decrease in students' real incomes. This year the grant has been frozen at last year's level, with no uprating for inflation.

What are we left with? First, with the withdrawal of housing benefit and income support and their replacement by student loans, students now get less, not more, money. Secondly, the so-called uprating has also meant that, in real terms, there is less, not more, money for students. Ministers can claim until they are blue in the face that students are getting more money and that they have never had it so good, but they cannot justify those claims by reference to the facts, which show that students are significantly worse off than they were previously. As a far better man than anyone in this House once said, "facts are chiels that winna ding", even for Tory Ministers.

The citizens advice bureaux evidence compared student incomes with the incomes of those who are in receipt of income support, which represents the minimum subsistence level below which no one in our society is meant to fall. What are these minimum subsistence levels? For a single claimant in the age bracket 18 to 24, it is £1,619.80 in income support per year, plus £1,560 for full housing benefit. That amounts to a total yearly income of £3,179.80. What is the subsistence level for students? It is £2,265 for the full grant and £420 for the student loan—in total a yearly income of just £2,685. That is almost £500 below the minimum subsistence level for the poorest people in our society.

That level of income has been described by the Prime Minister and the Government as a generous settlement for students, but the citizens advice bureaux provide a very different description. They say that student grants, taken together with student loans, cannot provide enough to cover even the most basic needs of the poorest members in our society. The Prime Minister answered a question that I put to him earlier this year by referring to the fact that he did not believe that I live in the real world. In view, however, of what he said about student support, compared with what the citizens advice bureaux say about student support—the citizens advice bureaux deal with real students suffering real hardship in the real world, while the Prime Minister hides himself away behind locked gates in 10 Downing street—there is only one conclusion that can be arrived at: that the citizens advice bureaux are right, because they live in the real world. The Prime Minister and all the other Ministers are wrong because they do not live in the real world.

Their reply will be, "What about the access funds?" Given that only £25 million were allocated to access funds for the whole of the United Kingdom, the answer must be, "What about the access funds?" The Government's intention was that these funds would be a way of helping with one-off exceptional circumstances affecting only a small minority of students, but the reality is that once again they have been shown to be completely wrong. Throughout the country access funds have been stretched way beyond the limit. Many colleges ran out of money long before they ran out of students needing help. The Minister of State, Scottish Office, shakes his head, but he knows that the Government conceded this point when they announced that they would allow colleges to anticipate up to 10 per cent. of next year's allocation to relieve the pressure on this year's inadequate allocation.

In Dundee in the first year more than 2,000 students applied to the access fund and more than £300,000 was allocated to them. It is not enough. The truth is that we are dealing not with one-off exceptional cases of hardship, affecting only a small minority of students, but with a widespread and damaging problem affecting thousands of students.

During the recess I held a number of surgeries in Dundee colleges, which were specifically for students. I was not short of students who applied for help in the most distressing of circumstances: mature students with spouses and children, who had been denied housing benefit and income support to which they had previously been entitled; landlords pressing for rent payments and students with no money to pay; arrears of rent building up; poll tax

arrears building up; overdrafts being extended; electricity supplies being cut off, in some cases to parents and children. Again and again I heard the same story of deepening poverty driving students to take the decision to drop out of education.

Recently Aberdeen university carried out a survey which revealed that 15 per cent. of students were considering quitting their courses because of financial hardship. That is an appalling situation, but it is made more appalling because it mainly affects students from the poorest backgrounds, those whose parents are on low incomes and who get no financial help from their parents because they cannot afford to give it. Mature students with young families, who are on their own financially and are burdened with the heaviest of financial commitments, are having to scrape by on an inadequate student grant and an even more inadequate student loan.

Dundee is an area of high unemployment, with few jobs to be had. I came across a number of cases where, in an attempt to increase their chances of employment, people had returned to college to try to get better qualifications. However, because they had been unemployed, they had not earned enough money in the previous three years to qualify for the mature student allowance, and so it was denied to them. They also lost their entitlement to housing benefit and income support, upon which they had been very dependent as they were unemployed. Many had children. Under income support regulations they were allowed £17 for each child every week, but under the student grant regulations they were allowed just £8 for each child per week. They too have children, with similar needs, but they are allocated much less because, rather than staying on the dole, their parents wished to return to college and get qualifications to get them back into work. All of those things were barriers, discouraging and preventing access to education for the poorest people in our society. Those are the people who need access to education most of all.

All those facts give the lie to the Government's claim that they are extending educational opportunity to everyone and that they are genuinely interested in creating a classless society. I am prepared to be convinced that that is not the case and that the Government mean well and intend to try to open up educational opportunity to everyone, no matter their class background. But if I am to believe that, when the Minister replies to the debate she will have to commit herself to two very simple propositions: first, that the Government will institute a full review of student financial support as a matter of urgency; secondly, that they will commit themselves to restoring to all students the housing benefit and income support that the Government have taken away from them. If that commitment is not made, the Government stand condemned of having betrayed a whole generation of the poorest people in our society by taking away their only means of escaping from poverty, access to education opportunity.

2.9 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Miss Ann Widdecombe) *rose—*

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): Come on, get on with it. Do better.

Miss Widdecombe: The hon. Gentleman's attitude does not do justice to the seriousness of this debate. I take the matters raised by the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) very seriously and I suggest that we debate them in a sensible manner.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Dundee, East for raising these issues. He has mentioned most of them in earlier correspondence with me and I see many hon. Members on the Opposition Benches who have also mentioned them, either in correspondence or in parliamentary questions. I especially welcome my hon. Friends from the Scottish Office to the debate.

The hon. Gentleman will know that the changes made to students' entitlement to housing benefit and income support were not made in isolation. The withdrawal of most full-time students' entitlement to those benefits took place at a time when substantial additional resources were being made available to students through the education system. The issues were discussed many times both in this House and in another place last year, and the social security regulations which gave effect to the changes were fully debated and approved by both Houses. Nevertheless, it would be helpful if I were to explain the background to the Government's overall policy on the financial support of full-time students.

As long ago as 1985 we set out our intention to remove students' general entitlement to certain benefits. Since that point we have taken a number of steps to reduce students' reliance on benefits. That culminated in the general withdrawal of income support and housing benefit in the 1990-91 academic year.

Our view then, which is undiminished today and is at the centre of the debate, is that it ought not to be the function of the social security system to support students, not only because of the administrative burden placed on the Department's local benefit offices and local authorities, but because there already exists a maintenance system for those in full-time education. Therefore, as I have frequently said in letters to Opposition Members and to my hon. Friends, we regard the support of students as the proper duty of the education system, rather than of the social security system, although there are exceptions that we support under the social security system.

The Government have often been accused of singling out students for special treatment under the rules. That is because there are alternative sources of financial support —provided from public funds—available to them. Opposition Members may wish to argue about the level of those funds. The thrust of the debate is whether the education system or the social security system is the right source of student support. I should have hoped that there was some consensus on both sides of the House that the responsibility for student support should remain with the educational maintenance system.

Our commitment to that principle was given greater weight by the fact that benefit claims for students frequently presented administrative problems out of all proportion to the amounts of benefit finally awarded and the duration of the benefit periods. Benefit offices faced periodical surges in claims which were complicated to assess and frequently resulted in no award of benefit being made. It seemed to us nonsense that the benefit system should be duplicating the role of educational provision in that way. It also seemed undesirable for students to become dependent on benefits while in full-time education. Social security benefits are intended to assist those people

[Miss Widdecombe]

who, for whatever reason, find themselves in circumstances where they are unable to support themselves and those circumstances could not reasonably be avoided.

Of course, we recognised that we would have to provide the wherewithal for students to support themselves. In the current academic year, the full-year loan facility plus the grant is more than 30 per cent. higher than in 1989-90. This support is 6 per cent. more than was available in 1991.

These increases will have resulted in the vast majority of students being better off overall. Research commissioned by the Department of Education and Science indicated that the average loss of benefits among students who actually claimed them—and they were a minority—would have been some £327 in the past academic year. By comparison, the average loan available is £420.

However, we are well aware that there are some students who, even with the increase in support from the grant and loan, may experience financial difficulties. That is why the Government have established the access funds.

It has been a fashion among Opposition Members—indeed, this was reported by the hon. Gentleman tonight—to suggest that the access funds alone are intended to compensate for the withdrawal of benefits generally and that the £25 million, which he correctly quoted, must, therefore, be inadequate. This is not the case. These funds are only one element of the package of extra resources for students which I mentioned a moment ago.

As I have already said, most students will have extra financial support available to them without having to call upon the access funds. Those funds are there to assist students who face particular financial difficulties and who, as a result, may not be able to take up or resume their studies.

I think that it would be helpful if, at this point, I were to remind the House that we have made special provision for students in certain groups. Hon. Members will appreciate, I am sure, that there are some students who have financial needs above and beyond those of their peers. I am thinking in particular of disabled students and students with children. The benefit regulations make specific provision for those students, or in some cases their partners, to receive both income support and housing benefit provided that they meet the general qualifying conditions for those benefits. The new top-up loan provides additional resources for those groups as well as for other students. The existence in the benefit system to which they have access of a generous £10 weekly disregard on income from a top-up loan means that many students in those vulnerable groups will be better off under the new arrangements.

I know that the hon. Member for Dundee, East is particularly concerned about students' ability to meet accommodation costs from within their resources. Clearly, this is one area of student expenditure that can vary quite markedly throughout the country. The student grant has always been intended to provide for accommodation and therefore to some extent reflects variations in costs. The regional variation in the level of grant has been, and continues to be, reflected in the way in which housing benefit for eligible students is calculated. Housing benefit is not payable for the first £16·25 of rent outside London or £23·45 of rent within London for any student. For some years housing benefit has not been available to students in halls of residence or similar accommodation. Therefore, students generally only really looked to housing benefit to top up their accommodation needs and only then if they were in property not owned by their college.

In fact, only about half of young higher education students live in privately rented accommodation. The Department's own statistical information suggests that in May 1989 fewer than 15 per cent. of students were claiming housing benefit and only 2 per cent. claimed in the summer vacation.

In recent months a good deal of concern has been expressed about students no longer having access to benefits over the summer vacation. The impression one gets is that, in the past, every student relied on income support, at least over the summer period. That is a fallacy. In the summer of 1989 DSS local offices kept a count of student claims; there were 135,000 during that long vacation. That represents less than a quarter of the student population affected by the benefit changes. Clearly, some students called upon the access funds in the summer period. In July, the higher education institutions were told that they could anticipate up to 10 per cent. of their access fund allocation for the 1991-92 academic year.

The hon. Member for Dundee, East called on us to promise a review, but that comes down to a running review and immediate flexibility. In this academic year the Department of Education and Science has also provided additional guidance to institutions administering the access funds. That is intended to assist them in determining how the funds might best be dispersed. The Government remain of the view that the educational establishments are well placed to assess the financial needs and priorities of their students.

Mr. McAllion: In common with the Minister from the Scottish Office, the Minister rightly says that the institutions are best equipped to know the needs of their students. Those responsible for the access funds at Dundee university wrote to me to say that their funds had run out even before the summer recess had begun. There was no additional help for students who found themselves in trouble in the summer. What advice would the Minister offer to a student who has a full student grant and a student loan but who is still £500 below the income support level, the minimum subsistence level for any individual in society? That student is unable to get help from his educational institution because it has run out of its access funds. What should that student do?

Miss Widdecombe: The grant and loan system is designed to cover the entire academic year, not just part of it.

Secondly, access funds are administered by the institutions, which are best able to decide what is needed. We have reviewed the problem that occurred and, as I said, we have issued additional guidance to such institutions to try to make sure that the problem does not recur. Students, with a combination of loan, grant and access funds, are well provided for over the course of an entire year.

Hon. Members will be aware that the access fund allocations for the current academic year have already been made. As before, their distribution among institutions takes account of student numbers and regional variations in housing costs. The institutions are required to

monitor their use of the access funds and the Secretary of State for Education and Science has undertaken to review the operation of the funds in due course.

The hon. Member for Dundee, East raised a number of important issues this evening. I am grateful for the opportunity to put the Government's views on the matter, but underlying all that I have said is a fundamental conviction that the education system, not social security benefits, should provide for the maintenance of students.

It makes no sense for two such complex systems of financial support to attempt to meet the same needs other than in the most exceptional circumstances. The educational maintenance system is specifically designed with the financial needs of students in mind and we have made substantial new resources available to ensure that those needs are met.

Mr. Huw Edwards: Why do the Government believe that for people on low incomes in employment the social security system, especially through family credit, has a vital role to play, yet for people on low incomes in education the social security system, through housing benefit, plays no role?

Miss Widdecombe: Because, until the Government introduced family credit, there was no comprehensive assistance for people in work on low incomes in terms of the benefits system. There is assistance available for students' education through the educational maintenance system and what is currently in operation is the best method for the support of students. There is no point in running two systems side by side.

If the hon. Gentleman has specific cases of hardship which he wishes to raise, there is a straightforward means of doing so. He should write to the Secretary of State for Education and Science setting out the problems, and the same goes for problems in respect of Dundee university. If there is a specific matter in the system which is the Minister's responsibility and which is causing concern, the Minister can respond to it.

I see no point in taking an already elaborate system and running it alongside another elaborate system, rather than having one straightforward source of student income. Indeed, it must be more comprehensible to, and dignified for, students to get the whole of their resources from the education system rather than from a mixture of social security and the education system. So there is an administrative advantage and an advantage in terms of comprehensibility in having a single system. The Government's point is made.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-three minutes past Two o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 13 November 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON UNDERGROUND (SAFETY MEASURES) BILL

[Lords]

Order for Third Reading read.

To be read the Third time tomorrow.

LONDON UNDERGROUND (KING'S CROSS) BILL

Order for consideration read.

To be considered tomorrow.

COMMERCIAL AND PRIVATE BANK BILL *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

Read a Second time, and committed.

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

Defence-related Employment

1. **Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the level of defence-related employment in Scotland.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart): Direct employment in Scotland associated with Ministry of Defence expenditure on equipment stood at around 14,000 in 1989-90. This was the equivalent of 9·5 per cent. of such employment in the United Kingdom, a proportion which has been constant since 1987-1988. In addition, at 1 July 1990, a total of 19,300 service personnel and 12,300 Ministry of Defence civilian employees were deployed in Scotland.

Mr. Home Robertson: How does the Minister intend to protect employment and help diversification at GEC-Ferranti and Yarrow? Will he focus on the Ministry of Defence decision to do away with 2,000 infantry soldiers' jobs in Scotland? In particular, will he reflect on assurances given by the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Transport that the amalgamations of the King's Own Scottish Borderers, the Royal Scots, the Gordon Highlanders and the Queen's Own Highlanders will be further reviewed? Now that both the Secretary of State for Defence and the Prime Minister have comprehensively rubbished those assurances, will the Secretary of State for Scotland have to eat humble pie again or will he stand up for Scotland and make this a resignation issue?

Mr. Stewart: My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Defence have spoken in complete unison on this. *[Interruption.]* The position is perfectly clear. There is no intention to review the proposals that have been announced, but there are at least two years before the first amalgamations and if military circumstances change, there is time for a reassessment of present plans.

On the hon. Gentleman's other point, it is worth saying that with 9 per cent. of the United Kingdom population, Scotland will retain 15·8 per cent. of the infantry, 13·6 per cent. of the armoured forces and 18·8 per cent. of the artillery. On the readjustment of industry, at my right hon. Friend's request Scottish Enterprise has established a defence industries initiative to help businesses and local enterprise companies exploit existing defence markets and develop diversification strategies. I hope that that move will be welcomed by the entire House.

Mr. Bill Walker: My hon. Friend will be aware of the concern of my constituents who work at the Royal Navy workshop at Almondbank because of the present review of helicopter servicing. Will my hon. Friend assure my constituents and the House that the Conservative party and Ministers in Scotland are fighting to ensure that that workshop, which has a record of excellence and can carry out plating work which saves the Government millions of pounds on buying replacement parts, will continue because of its record and not for sentimental reasons?

Mr. Stewart: I am aware of my hon. Friend's expertise on this subject and his concern about it. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement is present on the Front Bench and will have noted what my hon. Friend has said.

Almondbank is one of a number of helicopter facilities. A Cabinet Office efficiency scrutiny team is examining the structure of those facilities and will report early in the new year. I can assure my hon. Friend that I shall take a close interest in this matter. I shall also ensure that the merits and advantages of Almondbank, to which my hon. Friend rightly referred are taken fully into account.

Mr. Dewar: I thank the Minister for clarifying the Scottish Office position. I now understand that there will be no review of the future of the Scottish regiments unless there is a dramatic change in circumstances or a change in the strategic requirements of the country. How does he reconcile that with the rather desperate hints given by the Secretary of State in recent weeks as he vainly tried to rally his troops in the recent by-election? Is it not the case that after all the hype and hopes that were insinuated in the debate, the Scottish Office is toeing the Ministry of Defence line?

Does the Minister accept that there is an atmosphere of crisis within the defence contracting industry in Scotland? Does he accept the make-or-break significance of the next round of type 23 frigate orders for Yarrow and the central importance of GEC-Ferranti? Will we have regular reports of what the diversification unit set up by Scottish Enterprise is doing, its remit and the kind of results it is recommending?

Mr. Stewart: First, as I understand Labour party policy, which is a matter of some difficulty, the hon. Gentleman's party would cut defence expenditure by about £5 billion per year.

On the hon. Gentleman's first question, I am not responsible for what the press say about particular matters. I repeat our position, which has been made

absolutely clear by my right hon. Friends. There is no intention to review the announcement on the Scottish regiments, but there is at least two years until the first amalgamations and the hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Scottish ones will take place at the end of the process. If military circumstances change, there is time for a reassessment of the present plans.

I fully appreciate the importance of GEC-Ferranti as an employer in Edinburgh and Lothian. Yarrow is also a major employer, not only in the constituency of the hon. Gentleman but throughout the west of Scotland. The hon. Gentleman will be aware—[HON. MEMBERS: "Get on with it."] that I have discussed the frigate orders with the shop stewards. I believe that a meeting has been arranged between the hon. Gentleman and the Secretary of State.

Mr. Speaker: I realise the importance of such matters in Scotland, but may I ask for crisper questions?

Hon. Members: And answers.

Mr. Speaker: And answers.

Clydeside Against Pollution

3. **Mrs. Irene Adams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he plans to meet a delegation of members of the campaign for Clydeside against pollution.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): Neither my right hon. Friend nor I have any plans to meet a delegation of members of the campaign for Clydeside against pollution.

Mrs. Adams: The Minister may recall that it is almost a year since I first raised in the House the matter of the proposed incinerator in Renfrew. Since then the community of Renfrew—and, in fact, the entire Clyde valley community—have had the prospect of a toxic waste incinerator hanging over their heads like a black cloud. Will the Minister now come to my constituency and meet representatives of this responsible campaign group to discuss the prospect of a full public inquiry into the matter?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Secretary of State has a quasi-judicial role, as planning matters may be involved and there could be a planning appeal to the Secretary of State.

Mr. Dewar: They should be involved.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman says that they should be involved. I am saying that there could be an appeal to the Secretary of State and that therefore it is not appropriate to have a meeting. However, as I am conscious of the strong feeling that the hon. Lady has registered on behalf of her constituents, I assure her that before a plant can be registered for an incinerator it must comply with the emissions standards enforced by Her Majesty's industrial pollution inspectorate. Those standards must be in accordance with the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 and the Alkali, etc. Works Regulation Act 1906. Over and above that, the Environmental Protection Act 1990 brings more stringent procedures into force in 1992 and will apply to the subject.

The hon. Lady also asked about a public inquiry. At this stage I can only say that, as the statutory procedures are being correctly followed in all respects, a public inquiry would not be appropriate.

Fish Conservation

4. **Mrs. Margaret Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next expects to meet representatives of the Scottish fishing industry to discuss the conservation of fishing stocks.

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Mr. Michael Forsyth): My noble Friend the Scottish Fisheries Minister will meet the Scottish Fishermen's Federation on 18 November.

Mrs. Ewing: At the meeting on 18 November, will there be a clear discussion about the eight-day tie-up regulations which, one year on, are now seen as the most hated and despised aspect of the conservation policy, bringing financial hardship, fear and life-threatening situations to our coastal communities? If the Government are not prepared to abolish that most ineffective policy, will they at least consider flexibility in the application of the rules, taking particular account of men who are kept on shore because of bad weather or boat maintenance?

Mr. Forsyth: There will be a discussion at the December Fisheries Council about the best means of reducing fishing effort in 1992. The eight-day tie-up has been an agreed method within the Community during the current year. If the hon. Lady has any proposals, I am sure that my noble Friend would be interested to hear them. We are not absolutely committed to the eight-day tie-up rule and would be prepared to discuss other means of reducing fishing effort, but they would have to be agreed with our European Community partners.

Sir Hector Monro: I am glad that we are concentrating on conservation. Will my hon. Friend consider, in the light of our efforts on set-aside in agriculture, that the principle of decommissioning is very similar? I thank my hon. Friend for the Government's efforts to reduce the pressure on drift netting in the North sea, which will have a good impact on salmon fishing in Scotland. That will help our tourist industry and many other rural economies in Scotland.

Mr. Forsyth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and agree that the measures taken in respect of drift netting will boost salmon interests in Scotland. We remain open to suggestions on decommissioning. It need not necessarily reduce fishing effort, but it is about making people in the fishing industry unemployed. Our objectives are to secure the long-term interests of the fishing industry by ensuring effective measures to secure stocks.

Mr. Macdonald: A radical conservation measure which would enjoy the full support of the fishermen affected would be a weekend ban on prawn fisheries on the west coast. It would not cost the Government money, would have the support of fishermen and would be extremely effective in terms of conservation.

Mr. Forsyth: I shall ensure that my noble Friend the Scottish Fisheries Minister is aware of the hon.

Gentleman's suggestion. I am sure that he will consider the hon. Gentleman's representations, which are always carefully put and taken seriously.

Ayrshire South Hospital

5. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total number of responses to the consultation process regarding the application for trust status for Ayrshire South hospital; and how many were for or against.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Ian Lang): Eight hundred and five written responses, including 579 pre-printed slips from local newspapers, were received. A petition was also submitted.

Opinions ranged from outright support to outright opposition, with many respondents expressing concern or seeking information about particular aspects of the application.

Mr. McKelvey: That answer is a disgrace. I asked how many responses had been received because we knew, from the responses that we had received, that the vast majority of the people of Ayrshire are totally opposed to the opting out of Ayrshire South hospital. That opinion is absolutely in line with that expressed by the people of Kincardine and Deeside who thoroughly rejected opting out at the ballot box. If the Secretary of State is able to give an honest answer at the Dispatch Box, will he tell us that if he genuinely surveys the objections and sees that the vast majority of the people of Ayrshire object to opting out, he will give democratic and fair-minded consideration to the consultative process and, at best, abandon the idea of opting out or at least postpone it for the foreseeable future?

Mr. Lang: I do not doubt that the majority of opinion as expressed in the submissions was opposed to the opting out process, although it is impossible to categorise opinions in the way that the hon. Gentleman would wish. Much though I understand the worries expressed by residents of the district to be served by the hospital, one must also take account of the basis of their concern, and the misinformation which has caused their alarm. I must take account of the quality of representations as well as the sheer quantity. The application is measured against four clearly published criteria which include patient care, the competence of the management, the involvement of professional and clinical staff and the financial viability of the application. That is the basis on which I shall consider the application, and I will do so carefully.

Mr. Galbraith: Will the Secretary of State confirm that he has already decided to refuse the trust application from the Royal Scottish National hospital at Larbert and to suspend the applications from Foresterhill and Ayrshire South hospitals, designating them as shadow trusts, whatever that means? When will the Secretary of State make a decision and give us an answer on that most important issue? Rather than procrastinating with shadow trusts, why does he not do what the incoming Labour Government will do and abandon the ill-conceived, ill-considered, useless and unwanted ideas about trust hospitals?

Mr. Lang: I have not reached a conclusion on any of the applications before me. I am giving them the most careful and thorough consideration, and I shall reach a decision and announce it as soon as I can. I certainly shall not follow the example of the last Labour Government's handling of the health service. We have achieved a dramatic improvement as a result of the extra funding that we have put into the health service in the past 12 years.

Mr. Foulkes: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No, I did not call the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) and I know that the hospital is in his constituency, but perhaps he will be patient.

Tourism

6. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the value of grants under section 4 of the Development of Tourism Act 1969 in the current year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The Scottish tourist board estimates that in 1991-92 payments under the section 4 scheme of capital assistance will total £3·5 million. I am satisfied, and this has been confirmed by a recent independent review, that that support is effective in generating investment and jobs.

Mr. Coombs: My hon. Friend's answer will be widely welcomed by the tourist industry not just in Scotland, but throughout the United Kingdom, but will he say a little more about the results of the independent review to which he referred? Can he assure me that, if he has not already done so, he will send a copy of that report to our right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment?

Mr. Stewart: Yes, I can confirm that that review showed that there was a clear need for section 4 support in Scotland. During the period 1983-84 to 1989-90, the scheme assisted 902 projects, disbursed £31·6 million of board funds at constant 1990 prices, and produced total tourism investment of £197·2 million at 1990 prices. I know of my hon. Friend's interest in the matter, following the report of the Select Committee on Employment, and I can give an assurance that if the consultants' report to which I referred has not yet reached the Department of Employment, it will do so as soon as possible.

Mr. McAllion: Has the Minister read the reports in today's press of record numbers of passengers passing through Scottish airports? Will he confirm that most of them are tourists, many of whom are travelling north for a last glimpse of a rare species on the point of extinction in Scotland—Scottish Tory Members? Will he further confirm that he and his right hon. and hon. Friends in the Scottish Office have been recommended for a Scottish tourism award for their determination to self-destruct in Scotland?

Mr. Stewart: I have been described as many things, but that is the first time I have been described as a tourist attraction. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to refer to the increased numbers of passengers going through Scottish airports—especially Glasgow airport, following the Government's excellent decision to allow transatlantic flights from that airport.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: Will my hon. and attractive Friend congratulate Perth and Kinross district council on the dynamic quality of its work in attracting vast benefits to Scotland and Scottish industry by means of its policy of twinning with Pskov in Russia and Haikou on Hainan island in China, this year bringing to Perth the most valuable exhibition of icons in the world? *[Interruption.]* I should tell Opposition Members who are giggling, and who will also benefit from this, that the council is also twinning with Cognac.

Mr. Stewart: I am sure that my hon. and learned Friend is right to praise Perth and Kinross district council. Perth has many colourful attractions for tourists, it enjoys a high quality of life and I am sure that it will continue successfully to attract national and international tourists.

Patients Charter

7. **Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total cost of the launch of the patients charter in Scotland.

Mr. Lang: The cost of the production and launch of the patients charter to date is £29,316. We expect to stimulate significant improvements in NHS performance, particularly on waiting times, as a result.

Mrs. Michie: Does the Secretary of State agree that the staff of the national health service are dedicated and caring and have achieved many of the aims spelt out in that glossy document? Does he agree that what they need is support and proper resources so that they can carry out their work, not what has been happening over the past 12 years—continual restructuring and reforms which do the service no good and break up the comprehensive national health service that we all know?

Mr. Lang: I entirely agree with the hon. Lady's complimentary remarks about the quality of the staff in the health service. That is why I particularly welcome the enthusiastic way in which they have embraced the patients charter and the accompanying document on internal management in the health service, "Framework for Action".

As for resources, the hon. Lady will know that we spent about £3 billion on the health service in Scotland last year, which is more than £600 per head for every man, woman and child in the country and represents an increase of about 38 per cent. over and above the cost of living in the past 12 years. Resources are there in plenty; what we are now achieving is an improved application of those resources. That is what the patients charter is about, and that is why it is so warmly welcomed.

Mr. Favell: To an Englishman like me, it is a source of astonishment that Scots should intransigently oppose any kind of change in the health service. No one has done more to advance the frontiers of medicine than the Scots, yet the Opposition oppose any sort of change. Do not the Scots realise that with better techniques, new medical discoveries and more efficacious drugs many more people would be treated if only the health service were to change?

Mr. Lang: There is a great deal in what my hon. Friend says, and the pride which I and my fellow Scots have in the health service in Scotland is a reflection of the achievements of the past 12 years and the resources that we have put into it. As a result, 900,000 more patients were treated last year than in 1979, and that has resulted in in-patient waiting lists being 21 per cent. lower than in 1979.

Mr. Wilson: In total, how much does the Scottish Office intend to spend this year on thinly disguised party political propaganda, including vacuous glossy charters? Will he confirm that last year the Scottish Office spent £2·6 million on advertising alone, which is 10 times the figure for 1979? Why should the Tory party not pay for its own advertising out of party political funds rather than constantly using taxpayers' money to try to get its message across? The figure of £2·6 million is equal to almost £300,000 per Tory MP in Scotland. Is the taxpayer getting value for money?

Mr. Lang: There is no question of the Government using public funds for party political purposes, and I am astonished that the hon. Gentleman should suggest that. Of course, the Scottish Office runs a number of public information campaigns and I am quite sure that the hon. Gentleman would want us to do that to encourage the improvement of health in various ways. The patients charter is aimed at improving the quality of the delivery of health care in Scotland and at making patients aware of their rights, thereby helping to improve even more the delivery of the health service.

Heart Specialists

8. **Mr. Michael J. Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to increase the number of heart specialists working in national health service hospitals in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: We have increased funding for the cardiac services this year by a quarter bringing the total to £20 million.

Mr. Martin: Physicians are concerned at the fact that heart patients sometimes have to wait between three months and a year for surgery. Some patients do not even get the chance of surgery because they have waited too long. There is great concern that in a hospital such as Stobhill a patient with heart warning signs can receive angiography examinations within a week, but in places such as Ayrshire and Argyllshire physicians have to keep patients waiting longer on medication. Surely that is unfair. If we had more specialists and more facilities, heart patients could be dealt with in a proper manner.

Mr. Forsyth: Half the patients who require heart surgery are dealt with immediately, but the hon. Gentleman is right to say that some patients have to wait. Whether a patient needs to be admitted immediately is a clinical decision. The number of patients being treated has risen enormously, and 3,000 heart patients are now receiving surgery. We have expanded the programme in terms of the number of centres where treatment is provided, and at the beginning of next year we shall carry out the first heart transplant operations in Scotland. Therefore, there has been a major expansion. We are also expanding capacity, especially through Greater Glasgow health board which is using the private sector so that an extra 120 patients may be treated. I am acutely aware of the importance of what the hon. Gentleman says and I hope that it may be possible to make further progress in

expanding the programme. I hope that the hon. Gentleman recognises that there has been a major expansion.

Mr. McMaster: Is the Minister aware that over the past year some Scottish health boards have issued letters to general practitioners instructing them to refer only urgent cases for essential treatments such as physiotherapy and to hold the rest on file? Does that mean that there is now a waiting list to go on to the waiting list?

Mr. Forsyth: I am not aware of that, but if the hon. Gentleman would like to provide me with details I shall certainly look into the matter. The hon. Gentleman has clearly studied this issue and will know that three quarters of all patients in Scotland are dealt with within four weeks and that half are dealt with immediately. The record of the health service is improving dramatically and waiting lists are now very much shorter than they were when the Government first took office. Every Labour Government has left office with longer waiting lists.

RENAVAL Programme

9. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions he has held with representatives of district councils and European Commission officials concerning the implementation of the RENAVAL programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: There have been a number of discussions about the implementation of the RENAVAL programme between Scottish Office officials, representatives of the local partnerships, which include district councils, and officials of the European Commission.

Dr. Godman: Why has there been such a lamentable delay in the implementation of the RENAVAL programme? Is it not the case that those responsible for the disgraceful delay are to be found in St. Andrew's house? Many projects and organisations, such as the Clyde ports authority, Inverclyde district council and community groups, are seeking assistance in developing economic and community projects. The Auch mountain glen project, which would restore a local beauty spot, has remarkable local support, but it is being thwarted by the obduracy of the Minister and his officials. They should play the game by my constituency.

Mr. Stewart: I reject the hon. Gentleman's criticism, and I can reassure him on the present position. The revised projects for the RENAVAL programme for Fife and Strathclyde were recently agreed. The European Commission has said that it hopes that the projects will receive formal approval by the end of the year. I will send the hon. Gentleman a copy of the Strathclyde programme, which will be worth some £20 million ecu, which is £15 million.

Ardrossan-Saltcoats-Stevenston Bypass

10. **Mr. Lambie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he is going to announce the start of the Ardrossan-Saltcoats-Stevenston bypass; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The preparation of the Ardrossan-Saltcoats-Stevenston bypass scheme is continuing. A public local inquiry may be required to consider the remaining objections to the scheme. Negotiations are however continuing with the affected parties.

Once the scheme is fully prepared it will be considered for a construction start in the light of the competing priorities and level of available resources.

Mr. Lambie: I suppose that I should be happy with that response. I have waited 20 years for a decision on the Ardrossan-Saltcoats-Stevenston bypass, and I am sure that the Minister will give me a favourable result before I retire at the next election. Will the Minister confirm that he has received the results of the review of the trunk road system in Scotland and that the bypass, once it has been approved, will be given first priority in this list of trunk roads?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I can tell the hon. Gentleman about the review, which was commissioned in 1989. The results of the study are being analysed and will assist in the development of our policy for the management and improvement of all Scotland's trunk road network. Once the results of the review have been analysed, an executive summary will be produced, setting out the key strategic results. This will be available on request and is expected to be completed in the next few months. As to negotiations with the statutory objector, these are being pursued and we shall do our best to reach a satisfactory conclusion on the hon. Gentleman's constituency project.

Youth Unemployment

11. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the level of youth unemployment in Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart: In July 1991, the latest date for which information is available, there were 73,887 people aged under 25 years unemployed in Scotland. This represents 10 per cent. of the United Kingdom total compared with 14 per cent. in July 1989.

Mr. Hogg: Is the Minister aware that I have been asking this question, mostly of him, for the past 13 years and that that reply reflects how serious is youth unemployment in Scotland? Much of the real figure is concealed by half-baked schemes concocted by his Department, which do not reveal the real position. Do we not need to have real training for real jobs on the same basis as our major European competitors, notably the Germans? If we do not have that, we shall not be in a competitive position in the future.

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Gentleman will no doubt welcome the fact that unemployment in his constituency fell last month, as it did throughout Scotland. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman should wait to see the figures. As to the general point, we give a guarantee of a training place for all 16 or 17-year-olds who are not in full-time employment or education. As far as I know, that guarantee is given by no other European country. The current 300,000 youth training places in the United Kingdom compare with the lamentable 7,000 or so under the last Labour Government.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Opposition Members are always doughty fighters when claiming that they wish to preserve youth employment. Has my hon. Friend reflected on the likely effect of Labour's policy to establish a minimum wage of £3·20 per hour for every 16-year-old—and, indeed, on the effect on recruitment to the armed forces if defence spending were reduced by 50 per cent? That seems to be what Opposition parties want.

Mr. Stewart: I believe that, in that last instance, my hon. Friend is referring to the policy of the Liberal Democrats. He is, however, entirely right about the effect that a national minimum wage would have on jobs, especially jobs for young people. According to a number of independent commentators, up to 1·2 million jobs could be lost.

Mr. Worthington: Opposition Members are tired of the current complacency about youth unemployment. A guarantee is of value only if it is honoured. In Tayside, 533 young people are now unemployed; in Central region, 500 are unemployed. These are the 16 to 18-year-olds to whom the Government have given a guarantee.

The shortage of jobs is especially bad in traditional craft apprenticeships, in which many young people wish to work. Lothian now has 7,000 unemployed youngsters; that is 22 per cent. up on last year's figure. Strathclyde has a shortage of more than 3,000 opportunities. All that is concealed beneath a cloak of commercial confidentiality. The Minister is walking away from the problem, and he must stop doing so. Let us have a full independent review of the extent of youth unemployment in Scotland, and end the Government's complacency.

Hon. Members: Answer.

Mr. Stewart: I am going to answer. Today I checked the position in every local enterprise company. The hon. Gentleman mentioned Central region. It is clear that Forth Valley Enterprise is well on schedule towards ensuring that its end-of-year target is achieved. The hon. Gentleman also referred to Lothian; there are sufficient places on Lothian and Edinburgh Enterprise Ltd. to meet demand. Scottish Enterprise Tayside currently has 2,800 young people in training, and nearly 1,500 have entered the scheme since 1 April.

The guarantees will be met by local enterprise companies throughout Scotland. What the hon. Gentleman says about me does not concern me; but, if he is calling the local enterprise companies liars, I suggest that he repeat that outside the House.

NHS Trusts

12. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the future of NHS trusts.

15. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has had supporting the principle of hospitals becoming trusts outside the national health service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: NHS trusts form an important part of the national health service, providing services to patients free at the point of delivery. I am at present considering applications for trust status from three Scottish hospitals.

Mr. Bruce: Does the Secretary of State accept that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Stephen)—whom I am pleased to welcome to the House—will confirm, 100 per cent. of those who voted in the Kincardine and Deeside by-election voted against the opt-out of Foresterhill? Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that it would be contrary to the interests of patient care to force through a proposal that is opposed by consultants, nursing staff, general practitioners, patients and the general public? Will he now listen to the people of Scotland, abandon the current policy and pursue policies that have the support of the people?

Mr. Lang: On behalf of my hon. Friends, I am happy to welcome the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Stephen) to the House, and to congratulate him on his success in the by-election. We look forward to his participation in our affairs, and wish him a fulfilling time during his time in the House—however long or short that may be.

I have already spelt out in great detail the criteria that I shall apply when considering Foresterhill's application for trust status. It is a complex and detailed process, which deserves such treatment. Of course I take account of feeling in the area; but, as I said earlier, I also take account of the way in which feeling has been influenced by the misleading statements that have been put about over recent months.

I have no doubt that trust status for hospitals can be an enormous success, as it has proved to be south of the border. It can create the opportunity for local management to bring the delivery of health care closer to the people whom it serves, and give it freedom to run its own affairs. I shall take careful account of all aspects of the application before reaching a decision.

Mr. McAvoy: I am surprised at the remarks of the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce). In my constituency the Rutherglen Liberal Democrats supported the privatisation of care for the elderly.

When will the dogmatic Secretary of State for Scotland realise that the people of Scotland see NHS trusts as the thin edge of the wedge for privatisation of the health service, and that they do not want them?

Mr. Lang: Far from being dogmatic, our objective is to achieve the best possible delivery of health care through a health service that continues to be free at the point of delivery to patients. There is mounting evidence from south of the border that trust status has helped the hospitals that have achieved it to improve their delivery of health care and to expand the services that they can offer. If that is the case I imagine that more Scots will wish to take advantage of trust status. I read with interest in today's edition of *The Courier and Advertiser*, Dundee that the Dundee royal infirmary and Kings Cross hospital are beginning to consider the possibility of applying.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my right hon. Friend confirm to those who indulge in unnecessary and unwarranted smear campaigns that NHS trust hospitals are treating 10 per cent. more patients than were being treated a year ago? Will not people in Scotland quickly benefit from having several NHS trust hospitals?

Mr. Lang: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his view of the position south of the border. I was interested to see that the mid-Cheshire hospitals are increasing their eye

services by up to 50 per cent., that for Manchester central hospitals a day-care centre for cataract surgery has opened, and that in south Devon 67 new posts are to be created. Plainly, many of the hospitals south of the border that have applied for trust status are making considerable advances in the delivery of patient care.

Mr. Dewar: The right hon. Gentleman has said that in reaching his decision he would have to take account of the quality of the representations. Does he think that such an argument will help him, given that the objections come from the doctors, nurses and auxiliaries, who are themselves the health of the hospital, and who will be responsible for its continuing health? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of the theory that he would be happy to drop the whole unhappy business, but that his Minister responsible for health takes a different view? Is it right that the future of the hospitals should depend on an undignified ideological tug-of-war in the Scottish Office bunker? When will the right hon. Gentleman summon up the courage to make a decision on the applications?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman overlooks the fact that the applications originate from the people who run the hospitals, because of the advantages that are to be had, through local management, for local people. That must be borne in mind. There is nothing doctrinaire about our approach to the matter. We are concerned to continue to build on our magnificent record in improving the delivery of health care. As I have said, I shall consider each application on its merits and according to the criteria. I shall make an announcement as soon as I reach a decision.

Tower Blocks

13. **Mr. Sillars:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has for assisting councils to increase security in high tower block housing.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend takes the question of security in high-rise housing very seriously.

Expenditure needs, including measures to improve security in high-rise tower blocks, are taken fully into account in the distribution of housing revenue account capital allocations and housing support grant.

Mr. Sillars: Is the Minister aware that most people who live in that type of accommodation do not believe that the Government take the problem seriously enough, and that we now urgently require either a direct grant or an allowance for capital borrowing to provide concierge-type services in high tower blocks in Glasgow and other parts of Scotland? Is the hon. Gentleman aware that old people in places such as Ibroxholm Oval are now sitting in their houses paralysed with fear, because they are the targets of the criminal element in our communities? They are the most vulnerable people. They are afraid to stay in in case their doors are kicked in, but they are also afraid to go out in case their homes are done in while they are out. Will the Minister pay more urgent attention to the problem? It now requires Government action.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am well aware that two of the three tower blocks in Ibrox in the hon. Gentleman's constituency—Iona court and Broomloan court—have concierge services that are working extremely well. The further expansion of that excellent scheme has a great deal to recommend it, but the hon. Gentleman must make representations to Glasgow district council, which has been allocated more than £101 million this year in respect of housing revenue account for capital investment. I should also make it clear that, in recent days, we have allocated further sums of more than £9 million for Scotland, in addition to the £4 million allocated for specific projects for homelessness, which we think will also assist. I recommend that the hon. Gentleman take the matter up with his council.

Mr. Maxton: Does the Minister agree, therefore, that the concierge scheme introduced by Glasgow district council, involving controlled entry and video surveillance, is proving successful in the 80 blocks in which it has so far been operated? Is not it a disgrace, however, that the concierge service has been developed entirely out of Glasgow district council resources and that no money for it has come from the Scottish Office? Is not it also true that, next year, its further development will be restricted to three more blocks, whereas there are 170 tower blocks in Glasgow in which it has not yet been developed? Is not it now time that the Minister acted to solve the problems of high-rise blocks?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We shall, of course, take these matters into account before making the provisional allocations in December. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say that the schemes have been highly successful, but I take issue with him on his assertion that the matter should be taken out of the hands of the district council and placed in the hands of the Scottish Office. It is much better that the district council should have the responsibility for choosing its own priorities. I repeat that I shall bear in mind the hon. Gentleman's remarks before we make our allocations.

Nurses

14. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many student nurses qualified in Scotland last year; and how many secured permanent employment within the national health service.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In the year ending March 1991, 2,917 students in Scotland qualified for registration as first level nurses. Approximately 4,500 qualified nurses have secured employment in the national health service in Scotland during that period.

Mr. Brown: Is not it clear that many qualified nurses are not getting jobs in the health service? That is disgraceful because we know that, if resources were made available to extend the Royal hospital for sick children in Edinburgh and provide the promised new hospital in Leith, many more nurses and other medics could be employed to provide the service that they are trained to provide. If the Government claim that the health service is safe in their hands, will they do something about it and provide the resources, so that hospitals—particularly in the Edinburgh area—are given the back-up that they deserve?

Mr. Forsyth: I suspect that the hon. Gentleman had framed his supplementary before hearing my answer to his question, in which I made it clear that the number of nurses who were employed during that period was far greater than the number who qualified. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that, under this Government, the

number of nurses employed in Scotland has increased by one third. That is a magnificent record. Moreover, their pay has increased by 40 per cent., whereas it went down by 25 per cent. when the Labour Government were in office.

National Health Service Trusts

16. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what meetings he has had with hon. Members on each of the proposals for setting up national health service trusts.

Mr. Lang: There have been no formal meetings with hon. Members on proposals for setting up national health service trusts.

Mr. Foulkes: Why is the Secretary of State afraid to meet Ayrshire Labour MPs? Is it because we will point out that the consultants, general practitioners, radiographers, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, the Ayrshire local health council, all four district councils and the four Members of Parliament who bothered to make a submission were against the proposal to opt out—that all those 200 submissions were against it? It is an insult to all the people who made the submissions for the Secretary of State to suggest that all those professionals are accepting misleading statements and that the quality of their submissions is not as good as those of the handful of people in favour. Will the right hon. Gentleman now throw off the veto of his Minister of State and have the courage to meet us to argue and discuss the case?

Mr. Lang: Neither I nor my colleagues are afraid of the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) or his hon. Friends who represent Ayrshire, however much they may frighten each other. There is a statutory procedure laid down for the consultation process. I am in no doubt about the hon. Gentleman's views as he has tabled parliamentary questions on the matter, he took part in the debate on the regulations on 1 May, he spoke in the Scottish Grand Committee on 9 July and he submitted his views in the consultation process. It would be inequitable to those who take a contrary view to that of the hon. Gentleman if I were to see him exceptionally, in addition to all the other representations that I have received from him, now that the consultation period is over and I am reaching a conclusion on the matter.

Hypothermia

17. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the resource implications for the health service in Scotland of the incidence of hypothermia in the winter months.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The NHS is very conscious of the potential for an increased incidence of hypothermia in the winter months and health board plans take account of the need to provide a higher level of services in winter.

Mr. Dunnachie: I thank the Minister for his reply, but is it not about time that something was done to help senior citizens and the long-term sick? Every year we read about people who have died as a result of hypothermia or from a disease caused by hypothermia, but nothing is done. Every year people are asked to write in and beg for money. Is it not time that the Government got off their behinds and made it compulsory for a payment to be made every year to every senior citizen in this land?

Mr. Forsyth: The Labour party cannot hold a candle to the Government's record in terms of helping elderly people with the costs of heating. The hon. Gentleman would do well to familiarise himself with the keep warm this winter campaign run by the Scottish Office which has received every support from local authorities the length and breadth of Scotland.

NHS Trusts

18. **Mr. Darling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the hospitals in respect of which he has received an expression of interest in opting out or establishing a national health service trust.

Mr. Forsyth: Three hospital units have applied for NHS trust status—South Ayrshire, the Royal Scottish national hospital and the Foresterhill hospitals group. In addition, formal expressions of interest have been received from the Victoria infirmary, Glasgow, the West Grampian hospitals unit, the Princess Margaret Rose hospital in Edinburgh, and Lothian college of nursing and midwifery.

Mr. Darling: Can the Minister justify the payment of more than £234,000 of public money to accountants, bureaucrats and consultants to prepare opting-out submissions when that money can be better used to reduce waiting lists or to make a donation to the appeal for the Royal hospital for sick children in Edinburgh instead of being used to propagate Tory party propaganda which is not wanted by the people of Scotland and which would damage the health service in Scotland? What possible justification can the Minister have for that other than his trying to pursue a policy which is completely discredited north and south of the border?

Mr. Forsyth: The moneys provided for the preparation of NHS trust proposals are in addition to the moneys provided for patient care. If the hon. Gentleman were interested in patient care, instead of opposing NHS trust proposals in principle, he would look at the merits of the proposals and decide whether they should go ahead on the basis of the interests of patient care—and that is precisely what my right hon. Friend will do. If the hon. Gentleman cares to consider examples from south of the border, he will see that trusts there are cutting waiting lists, employing more doctors, treating more patients and providing a wider range of services at times convenient to patients. It is sheer dogma by the Labour party to reject them out of hand without even considering individual applications.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: May I endorse most vigorously what my hon. Friend has just said about the benefits of NHS trusts operating within the health service. There are two trusts in my constituency that offer improved patient care and have taken on more staff. Is it not time that Scotland was able to enjoy the benefits of improved patient care that NHS trusts offer patients in England and Wales?

Mr. Forsyth: My hon. Friend is right. I hope everyone in Scotland understands the position of all the Opposition parties. Even if an NHS trust can be demonstrated to be

in the interests of patients to reduce waiting lists and provide a better quality of service, they would reject it because they put politics before patients.

Scottish Government

19. **Mr. Galloway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received on the subject of Scottish government; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: A range of representations has been received on the subject of Scottish government.

Mr. Galloway: Now that the Government's risible rump of 10 Scottish Members of Parliament has been reduced to the nefarious nine, and now that the Secretary of State for Scotland and virtually every one of that nefarious nine trembles on the edge of the abyss of a total political wipeout in Scotland, will the Government finally see the sense of coming to the negotiating table and talking about Scottish government? If not, how few Tory Members do there need to be in Scotland before it is accepted that the status quo is no longer tenable?

Mr. Stewart: This Government will fight the next general election as a Conservative and Unionist Government. On the by-elections, Langbaurgh strongly suggests that the Labour party will not have the chance to implement its half-baked proposals for a Scottish Assembly, as proposed by the Scottish Constitutional Convention—it would increase taxes, be a constitutional impossibility and lead to constant feuding between Westminster and Edinburgh. That is no answer to Scotland's problems or opportunities. Of course, there is a constitutional choice for the people of Scotland—it is between the Union and independence.

Points of Order

3.32 pm

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I rise as a result of the intervention by the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth). I was here from half-past two. The hon. Gentleman came in just five minutes ago. I stood up for six questions, not least for question No. 3, in which I have a constituency interest. In the light of the by-election result in Scotland and the fact that we have an opportunity only once a month to put our constituency interests, I appeal to you not to hear frivolous comments from Conservative Members but only real issues that concern Scottish Members of Parliament.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not need any help. This is a United Kingdom Parliament. The hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth) has as much right as anyone else to ask a question on a matter of general interest to the whole House of Commons. I am aware that it is not possible for me to call every Scottish Member at Scottish Question Time, but I thought that it was fair today—I hope that the House will agree—to get as far down the Order Paper as I possibly could.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: We managed to get down to question No. 19, and the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) had already asked a question. That was not bad.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Would it be appropriate to remind the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) that this is the United Kingdom Parliament? If he wants home rule for Scotland, he can have it, and then we will have home rule for England as well.

Mr. Speaker: I have just said that this is a United Kingdom Parliament.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is not the difficulty in which you are placed the fact that there are now only four Government Back-Bench Members representing Scotland, and 63 of different parties on the Opposition side of the House? Frankly, Mr. Speaker, if you are obliged to continue to apply the archaic rule in total contradiction of the balance of the parties in Scotland, this place will look increasingly irrelevant to the people of Scotland.

Several Hon. Members: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let me deal with one point at a time, please. I must keep a balance in this House. Hon. Members from Scottish constituencies have as much right as an hon. Member from an English constituency to raise a question on defence or any other matter—*[Interruption.]* And they do. Equally, the whole House will have seen for itself how far we have moved down the Order Paper today and that I have called a number of English Members on hospital trust matters.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I think that there is a general recognition on the Opposition side of the House that you have a difficult job at Scottish Question Time. I recognise that it is difficult to balance interests. That difficult situation is made infinitely worse and more galling to colleagues who have been rising repeatedly, question after question, without success, when a Conservative Member swans in, three quarters of the way through Scottish Question Time, and is instantly called.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth) was not instantly called.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Perhaps those hon. Members who have raised points of order have done a service to the hon. Members who wish to take part in the ballot. If I take one more, two more Members can sign the book.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): As a Back Bencher, I need the opportunity of raising questions at Scottish Question Time. It is lamentable that the Government have not set up a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, which could help us to deal with Scottish matters.

Mr. Speaker: That is as may be.

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I had better take one from a Conservative Member now. I call a Member from Cornwall. *[Laughter.]*

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): Is not the root cause of your difficulties about the complaint that has been raised, Mr. Speaker, Scotland's gross over-representation in this House on matters relating to other parts of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Speaker: I cannot be involved with constitutional matters of that kind.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No, I think that I had better take one from the Scottish National party.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): This, of course, is the United Kingdom Parliament—many of us think that that is exactly the problem. However, as you have some discretion in these matters, Mr. Speaker, and while we wait for the Scottish electorate to remove the remainder of the Scottish Conservative party from this House, would it not be appropriate for you to give priority to Scottish Members at Scottish Question Time?

Mr. Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman looks at *Hansard* tomorrow, he will see that I have done exactly that.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We should now move on, because everybody——

Mr. Ian Bruce *rose*——

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have a very heavy day ahead of us. I shall have to put a 10-minute limit on speeches, and the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) might be affected by that.

Mr. Walker: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Very well: I shall trade the hon. Gentleman a point of order for a speech.

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am raising a point of order because my understanding is that this is the United Kingdom Parliament, which has representatives from all over the United Kingdom. The cornerstone of our democratic system is hon. Members' right to ask questions and to have those questions answered. Can you confirm, Sir, that you keep a record of the questions that have been asked and that, although the Scots comprise less than 9 per cent. of the United Kingdom population, their representatives regularly ask more than 9 per cent. of the questions that are raised in the House?

Mr. Speaker: I must now bring this matter to a conclusion. I do indeed keep a list of questions, but I advise hon. Members representing Scottish constituencies that the next time we have Scottish Questions those hon. Members who have been called today will not stand quite such a good chance of being included next time.

BALLOT FOR NOTICES OF MOTIONS FOR FRIDAY 29 NOVEMBER

Members successful in the ballot were:

Mr. Derek Conway
Mr. Gavin Strang
Mr. John Bowis

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I do not think that I need any more points of order. I have taken my final point of order this afternoon. The Clerk will now proceed to read the Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

Asylum Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Speaker: I must announce to the House that I have selected the amendment——

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Let me finish this first, please.

I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition. In view of the pressure to participate in the debate, I shall put a precautionary limit of 10 minutes on speeches between 7 and 9 o'clock. If hon. Members who are called before 7 o'clock keep broadly to the time limit, it may be possible, in the interests of the whole House, for the occupant of the Chair to relax that limit later in the debate.

Mr. Madden *rose——*

Mr. Speaker: What is the point of order?

Mr. Madden: I am sorry to detain you and the House, but this is an important matter of order which affects the Bill. Later this month, the Commission for Racial Equality will consider instigating a judicial review against the Government's proposals to withdraw the green legal aid form in cases of political asylum and immigration. What opportunity will be given to a Law Officer to give advice to the House on the matter? The Home Secretary has told the Commission that he cannot give advice on the matter. There is widespread anxiety that the Bill may be a clear breach of the Race Relations Act 1976.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman can raise those matters when I call him in the debate, as I hope to do. The Law Officers may attend the Standing Committee. That is a normal procedure.

3.40 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Kenneth Baker): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill deals with the treatment of asylum seekers and procedures for determining their claims. As I made clear to the House on 2 July, the numbers of people seeking asylum pose major problems both in Britain and throughout the world. There have been more than half a million applications for asylum in Europe this year. Germany estimates that it will receive about a quarter of a million applications. The United Kingdom total, including dependants, will exceed 50,000—10 times the figure only three years ago. By the end of October we had received some 38,800 principal applications during this calendar year.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has estimated that there are 17 million refugees and asylum seekers in the world. A phenomenon of that order cannot be ignored. It is not scaremongering or playing the numbers game to recognise and respond to changes on that scale. On the contrary, it would be a gross irresponsibility for the Government to ignore them and pretend that numbers do not matter.

[Mr. Kenneth Baker]

On the continent, political movements are already emerging which thrive on the flow of refugees and exploit naked nationalism. In France, Le Pen's party seems to have 30 per cent. support in opinion polls. Young fascists march in Germany and chant the slogans of the 1930s. In Austria this week, a far right-wing party has just won 22 per cent. of the votes, campaigning on a slogan of "Vienna for the Viennese". Those are disturbing trends, with resonances from the darkest period of European history. We must ensure that such movements are not given the opportunity to develop in our own country.

We have been working at improving race relations in Britain for over 30 years, under successive Governments. Some of the speeches by politicians of all parties on the continent in recent months would be simply unacceptable from a politician in Britain. I draw some comfort from that fact, because it reflects our maturity in dealing with such matters. But we must keep working at it. One of the most important messages that we must give to everyone in our country is that we have in place proper, fair and effective policies to deal with the unprecedented flow of asylum seekers.

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Michael Morris (Northampton, South): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Baker: No, I want to get into my speech. I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman and to my hon. Friend in a moment.

I remind the House of the measures which the Government have already taken, and of four in particular. First, we have increased by five times the staff who determine asylum claims to over 500 during this financial year; 330 are already in post. Secondly, we have increased from £1,000 to £2,000 the charge under the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987 for bringing improperly documented passengers to Britain. Thirdly, we have placed document specialists at Lagos airport. A second team is currently working at Moscow airport, which has become a major transit point for people without proper documents. Plans are well advanced for similar exercises elsewhere. Fourthly, we intend to increase the provision of detention places by 290.

Mr. Vaz: The right hon. Gentleman will recall that, when his predecessor introduced the Immigration Act 1987, he talked about providing a better customer service from Lunar house in Croydon. Does he not share part of the responsibility for the Government's failure to allocate more resources to deal with asylum applications at least four year ago when the problem first arose? Does he accept that what he has announced is not sufficient to deal with the applications from asylum seekers, let alone with other immigration applications which are bottling up Lunar house?

Mr. Baker: We are increasing resources constantly, not only at Lunar house but also in the naturalisation department in Liverpool, which is an aspect of that. We doubled resources in 1989, and as soon as I became Home Secretary, I realised that that was one of the most important issues that I would have to deal with. I therefore put in hand increases which are now in place.

Mr. Michael Morris: Does my right hon. Friend recall the case of one Viraj Mendes? He will be aware that I have taken a great interest in Sri Lanka since I have been in the House. Is he aware that that gentleman hoodwinked the nation for about eight years and that in the end his wife made it clear that the man was entirely bogus? Is he aware that the Church was totally taken in, and everyone in Sri Lanka in the end made it absolutely clear that the man was bogus? When he returned to Sri Lanka, he returned to safety and, according to the latest reports, he is now in Germany. In those circumstances, my right hon. Friend's proposals are greatly to be welcomed, to ensure that Tamils who are genuine and need asylum can be properly considered.

Mr. Baker: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. He specified the details of that case precisely. One of the most important points was that, after a long process when every possible avenue had been carefully and scrupulously explored, when Mr. Mendes was returned to Sri Lanka he suffered no persecution whatsoever.

Mr. Robert Hayward (Kingswood): In reviewing the measures that have been introduced in the past few years, my right hon. Friend referred to carriers' liability. He will recognise that that is causing substantial problems for a number of carriers. Could he review the way in which the regulations work and their impact on some carriers?

Mr. Baker: We are providing a great deal of advice and training for officials of different carriers—and not merely for British Airways, because we do not expect airline officials to be immigration officers; that is not their function. However, it is entirely right that we should ask them to check whether documentation is correct. I remind the House that we are not alone in doing so. Virtually every other country in Europe does it, Canada and America do it—fines in America are $5,000, and in Canada the penalty is $3,000—because all countries recognise that airlines have responsibility in that matter.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): There appears to be bipartisan agreement that bogus asylum seekers should be dealt with, but there is a good deal of concern among voluntary societies and practitioners. Could my right hon. Friend make it clear that, during the passage of the Bill, he and his colleagues will have consultations with those who make representations to ensure that their worries about links between people with different claims and the causes of large-scale immigration are considered together?

Mr. Baker: Yes, I shall certainly give that undertaking. We have already received a considerable number of representations. My hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for immigration matters met a delegation from various refugee groups yesterday. We shall certainly continue to receive representations during the passage of the Bill.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood) *rose—*

Mr. Baker: I shall give way to the hon. Lady, but then I must proceed with my speech.

Ms. Short: Will the Home Secretary admit that the problem of bogus applications, and there are some, is entirely the responsibility of the Government, in that the enormous delays in processing applications, which cause great fear for real refugees, have encouraged bogus

organisers of fraudulent claims, such as the friend of the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks)? I wrote a long time ago to his Department and asked it to move against him and the Department failed to do so. There is a simple remedy: speed up the processing, and we will not have the problem. We do not need any other changes or legislation. The Government's inefficiency bears the whole responsibility.

Mr. Baker: I hope that the hon. Lady will vote for the Bill, because its purpose is to speed up the process. It is an absurdity to say that we are responsible for bogus applicants. Can the Government be held to blame for such claims as this—a Turkish Cypriot claiming asylum on the basis that her mother did not get on with her husband and was trying to break up her marriage? That is the sort of claim that one gets. I do not want to make too much of them, but there are bogus applications and they are completely clogging up the system.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Baker: To get the balance right, I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor).

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): In view of the serious situation that my right hon. Friend has outlined and the excellent policies that he is introducing to deal with it, can we have a clear assurance that the Government will resist any proposals at the Maastricht discussions to transfer immigration control to Brussels or the European Economic Community?

Mr. Baker: I have already made our position on that extremely clear. I am wholly opposed to a transfer of competence to the European Community on matters of asylum and immigration. That is our negotiating position. The matter is rather tangential to this Bill, but I am glad to clarify the position.

To respond to the phenomenon of asylum seeking is not in any way racialist. This is not about discriminating against non-white applicants. Eastern Europe remains a major cause for concern. Despite the growth of democracy there, the number of people from eastern Europe seeking asylum in the west has increased significantly. Nearly half of Germany's huge total of asylum seekers are European.

Last week, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) accused me of being unduly alarmist when I referred to the figure of 7 million Russians wanting to leave the Soviet Union. That was not my figure; it was given by a senior Soviet spokesman at a conference in Vienna that I attended with other Ministers of the Interior at the beginning of this year. He surprised and alarmed us all by saying that, following the liberalisation of exit controls, he expected that up to 7 million Soviet citizens would want to work in the west. Many might seek to use the asylum route and, indeed, it would be naive to think otherwise.

I was appalled when, in his party conference speech, the right hon. Gentleman said that we were preparing to play the race card in this matter. He has flirted with that theme. He has ducked, bobbed and weaved with it, but he is clearly embarrassed by it now. His hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) has not attempted to get into this murky area. He has not followed the right hon. Gentleman's grubby lead.

As I said at the Conservative party conference, I want to make it clear that our policy is colour blind. It applies to people wheresoever they come from, whether Africa, Asia or eastern Europe.

The trouble with the right hon. Gentleman is that he has been searching for a way to do nothing about this problem. He would prefer to turn a blind eye to the problem of asylum seekers around the world. When he appears on television or in the media, he pooh-poohs and belittles it, and gives the impression that we are exaggerating the problem. He will not face up to the problem.

Faced with the evidence that we have, any responsible Home Secretary would act as I have acted. For the right hon. Gentleman to oppose the Bill and underestimate the problem that faces us shows that he is completely unsuited to hold this office. I suggest to him that he should overcome his natural sloth and complacency. *[Interruption.]* The only race card being played is being played by the right hon. Gentleman.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Baker: I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Hicks).

Mrs. Maureen Hicks (Wolverhampton, North-East): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is a question not of being racialist but of being realistic? Is there not some hypocrisy when the Opposition talk of problems of unemployment and housing, yet suggest that we add to them—*[Interruption.]*—by advocating an open-door immigration policy that will mean more people coming to our constituencies and competing for homes and jobs? The people of Wolverhampton, all colours and creeds, live daily with that reality. May I assure the House that my right hon. Friend has their full support and that they are completely opposed to the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley)?

Mr. Baker: My hon. Friend should know that I will deal with the interaction between immigration policy and asylum seeking later. It is realistic to recognise that there is a significant problem with which we must deal and that it is right to do so.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Baker: I have given way a great deal, and I must pursue my speech.

It is clear that many people are now using asylum claims as a means of evading immigration control. As numbers rise, a decreasing proportion are found to qualify for refugee status. In 1980, in the United Kingdom, 64 per cent. of claimants were recognised as refugees. Last year, the figure was about 25 per cent. In Germany, it was less than 5 per cent.

I am anxious to find common ground in the country on this matter and I strongly suggest that it is important that that common ground is found. My view is shared by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. His director of international protection, Michel Moussalli, wrote in "Refugees" magazine—the UNHCR publication—in May:

> "The majority of people coming as asylum seekers into Europe are not refugees but economic migrants."

He also said that they

> "clog up the asylum procedures which cannot function normally any longer. This in turn proves to be an attraction

[Mr. Baker]

to many destitute persons abroad, who feel that if they apply for refugee status in a Western country, they will be taken care of by the social welfare system of that country for a year or two, or even longer, while their claims are being examined." Those are the words of the international protection director of the UNHCR, and he has touched upon an important point.

Applicants benefit from delays in determination systems and the complicated review procedures after the initial decision. That pattern is repeated across Europe; that is why we must ensure that we reduce and not add to the delays when we change our system and introduce new rights.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North) *rose*——

Mr. Baker: I have given way a great deal, and I must pursue my speech.

The category of "refugee" is defined in the 1951 United Nations convention. It is important to recognise the philosophical background to that definition. There is a basic assumption in international law—and in common sense—that a state will protect its citizens. That is the very reason for the existence of states. The 1951 convention is about citizens whom a state is actively seeking to harm. It is not enough to say that most asylum applicants are deserving because they come from "unstable" or "strife-torn" countries. It is not enough that a state is unlucky or incompetent in its economic, social or foreign policies—that jobs or food are scarce, or that it is at war with itself or with its neighbours.

By the 1951 convention, the international community has singled out the persecution of the individual on racial, religious or political grounds as the cause for special concern. I repeat clearly today that the Government will continue to honour their commitment to people in that category. We have followed that noble tradition over the centuries, and that category certainly exists.

When considering measures to resist the exploitation of our procedures by manifestly unfounded applicants, we should not forget the clearly well founded applicants—genuine refugees who often have harrowing stories of suffering, degradation and torture. We will continue to respond sympathetically to their needs.

Mr. Winnick: Is the Home Secretary aware that the argument is not about bogus asylum seekers? Those claimants undermine the claims of genuine asylum seekers, and no one would wish to defend them. However, does the right hon. Gentleman recognise that profound disquiet has been expressed about some of the proposals in the Bill, particularly the fast-track ones? The letter published in *The Times* today from the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster expresses the profound disquiet among many people who are concerned about genuine asylum seekers. If the Bill is not amended, those genuine claimants will undoubtedly be penalised. Will the right hon. Gentleman take that on board?

Mr. Baker: The hon. Gentleman anticipates what I am about to say. I shall deal with that point in a few moments.

I was dealing with the definition of refugees under the 1951 convention, and concentrating on the well-founded fears of persecution. There is considerable pressure for people all over the world to migrate, for all sorts of reasons. But why should the inevitable response to a problem in one country be permanent emigration to the other side of the world? Should all the 17 million refugees whom the United Nations have identified be allowed to come to Europe if they so choose? The closer refugees remain to their own countries, the easier it is to organise their return when conditions allow. If repatriation is not possible, the United Nations considers that integration and settlement within a refugee's region is the next best alternative. Resettlement outside the region should be considered only in the last resort.

For example, why did more than 600 Angolans apply for asylum here in October alone? Angola has its problems but it has no ex-colonial links with this country. Angolans tend to speak Portuguese rather than English, and Angola directly borders four other countries. In 1969, the Organisation of African Unity agreed a convention under which member states undertook obligations for refugees in their own regions, which goes considerably further than the United Nations convention. Do Angolans really need to enter Europe in such numbers?

We are not washing our hands of the problem. The United Kingdom plays a full and honourable part, financially and diplomatically, in alleviating the suffering of refugees in regions close to their own countries. Last year, we spent some £60 million helping refugees and displaced persons overseas. The House will recall that we took a strong lead in the international effort to help the Kurds in Iraq. In that context, asylum-seeking in the west is, in many ways, a damaging and distracting sideshow. It consumes many times the global budget of the UNHCR in supporting a self-selecting minority, without addressing the real problems that lie behind the asylum-seeking flows.

I remind the House that the United Kingdom and other developed countries of Europe must assist and support the developing economies, especially in eastern Europe, to ensure that people will want to stay and strengthen those economies themselves. Yesterday's leader article on Austria in *The Times* concluded:

"The Community must itself look east and rebuild by free trade those shattered economies if the migration on which far-right reaction feeds is to be stemmed".

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Baker: If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I must resume my speech. I have not given way to Opposition Members—*[Interruption.]* As there is acclamation for my hon. Friend, I am delighted to give way.

Mr. Janman: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the opportunity for this country to help support genuine refugees abroad through various aid programmes is not helped by the fact that, according to a headline in *The Times* today, bogus refugees bleed Britain of £100 million through benefit fraud? Has he seen the comments of a DSS officer in the same article that benefit fraud is now a national sport and that bogus asylum seekers think that the way in which this country hands out so much money is hilarious?

Mr. Baker: Like the hon. Member for Walsall North (Mr. Winnick), my hon. Friend anticipates a point that I shall come to. I shall deal with that matter in a moment. I shall deal with both points in my own way and in my own time.

The central purpose of the Bill and the rules that we have published for consultation are to speed up the

determination process and to ensure that genuine cases are promptly identified and that rejected applicants leave the country. The Bill gives new rights of appeal.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Mon): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Baker: With great respect, I must continue; I have given way a great deal.

Clause 1 defines a claim for asylum in terms of a potential breach of the United Kingdom's obligations under the 1951 convention. Clause 2, which is one of the more controversial clauses, deals with fingerprinting. The Government have been criticised on that provision, so I wish to explain why we think that it is necessary.

Clause 2 provides for the fingerprinting of all asylum applicants because more than half of those who apply at ports have disposed of their travel documents and other forms of identification before they arrive in the United Kingdom. Many of those documents are destroyed on the aeroplanes. Increasingly, applicants in this country who have been here for some time present themselves without documents and freely admit that they have passed on their documents after entering illegally——

Ms. Short: What proportion?

Mr. Baker: I can help the hon. Lady on that point. As the House knows, most asylum applications are made by people resident in this country—some 75 to 85 per cent. are made by people who have been living in this country as visitors, students or tourists for some weeks, months or years. When they seek to claim refugee status, they do so in two ways: they go to Croydon and claim it, or they apply by post. If they write in and apply by post and do not include their passport, we have no means of knowing their real identity——

Ms. Short: Answer the question.

Mr. Baker: I am now coming to the question that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) shouted out a moment ago, and I must ask her to contain her natural enthusiasm for knowledge. I am just about to answer.

In order to deal with applications by post, on 1 November we introduced a new system, under which those applicants who cannot establish their identity by sending their passports are called for interview. It may interest the House to know that, of the first batch of 130 interviews arranged, only one of the applicants has so far turned up.

Ms. Short: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Baker: No, I shall continue and develop my argument.

The House will know that most asylum applications are made by people who have already entered the United Kingdom and then seek to extend their stay. We have uncovered a number of cases in which individuals have made multiple applications in false identities.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): How many?

Mr. Baker: I am coming to that. The anxiety of Opposition Members to learn bad news seems to be almost unchallenged.

Other countries have the same experience, and a number of them, including France, the Netherlands and Switzerland, already take fingerprints from all asylum applicants and make systematic comparisons. On introducing such systems, they found that between 5 and 20 per cent. of applications were multiple. We are finding the same problem. Eight asylum applicants arrested in August were found to have made 100 asylum and social security applications between them. One applicant had 49 identities and another had 34. One suspect was found in possession of 14 Department of Social Security payment books.

Ms. Short: They should be prosecuted.

Mr. Baker: They are.

A forgery kit was found which included falsified letters from the Home Office, Angolan, Gabonese and Burkina Faso birth certificates and Gabonese authenticating stamps. More than 100 cases are under investigation. Clearly, measures are needed to tackle that problem. There are 56 north London addresses under investigation at present. One address in Gravesend which was under investigation was the source of 47 asylum applications—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members want the information, but they do not like it when I give it to them. A further 600 files are under suspicion—*[Interruption.]* If Opposition Members say that it is not a problem and the matter should be tucked away, that shows their attitude to asylum-seeking.

There are other problems relating to identity. A case was brought to me only this morning of an Angolan——

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): The Secretary of State is not talking about the Bill.

Mr. Baker: I am talking about clause 2.

An Angolan/Zairean entered this country illegally, sought asylum and was given it. During the following Department of Social Security inquiries, it was established that he had been given asylum in France in another name and under another identity. The determination of identity, therefore, is very important.

There is now a clear practical need for fingerprinting powers in this country. There is no question, as some have suggested, of our seeking to criminalise asylum seekers. The system will be operated by the immigration department entirely separately from police records.

Clause 3 contains provisions to modify the duties on local authorities under the homelessness legislation in relation to asylum seekers. These measures will be fairer to people on local authority waiting lists, while continuing to provide protection for asylum seekers in genuine need. It is illogical that someone whose right to remain in the country permanently is still under question should be able to secure permanent accommodation in this way and even acquire the right to buy.

We therefore propose two extra tests for asylum seekers who are waiting for their asylum applications to be decided. Do they have reasonable accommodation at the moment, even if it is only temporary; and is there any other accommodation to which they could reasonably go? The Bill provides that, if they meet all these tests, local authorities have to provide only temporary accommodation until the asylum applications are decided.

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Sir Philip Goodhart (Beckenham) *rose*——

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The three hon. Members who are rising are seeking to participate in the debate. It might be better if the Home Secretary completed his speech and they then made their points during the debate so as to receive an answer from the Minister who will wind up.

Mr. Baker: I have given way generously, and I think that I should pursue my explanation of the Bill.

Clause 4 provides for the curtailment of any existing leave to be in this country in another capacity when an asylum application is refused. For example, when a person is admitted as a visitor and then applies for asylum, it will usually be inappropriate to go back to treating him as a tourist. Since an asylum application is a request to be dealt with outside the normal immigration rules, it is unreasonable to treat rejected applicants as if nothing has happened and allow the regular procedures to take their course. The Bill will allow simultaneous decisions to refuse asylum, curtail leave and deport. All the issues raised can then be addressed in a single appeal.

Clause 5 and schedule 2 set out new appeal rights for all asylum seekers before removal, regardless of immigration status. Immigration and refugee organisations have pressed for this change over a number of years. The clause gives everyone an appeal right, while avoiding exploitation of the system with repeated appeals on the same facts.

Appeals will be dealt with by nominated independent immigration appeals adjudicators. Applicants will be required to obtain leave from a special adjudicator before proceeding to an oral hearing of their case, and the procedural rules outlined by the Lord Chancellor will make it absolutely clear that an adjudicator will be required to grant leave for a full oral hearing unless he is satisfied that there is no arguable case. This procedure is necessary to ensure that cases that are manifestly unfounded do not clog up the system. For example, a young man arriving at Dover on the ferry from Calais can be sent back for his asylum claim to be examined there without undue delay.

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): I hope that, even at this moment, we can persuade the Home Secretary to stop saying that the Bill provides automatic rights to appeal. It provides no such thing. It provides the right to apply for an appeal, to ask for an appeal, to seek leave to appeal. That is quite different, and the Home Secretary should stop repeating the fallacy.

Mr. Baker: The right hon. Gentleman has not understood the Bill correctly. People applying for asylum have a right to appeal now, under the existing system. We are extending the right to appeal. For instance, if someone applies for asylum at one of our air or sea ports, he is examined by officials from the immigration department, who make a decision that is final. In future, it will not be final. Asylum seekers will be able to seek leave to appeal to an independent adjudicator, who must examine the case and deal with the appeal in one of two ways. In accordance with the Lord Chancellor's rules, he can say that there should be an oral hearing, if there is an arguable case. We expect that most cases will be like that. He will also address some cases that are manifestly unfounded, without an oral hearing. That will still be an appeal to an independent adjudicator, a procedure that does not currently exist.

Mr. Hattersley: Will the Home Secretary concentrate on the wording of the Bill and the rule, because they make it absolutely clear that the right is to apply for leave to appeal? The adjudicator, about whom the Home Secretary has said so much, is entitled to refuse leave to appeal. If that happens, in law no appeal occurs. The Law Society and the Bar are unanimous in that view. Everyone who has looked objectively at the Bill makes the obvious point that leave to appeal is not the same as an appeal. Whether or not the Home Secretary knows it, his explanation makes it absolutely clear that the person who might grant leave to appeal is entitled, on nothing more than re-reading the papers, to refuse leave. That is not an appeal.

Mr. Baker: I shall justify what I have said on the grounds of several cases. The right hon. Gentleman's interpretation is wrong. The Bar Council has not made the point that the hon. Gentleman suggests, although it has made other points. We are inserting a new right for those who make applications at the port to have their case determined by an official in the Home Office and to go to an independent adjudicator, who has the choice between granting a hearing or going through the papers and carrying out the appeal process himself. That latter process is needed for clearly unfounded cases. Therefore, an independent adjudicator looks at the case again. That is a second person looking at the case, but the right hon. Gentleman does not seem to be able to understand that, although I have said it three times.

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): My right hon. Friend is being most helpful in explaining the new system. Will he confirm that it is similar to cases in which there is an appeal on facts, the leave for which has to be granted by the Court of Appeal? In cases where there is a clear right of appeal on a point of law, because the adjudication was wrong in law, would there still be a right of appeal to the High Court on a prerogative writ? If there is, that is perfectly normal, and the same as a normal court case.

Mr. Baker: A later clause in the Bill makes it clear that there is a right of appeal to the Court of Appeal.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. Baker: No. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be called to speak.

Under the draft procedural rules set out by the Lord Chancellor, which have been published for consultation, an application for leave to appeal must be made not later than two days after the applicant has received notice of the decision against which he wishes to appeal. We have received representations from refugee groups and others, and I have seen the letter from the archbishop and the cardinal in today's issue of *The Times*. I am certainly prepared to consider those representations as the Bill is debated. Those who argue for an alternative procedure must be expected to demonstrate that it would not add to the scope for abuse and delay.

Clause 6 provides a further avenue of appeal on points of law to the Court of Appeal. That was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby). That is likely to be relevant only in a minority of cases, but it will provide a specific means of resolving matters in which a real legal point is at issue.

Clause 7 puts on a statutory basis the existing administrative arrangements for requiring visas of

passengers who are ostensibly planning to change planes at a United Kingdom airport without passing through immigration control.

I come finally to the draft immigration rules. They fit together with the Bill and the Lord Chancellor's procedural rules. The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook nods. They have to be seen as a complete package. Their provisions and the additional staff that we are recruiting will enable most cases to be resolved in three months, as against the current average of 20 months.

The asylum rules include, in paragraph 6, a list of criteria which may cast doubt on an applicant's credibility and may lead to refusal. Some immediate reactions to the rules have characterised these criteria as harsh and unsympathetic. Are those critics really saying that it is all right for asylum seekers to lie to us, to conceal relevant information, to destroy documents deliberately or to make multiple applications in different identities? Are they saying that, if we find them out in this sort of trickery, we should pat them on the head and pretend that it did not happen? Self-evidently, that would be absurd. It may be the case that genuine refugees will sometimes not immediately tell the whole truth, but that is something to look at in individual cases. One does not set up the system on the assumption that genuine applicants will lie.

Some critics quote the United Nations handbook on determining refugee status if they feel that there is some deficiency in our procedures. However, they do not always mention that the handbook places clear responsibility on the applicant to tell the truth and assist the examiner in full, to make an effort to provide evidence and to supply all pertinent information concerning himself and his experience in as much detail as necessary.

The asylum rules also make it clear that applications will be refused when an asylum seeker could have sought protection in a safe third country that he has been in before coming here. The aim is quickly to weed out cases where there is no question of the United Kingdom's obligations being engaged. This is fully in line with accepted international practice.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Baker: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not.

Our proposal on political activities is often misrepresented. The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook did so in the debate last week, and I heard him do the same on television today. We are not saying that asylum seekers must refrain from political activity while they are here, but if they indulge in political activity with the specific intention on enhancing a claim to asylum, the High Court has made it clear that we are not obliged to accept them as refugees.

In a particular case, ex parte B, an Iranian with no history of political involvement waited until he had been refused an extension of stay before joining an opposition party in the United Kingdom, and then had photographs of himself at a demonstration printed in his brother's newspaper. That is what we are up against. The court found that the Secretary of State was justified, having regard to his applicant's faith, in rejecting his application.

The underlying intention of all these changes is to give all applicants a proper opportunity to state their case and give genuine refugees who are entitled to the United Kingdom's protection early recognition of that fact. The option of exceptional leave will remain, but our aim is to use it only when there are genuine and compelling humanitarian factors.

The Government want to protect genuine refugees and will work for solutions to their problems, but domestic asylum policy is only part of that process. To achieve the wider objective, it is essential to preserve public sympathy for refugees—and public confidence in the fairness and firmness of our determination system is crucial to that.

Our asylum system must function within the context of our commitment to effective immigration control. The control has been distorted and strained by the growth in asylum numbers and by blatant misuse of asylum procedures. The Bill will play an important part in restoring a proper balance. I commend it to the House.

4.22 pm

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): I beg to move, to leave out from "That" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"this House, whilst reaffirming its determination to prevent bogus asylum seekers from entering the United Kingdom, declines to give a Second Reading to a Bill which, because of the arbitrary criteria against which asylum applications are measured and the inadequacy of the appeal system for those who are initially rejected, will result in the exclusion of men and women who have well-founded fear of persecution and death and is therefore in breach of this country's obligations under the United Nations Convention of 1951."

According to the Queen's Speech, the Bill is intended to do no more than improve the speed and efficiency with which the Home Office examines and determines applications for asylum. Were that its true purpose, and if that intention were properly reflected in its clauses, we would vote for Second Reading. Speed and efficiency in handling these applications are essential. Some of the delays that have characterised examinations have been intolerable and the Opposition have joined Amnesty International and other organisations to urge the Home Secretary both to improve procedures and to provide extra resources to deal with the applicants.

The announcement of extra resources is welcome. The nub of our complaint to the Home Secretary, however, is that the need for more speed cannot be made an excuse for the operation of less justice. In any case, it is by no means certain that the Bill's provisions will materially reduce the time that it takes to determine an asylum application. In my experience, delay is usually a result of the Home Office's failure to make a swift judgment. Yet the one stage in the whole procedure that is not given an end date in either the Bill or the attendant regulations is the date of the Home Office's eventual decision.

Let me make clear—beyond doubt, I hope—that bogus asylum seekers must be prevented from entering the country. That is an honourable and sensible objective, and our amendment reflects our determination to ensure that bogus asylum seekers are identified and denied entry. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), who intervened on the Secretary of State to put on record the existence of unanimity across the Chamber and between the parties on the need to exclude such bogus asylum seekers. Such objectivity secured the hon. Gentleman's removal from the Government.

Our objection to the Bill—and we hold this view with some strength of feeling—stems not from its effect on the bogus asylum seeker, but from its consequences for the genuine refugee.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hattersley: Not yet.

If the Bill is passed, some men and women with a well-founded fear of persecution will undoubtedly be returned to imprisonment, torture and possibly death. What is more, the Bill's authors must know that. The best that can be said of them is that an obsession with unjustified claims has overridden whatever conscientious concern they ever had for genuine refugees.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hattersley: Not for the moment.

We are not alone in our opposition to the Bill. This morning, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster criticised it in exactly the same terms as our amendment. Being of a theological disposition, they dealt with the "whited sepulchre" aspect of the Government's proposals. They said:

"There is little virtue in proclaiming a willingness to open the door to genuine asylum seekers if the path to it is effectively blocked by provisions which obstruct rather than facilitate access to fair adjudication".

That amounts to the sin of the Pharisee.

I was struck by the comments made by the Home Secretary at the beginning and at the end of his speech. At the end, he announced that it was his duty to do what he could to maintain public sympathy for refugees. At the beginning, he regaled the House with Conservative club tittle-tattle about how many applications made five, and what abuses of the public system were common among refugees.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I was asked for that information by an Opposition Front Bencher, and I gave it to the House.

Mr. Hattersley: Many of the right hon. Gentleman's predecessors would have regarded such bar-room tittle-tattle as beneath them.

The Bill can be seriously examined only in conjuction with the related documents that the Home Secretary issued along with it—the new immigration rules and the asylum appeals procedure rules. The Home Secretary mentioned them in passing, in the last two or three minutes of his speech; however, they are in every respect crucial to the application of the Bill that he purported to describe. Together, they demonstrate the true nature of the Bill: it is arbitrary, partial and, in some respects, retrospective. I shall take the Home Secretary through the Bill's stages and its attendant documents, as he did not go through them himself, so that the House, and perhaps even the country, will really understand its consequences.

Mr. John Carlisle: Will the right hon. Gentleman tell the House whether, if the Labour party came into government, he would repeat what that party did twice when it was last in government and grant an amnesty to those awaiting a decision on their applications—to illegal immigrants, in some cases? Such people would still exist if the Labour party came into power. Would the right hon. Gentleman grant a full amnesty, as the Labour party did before, or would he accept the law as it then stood and send such people back?

Mr. Hattersley: No. We shall introduce new rules, which I shall describe at the end of my speech. We shall certainly not indulge in the altogether unattractive practice of retrospective legislation.

That brings me to the next pont that I was about to make. Clause 1 defines an asylum seeker as a person whose claim is

"recorded by the Secretary of State as having been made".

That is when the processes that the Bill sets up begin, so I ask the Home Secretary a question. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will listen to at least part of my speech; a little ritual abuse and the reading of a Home Office brief is not enough for the entire afternoon. I want to ask the right hon. Gentleman three or four questions, and as I complete each one I shall willingly sit down so that he can answer it straight away.

I have told the Home Secretary—apparently, he did not know before—that clause 1 says that an application begins when the Home Secretary accepts and registers such an application. Does that mean that all asylum seekers past and present will be subject to the provisions of the Bill as soon as it becomes law? Or will there be transitional arrangements for asylum seekers whose applications are outstanding?

If the Government intend to judge existing asylum seekers under the present law, it is no good the Home Secretary's telling us that the Bill will speed up the process. There are very many applications in the pipeline. If, on the other hand, existing applicants are to be judged under the new regulations, they will be subject to retrospective legislation that will deny them rights that existed when they made their applications. What is more, and perhaps worse, they will be judged according to the criteria governing the consideration of cases set out in the new immigration rules. Those rules are different from, and far harsher than, those that applied when the men and women now in the queue made their applications.

I shall mention three rules, each of which is in my view wholly unacceptable. The first rule requires immigration officials to doubt an applicant's credibility, and therefore probably to refuse his application, if the applicant

"has made false representations either orally or in writing".

A related provision requires the same reaction if the applicant has

"destroyed, damaged or disposed of any passport, other document or ticket relevant to his claim".

That requirement contravenes article 31 of the United Nations convention, which specifically accepts that many asylum seekers may have neither the time nor the opportunity to go through the complicated procedure of obtaining visas and the required travel documents. The rules—laid down by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees—are specific on that point.

The Home Secretary talked about the rules, but he did not quote the relevant and operative sentence, which reads:

"Untrue statements by themselves are not a reason for refusal of refugee status and it is the examiners responsibility to evaluate such statements in the light of all the circumstances of the case".

By ignoring that advice the Government breach the rules.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Peter Lloyd): That is exactly what our draft rules say—that those factors will reflect on the credibility of the applicant. That does not mean that the

applicant has to be refused. It means that those factors have to be taken into account, to reach a true judgment. That is exactly in line with the rules under the convention.

Mr. Hattersley: If that is the case, let us come to an agreement—which will move the argument a great deal further on—that a note should be added to the draft rule in question to the effect that, on some occasions, asylum seekers will not be able initially to give an honest explanation of their position. Let us add that specifically to the rules. Let us not merely say it here. Over the past 13 years, I have grown tired of being told, "Don't worry. The rules say one thing but you can trust Ministers to do another." In my experience, Ministers say one thing in the House and then apply the letter of the law rigidly and unyieldingly in dealing with cases, as I shall go on to show in respect of the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987. That is why I want such a note written into the rules, and I look forward to hearing the Under-Secretary's answer to my request.

I want the Under-Secretary to confirm that the asylum seeker—pursued by the police and hunted by the security services—cannot queue up outside the British embassy and obtain the authorised papers. The idea that he can is so ludicrous that not even the Home Secretary can accept it. Equally, the Home Secretary ought to know that no British post abroad will issue visas for the purpose of asylum seeking. Many asylum seekers have to escape with no travel documents or with bogus travel documents. They are genuine, but, by definition, their papers are not. That was the case when refugees from Austria and Nazi Germany fled to this country before the war. Had the Bill been in force at the time, many of our most distinguished citizens would have been denied entry to this country in 1937, 1938 and 1939.

Another criterion against which asylum seekers will be judged is whether they had the opportunity to move to another part of the country of origin, which "might be safer". The House will note that the word used is not "safe" but "safer". That means not absolute protection but relative security. The House will also note that the words are not "will be" safer but "might be" safer. Let me ask the Home Secretary for his judgment on another point, therefore. If a Kurd in Baghdad has a genuine, well-grounded fear of persecution, is he entitled to come to the United Kingdom, or is he to be told under the rule that he should have moved into or towards a Kurdish enclave? Perhaps we may have an exact answer to that.

Yesterday, the Minister for Overseas Development was eloquent in her calls for help for the persecuted——

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will answer a question. Is any asylum seeker coming from Yugoslavia, parts of which are extremely dangerous, automatically a refugee? Is the fact that one comes from Yugoslavia the only thing that one has to show to demonstrate that one is a refugee, or would the right hon. Gentleman say that these matters depend on the circumstances of the particular case?

Mr. Hattersley: Of course I am not saying for a moment that everybody who comes from Yugoslavia can claim to be an asylum seeker. That is why I was careful to say—and I am sorry that the Under-Secretary did not follow me because the Home Secretary was asking him questions at the time—that the Kurd in my hypothetical case had a well-founded fear of persecution. I have no doubt at all, and it is much to my regret, that, in Serbia and Croatia, some individuals will have a well-founded fear of persecution. Having listened to the Minister for Overseas Development on the radio yesterday, and having studied the Bill and the rules accompanying it, I regret that I cannot see how a single Kurd with a well-founded fear of persecution, or a single Serb or Croation who qualifies under the United Nations convention of 1951, could possibly get into this country. Such people could not get a visa for the purpose and they would be turned back if they came here with forged or false papers. There is no way that we could offer them the sort of assistance that a humane and self-confident country should provide.

Let us look at some of the other rules. The Home Secretary referred to the fact that, last Tuesday, I asked him to justify paragraph 6, which requires an immigration officer to judge an applicant's credibility in the light of his political affiliation. I regard that as absolutely intolerable. Of course, we all agree that, if a man pretends to take up a position that he has not previously occupied, that should disqualify him—as part of the evidence—from being an asylum seeker, but that is not what the paragraph says. The paragraph says that, if he takes part in political activity while in this country, that fact may be held against him.

Although it may not be popular, especially on the Conservative Benches, I believe that if a Kurdish refugee in this country has a genuine claim to asylum, he is entitled to go to the Iraqi embassy and say that he believes that Saddam Hussein is an abomination. The idea that that may be held against him is quite preposterous.

I now realise that the situation is worse than I understood it to be. Paragraph 7 of the rules stipulates that the

> "actions of anyone acting on behalf of the asylum applicant, whether or not with the applicant's express approval, may be taken into account"

when the applicant's acceptability is determined. That means that a Kurd in danger of his life may be sent back to Iraq, not because of anything that he says, does, believes in or has done in the past, but because of what others do or say on his behalf without his approval or knowledge.

The unacceptability of penalising one man for what another does is something that the Home Secretary should easily understand, because the problem is particularly relevant to him. When immigration officers broke their undertakings and returned an asylum seeker to Zaire before the case had been considered in court, the courts did not hold the Home Secretary responsible for the decision, because it was said that the decision was not taken with his express approval. Similarly, the Home Secretary made the same excuse after the Brixton break-out fiasco: he said that he had not done anything and did not know about it. Why should that rule apply to him when the asylum seeker is penalised for something he does not know about?

I give the Home Secretary credit for not understanding the Bill's most important proposals; otherwise I could describe his behaviour to the House only in unparliamentary language. The inadequacy of the appeal procedure, or, to be accurate, the so-called appeal procedure, is vital. According to the Bill, asylum seekers have no right of appeal. They have a right to ask leave to appeal, but that is quite a different matter. In consequence, the Under-Secretary of State's claims to the contrary are simply wrong. The appeal system is not extended; it is attenuated.

[Mr. Hattersley]

The Under-Secretary of State's letter in today's *Independent* confuses the issue even more. He has sent so many letters to newspapers that it can only be a matter of time before the Home Secretary publishes them as an anthology and claims that he has written a book. The letter which the Under-Secretary of State is notable for not writing is the one I invited him to write last Tuesday contradicting the report in *The Times* that he had ever said that the Bill would penalise some asylum seekers.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I intervened in that debate. As the right hon. Gentleman has said, I have written several letters to the newspaper because the headline of an article I read was wrong while the body of the copy was not. I have not written the other letter because I was waiting for the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) to send me a photocopy of the article by Mr. Philip Webster. The right hon. Gentleman said rather pompously and ponderously that if I was correct, Mr. Webster, the excellent parliamentary correspondent of *The Times*, had it wrong—something he rarely does. When I receive that photocopy, I will certainly pen a letter to *The Times*.

Mr. Hattersley: The Under-Secretary is right. I got the byline wrong. That is a grievous offence and grievously shall I answer for it. However, as the Under-Secretary claims that *The Times* grossly misrepresented him, saying that he had admitted that the Bill would disadvantage some asylum seekers, I look forward to his refutation in a letter and to the comments that *The Times* writes under that letter when it publishes it.

Mr. Lloyd: The body of copy was correct, the headline was wrong. That demonstrates that the right hon. Gentleman only reads the headlines, not the small print.

Mr. Hattersley: The hon. Gentleman is wrong about the body of the article. The point was in the body of the article. However, if I had been accused in a headline or anywhere else of disadvantaging asylum seekers, I would have thought it best and right to contradict that in a letter to the editor.

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): I want to refer to something that the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) said before the last altercation between him and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State—his strictures on the Home Secretary about what is meant by an appeal. I do not criticise the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook, who is a scribbler rather than a babbler in the courts. However, does he accept that an appeal takes place when one goes to another tribunal to question the decision of a lower tribunal? If one goes to a special adjudicator to ask it to reconsider a decision, that is an appeal in law. The first stage may be to seek leave to appeal more fully, but that is still part of the appeal process and is understood to be in our courts. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that?

Mr. Hattersley: I hope that the hon. and learned Gentleman, to whom I am very well disposed after what he said about me last week, noticed that when one of his honourable and I believe equally learned colleagues said that the procedure was similar to that which applies in the courts, I nodded as emphatically as I could. However, the system that applies in the courts may lead to appeal. Ministers have chosen to represent the proposal in the Bill as automatic, invariable and unconditional appeal. That is the great difference.

Mr. Maclennan: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way, particularly as the Home Secretary would not give way to me. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that, on that point, the Home Secretary, whether by oversight or deliberation, chose to misrepresent precisely what the Bar Council has said about the matter? The Bar Council has issued a brief to all hon. Members who are interested in these matters explicitly criticising the Government for not making it clear in the statement on 2 July that the proposal was merely a right to seek leave to appeal and not a right of appeal. The Bar Council stated:

"We do not understand why this limitation was not drawn to the attention of Parliament when the statement was made on July 2nd."

The Home Secretary has deliberately misrepresented the position of the legal profession.

Mr. Hattersley: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the Home Secretary has quite scandalously—although whether deliberately is not for me to say—misunderstood and misrepresented the views of the Bar Council. However, were I to correct all the factual errors in his speech, I would speak for almost as long as he did. I want now to describe the truth and the facts about appeals, and the House and the country must decide whether the so-called appeal is adequate.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East) *rose*——

Mr. Hattersley: I will not take any more interventions for a while or I will speak for almost as long as the Home Secretary.

Applicants for asylum resident in the United Kingdom —three quarters of all asylum seekers—now possess under the law a real right to appeal. The present right is to be extinguished. It will be replaced by the right to apply for an appeal. When the application is granted—and I have no way of knowing on how many occasions that will occur —the appeal that is awarded will not be worthy of that name.

The Home Secretary has chosen to argue, and will no doubt continue to argue, that the Bill provides appeals where no appeal was previously allowed. However, that is only the case if, like Humpty Dumpty, he believes that words mean whatever he wants them to mean. At present, men and women who apply for asylum on arrival in the United Kingdom have no right to appeal against refusal until they return to their country of origin. The new provision states that every applicant "may"—not "will" —have his case examined a second time. However, the second examination is not a right, and to call it an automatic appeal is a simple perversion of the language.

Clause 1 stipulates that a person who is refused admission may appeal. Schedule 2 states that an appeal goes ahead only with the leave of the special adjudicator. If the adjudicator decides that the appellant does not have an arguable claim, no appeal is allowed. The decision whether to allow the appeal is taken without hearing any additional evidence.

Disqualification may be automatic if, for example, the applicant has travelled through another country. The Home Secretary dealt with that point by asking, "Why

should an applicant who travelled through another country be awarded asylum?" He said that the Security Council resolution and the high commission rules said that an applicant who travelled through another country should not necessarily be awarded asylum. The Home Secretary failed to point out—again, I am sure, through inadvertence rather than a wish to deceive—the last sentence of that advice, which refers to the applicant having travelled through another country which is itself a signatory to the United Nations convention of 1951. That qualification does not appear in the Home Secretary's rules.

If there is no appeal, all that happens is that the original papers are re-read. There is certainly no provision for an oral hearing. The applicant cannot add evidence. The applicant does not even know why his application has been rejected. Leave to appeal is refused on nothing more than a re-reading of the immigration official's evidence. The idea that that is an automatic appeal is clearly nonsense.

I concede that when an appeal to an adjudicator is allowed and then is subsequently refused, appeal to a tribunal is possible, but only on a point of law. There is also the right, which is stipulated in clause 6, to appeal on a point of law to the Court of Appeal, but it is the Bar Council's view—I hope that the Home Secretary will not contradict it on this occasion—that that is not an extension of the applicant's rights but is an attempt to limit the terms of any future judicial review.

Much has been made of the fast-track approach. "Fast" is certainly the word for the way in which an applicant for asylum must behave if he or she is to contest his or her refusal to enter this country. The applicant will have 48 hours to lodge an application for leave to appeal. If an appeal is allowed, the appellant must be heard within six weeks—six weeks to prepare the case—but no deadline is set for the Home Office's final decision. Those are intolerable pressures to put on a man or a woman who is facing and fighting against return to imprisonment and death. The inadequacy of the appeal system is compounded by the Government's decision to remove the right to legal aid—the green form system—from asylum seekers and require all asylum seekers to obtain advice through the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service.

I again ask the Home Secretary a question which he should intervene and answer at once. My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) said that it is crucial to the conduct of the debate. Will the Government resist the claim to be made in the High Court by the Commission for Racial Equality that, by removing legal aid from asylum seekers, the Government have acted unlawfully under section 20 of the Race Relations Act 1976? I hope that the House and the Home Secretary realise the seriousness of the facts. The right hon. Gentleman's own agency—an agency which he sponsors and funds—is about to take him and the Government to court for breach of section 20 of the Race Relations Act. I have actually seen a copy of counsel's opinion that the CRE obtained—not, I should point out, sent to me by the CRE. That opinion is categorical in saying that the court is likely to agree that the removal of the green form scheme is racially discriminatory and therefore in breach of the law. We should be told at once, before the debate proceeds, whether the Law Officers share that view, whether they think that they are obliged under the law of this country to backtrack on the original proposals, or whether they will blind it out and face it out in court. I shall gladly give way if the Home Secretary will, as he should, tell the House here and now what is the Government's attitude.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I made it clear to the right hon. Gentleman a week ago that we do not accept that interpretation.

Mr. Hattersley: The right hon. Gentleman did not mention it to me a week ago, but I hope that I can now take it from what he says that the Government intend to fight the case in court.

Mr. Baker: We do not yet know whether it is going to court.

Mr. Hattersley: If it goes to court, will the Government fight it?

Mr. Baker: It depends how the matter is to be proceeded with. I have made it clear to the House that we do not accept that interpretation of the case put forward by the Commission for Racial Equality.

Mr. Hattersley: The House will judge the conviction with which the Home Secretary holds on to that position, not least because, on this subject, the Home Secretary changes his tune from day to day. Sometimes he claims that the object of ending the green form scheme is to save public expenditure. On other occasions, he insists that the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service would provide superior advice to that which would be obtained through independent solicitors. I therefore ask him, in passing: how is the applicant for asylum, who has 48 hours to respond to a rejection, and who lives in a town in which there is no UKIAS office—he may be 100, 200, or 300 miles from a UKIAS office—to respond in 48 hours if he he is not entitled to free legal advice from any other source? In a sense, that is the practical application of the Home Secretary's inadequacy.

More important is the principle. The principle is that a man or woman whose life is in danger or who believes his or her life to be in danger is entitled to make a choice about the legal advice that he or she receives. When I made that point on 2 July, after the Home Secretary's statement, he was foolish enough to accuse me of criticising UKIAS. We now know that UKIAS shares my apprehensions exactly. It calls the Home Secretary's proposals

"a denial of natural justice."

It does not want to be the sole provider of legal advice to asylum seekers. Indeed, initially it refused the job point-blank. As a result of that, it is now being threatened by the Government.

Mr. Winnick: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, having been involved in the UKIAS in either a full-time capacity or as chair until last year, I have the greatest confidence in that organisation? Its advice is excellent, and it is independent of the Government. Although it receives funds, it is virtually in the same position as the citizens advice bureaux, and so on. Does my right hon. Friend accept that if the pressure that is now being put on UKIAS were to succeed, it could seriously call into question the credibility of that organisation, and those who are anti-UKIAS could say, "This is not an independent organisation. It not only receives money from the Government, but, as a result of receiving money, it has a monopoly, and therefore people are not in a position to

[Mr. Winnick]

take legal aid"? The credibility of UKIAS is being seriously questioned as a result of what the Home Secretary has done.

Mr. Hattersley: My hon. Friend is right in every particular. On 2 July, when the Home Secretary said that I was attacking UKIAS, my hon. Friend was the first one to say that that was not our position. We wanted to protect UKIAS. He is quite right to say that many asylum applicants will wrongly but nevertheless strongly hold the view that an agency funded by the Government is not an agency to which they can speak frankly. UKIAS has sent me examples of applicants who have said, "We would rather have an independent solicitor because we know what some Governments do in other countries and we are not sure whether this Government is any more independent."

Mr. Tony Banks: Does my right hon. Friend share my great concern at the way in which Conservative Benches are almost totally denuded? Hon. Members would normally expect courtesy to be extended to Front-Bench Members so that they can hear the arguments for and against.

We will get far more accuracy from my right hon. Friend than we will get from the Home Secretary. Therefore, I refer my right hon. Friend to the statement that was made by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State on radio the other day about the right of appeal. If refusal is delivered at the point of entry, the potential refugee, by saying, "I intend to appeal," has entered an appeal. I am not sure whether the verbal statement will qualify as signifying intention to appeal.

Mr. Hattersley: I must tell my hon. Friend that I am not sure, either. However, I must also tell him that I do not mind the absence of Conservative Members. They came in intending to bray at the Labour party, complaining, in the Home Secretary's words, that we wanted an open-door policy. As they have now discovered that I propose to take the House through the Bill stage by stage, and as the intellectual effort is too much for them, they have all left the Chamber.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *rose*——

Mr. Hattersley: It appears that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary wishes to intervene. I could advise him simply to write me a letter, but instead I shall gladly take his intervention and then proceed to my conclusion so that other hon. Members may participate.

Mr. Lloyd: A few moments ago the right hon. Gentleman wanted me to write him a letter, but I am nevertheless grateful to him for giving way yet again. I was interested in what he was saying about UKIAS and the monopoly and shall certainly comment on that in my reply. I should be grateful, however, if the right hon. Gentleman would continue his argument. He does not want UKIAS to have a monopoly on advice, but at present it has a monopoly on representation, which is crucial to the putting of any asylum seeker's case. Indeed, UKIAS had a monopoly under the last Labour Government. Is the right hon. Gentleman now proposing to end that and if not, why not?

Mr. Hattersley: The case of a man or woman who believes and fears that he or she might be returned to death, torture or imprisonment and who wants to feel that he or she is operating independently of any Government agency is very different from other cases.

As the Minister has referred to advice and audience, I should like to return to the point that I was making before I took several interventions. Having said that it does not want the monopoly in this area, UKIAS is being threatened by the Government. In reply to UKIAS's refusal to dance to the Government's tune, the Minister wrote to that organisation, stating:

"this must throw a question mark over the funding that you already receive from such work and we would want to consider whether the grant should be more directly restricted simply to providing representation before the appellate authorities."

In short, unless UKIAS does the Government's bidding, it will be emasculated. That would be a denial of all that it stands for and would destroy all its work on behalf of those whom it is supposed to serve.

I shall now deal with the rest of the legislation as quickly as the Bill itself allows. Clause 3 deals in one particular with the treatment of asylum seekers who have obtained admission to this country—it relates to their right to housing. We believe that once an asylum seeker is allowed to enter the country, he or she should be treated like any other resident—no better, no worse. Housing authorities should treat every applicant according to need. Several of the London boroughs in which asylum seekers have settled have been put under special pressure. That problem should be solved by the Government's providing additional housing resources. The hard fact is that in most boroughs no municipal houses are being built. The Government do not believe in municipal housing, even if the alternative is a shop doorway. The housing investment programme has been largely abandoned. The problem of the pressure on the London boroughs is of the Government's making, not the asylum seekers'.

Clause 3 is likely to make things worse at least in terms of public expenditure. Local authorities would not be required to provide anything more than temporary accommodation—in other words, bed and breakfast accommodation. That would allow the Government to proclaim that they are protecting the housing stock from the 7 million Russians whom the Home Secretary says are waiting to come to the United Kingdom. In fact, the measure would squander poll tax payers' money. In London, the cost of permanent council accommodation in a family house is £8,500 per year, whereas the cost of bed and breakfast is £14,500. Clause 3 is expensive as well as unacceptable.

Ms. Short: Will my right hon. Friend give way on that point?

Mr. Hattersley: I shall take just one more intervention, but then I must get on.

Ms. Short: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is the delays in the Home Office system that lead to the cost of housing and social security? Because of those delays, genuine refugees who want to work and to maintain themselves have to wait for years, living only on social security benefits, and are thus unable to provide their own housing? Speeding up that system would solve most of the problems.

Mr. Hattersley: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend, which is why I believe that an end date should be put on the Government's period of decision-making.

Clause 7 claims to amend, but actually extends, the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987 by requiring transit passengers to possess an appropriate visa. If the passengers do not possess that visa, the airline will be punished. It can be fined for carrying anyone without the proper documentation. The whole Act is a farce—and an unjust one at that. We believe that it should be amended to concentrate action on those agents who exploit asylum seekers rather than penalising airlines which often carry passengers in good faith without realising that they are technically ineligible to enter the United Kingdom.

Last week British Airways gave me some examples of how the Act works in practice. Regular business travellers whose passports have expired on the day before their journey are invariably allowed into the United Kingdom despite the discovery that their passports are technically invalid. Although such a passenger may be allowed through immigration, British Airways will be fined £1,000 or £2,000 for carrying him. That is absurd.

The Minister for Overseas Development telephoned British Airways a few weeks ago to ask for its assistance in flying refugees into the United Kingdom. She was told—jocularly, I am assured—that that was all very well, but that as none of them would have any documents, it would cost BA £1,000—the figure will soon be £2,000—to provide each of them with that humanitarian service. The Minister expressed her surprise and said that the Government would waive the fine.

The worst example comes from the House of Lords. Among other things, it demonstrates that Lord Waddington's speed of thought has remained unchanged since moving from this place to the other. The Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act was described by Lord King, who first reminded their Lordships that he was a close friend of the Government, as draconian, unprincipled and pernicious. He then told the story of a woman who was travelling with her recently born baby. The baby's name was on the mother's passport, but not on her visa. British Airways was fined £1,000 for allowing the mother to take her infant child with her. It is worth noting Lord Waddington's judgment on that case, once he had eventually realised that the baby had not actually been born on the aeroplane. There was much interested shouting between Lord Waddington and Lord King about the baby being delivered not on the aeroplane, but by the aeroplane. When the Leader of the other House finally accepted and understood that point, he said:

"if the baby was delivered before the lady went through embarkation control . . . there was no valid documentation for two passengers".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 22 October 1991; Vol. 531, c. 1473.]

The noble Lord concluded that the fine was therefore essential and right. It is difficult to imagine a better example of a hard head and a bonehead.

Finally, there is one part of the Bill about which I admit regrettable ambivalence. I refer to clause 2, which requires asylum seekers to be fingerprinted. Because I believe that bogus asylum seekers should be excluded from this country, I was initially sympathetic to any practical step that would achieve that end by avoiding and preventing multiple applications. However, there is no doubt about the damage that would be caused by fingerprinting. Only two classes of person would be obliged to have their fingerprints taken—persons helping the police with their inquiries and asylum seekers. On balance, as I do not believe that an asylum seeker should be treated as a criminal, I am against the proposal. I am hardened in that opinion by the Government's general behaviour. Throughout the asylum debate, they have painted the worst and most prejudicial picture of asylum seekers and of the reasons that motivate most applications——

Mr. Kenneth Baker *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Hattersley: The Home Secretary is shaking his head. Has he forgotten, within the past hour and a half, the belly laughs that he got from his own Back Benchers with his stories of social security fraud? Has he forgotten, in just an hour and a half, the pleasure that he gave to his own backwoodsmen by telling stories about multiple applications? We thought that he had probably found just eight such examples out of a total of 1,000. The fact that he demonstrated his interest in those eight cases, emphasised them and talked so wildly about them, shows that his concern is not with the genuine asylum seeker, but with diminishing the respect that this country should hold for people who are in desperate trouble and whom, in better and more self-confident days, hon. Members of all parties would have been in favour of helping.

Although while making those allegations and telling their bar room stories the Government have added that they propose to respect their obligations under United Nations conventions, they have always followed that with attempts to make the nation's flesh creep with the thought of the foreign hordes from whom an heroic Home Secretary is now protecting us.

If the Home Secretary meant what he said about increasing the status of asylum seekers and respect for them, why in the debate on the subject at the Tory party conference did he talk about 7 million Russians waiting to move west, when he knew that last year 117 Russians applied to enter this country and less than half of them were allowed in?

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I answered that in my speech. If I may remind the right hon. Gentleman, I did not invent that figure. It was the official estimate from the Soviet spokesman at the international conference at Vienna this year. At the Berlin conference only 10 days ago my German counterpart, the Minister of the Interior, was alarmed at the number of eastern Europeans and Russians who intend to move into Germany.

The extraordinary thing about the tenor of the right hon. Gentleman's speech in the past few minutes is that once again he seeks to make out that this is not a very important problem and that we can push it away. Earlier in his speech he weakened every attempt to strengthen our defences such as the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987 and fingerprinting. He does not want any of that. He represents a weak policy. We represent a strong policy.

Mr. Hattersley: Unfortunately, there are not enough Tory Members to cheer that extract from the future Tory manifesto. However, I have no doubt that the Home Secretary reveals his secret self. He reveals what all this is about. It is the attempt to claim that he is strong and others are weak. No one who has listened to this debate so far, let alone anyone who listens to it between now and

[Mr. Hattersley]

10 o'clock, will believe that assertion for a moment. They will know that the Home Secretary sees the matter essentially in narrow party terms.

I was about to say that, looking back at his record, I could not understand why the Home Secretary wanted to relive his time as Conservative party chairman, because that was hardly his finest hour. However, when I think of him at the Departments of the Environment and of Education and Science, I realise that it probably was his finest hour.

The point about the 7 million Russians is simply this. I dare say that there are 7 million Russians waiting to move west. But the Home Secretary's fraudulent attempt to imply that they were all destined for Heathrow does him no credit and should cause him shame.

Perhaps the Home Secretary will get up to respond on the second point that he made to the Conservative party conference. He said that the alternative to his policy was the open door. Does he believe that? Does he believe that we advocate an open door or does he share the view of his hon. Friend the Member for Eltham that there is unanimity across the House that we should not allow the bogus asylum seeker into this country?

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The right hon. Gentleman has shown clearly during the past few minutes that his proposals are much weaker than the Bill. Our proposals are also those made by the socialist Government in France, the Christian Democrat Government in Germany and virtually every other country in Europe. The right hon. Gentleman turns his back on all that because he is living in a fool's paradise and believes that the problem will not go away. It will not go away and the right hon. Gentleman abdicates responsibility by not facing up to it.

Mr. Hattersley: I understand exactly what the Home Secretary meant even though he got his "nots" in the wrong place. I ask him again, not to make a point on which I did not ask for his response, but to answer a simple question: does he believe that others advocate an open door?

Mr. Baker: Under the policies that the right hon. Gentleman advocates it would be much easier for people to come here. In our Bill we ensure that there is a proper distinction between genuine and bogus applicants. That is what we stand by. The right hon. Gentleman will come to regret many of the things that he has said in the past half hour.

Mr. Hattersley: The right hon. Gentleman does not have the courage to repeat in the House what he said at the Conservative party conference. I do. I believe that the Government are motivated by the basest possible considerations. Everything that the Home Secretary has said about the Bill today and in the debate last Tuesday confirms my judgment.

I am not surprised that radical and enlightened opinion in Britain, from Bernard Levin in *The Times* to the leader in *The Mail on Sunday*, regards the Bill as shameful. It is made all the more shameful by the Home Secretary's behaviour, not least the way in which he defended the representations of the Bill made on the front pages of tabloid newspapers. He regarded those representations as respectable, but I can describe them in the language which Parliament prevents me from using about the Home Secretary. What they said was a lie. It was intended to be prejudicial not simply to my party—which would be understandable—but to the millions of black and Asian Britons who live in this country. That is what we find unforgivable and that is why when we come to power, as we shall in six months, we shall introduce a decent system of appeals and objective criteria and a carriers' liability Act which does not penalise the honest airline doing its best but takes action against the men and women who exploit those who wish to come here. Until those changes are made, the Bill will be unworthy of Parliament. It will be just about worthy of the Home Secretary.

5.15 pm

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): I have listened to the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) for the best part of an hour. I hope that I may be rather more brief, out of courtesy to my many Conservative colleagues who wish to comment. In that hour, I heard bigotry and claptrap but very little which suggests that the right hon. Gentleman is remotely interested in dealing with the real problems of genuine asylum seekers.

There are those on this side of the House, and I am one of them, who are proud to count themselves among the number of those who have fought hard for asylum seekers when we believed their cases to be genuine and for human rights for people living in the Baltic states, the Kurds and people in Soviet prison camps. We do not need any lessons from the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook.

In an hour, I heard the right hon. Gentleman repeat the scorn that he poured on the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987 in last week's Queen's Speech debate. The Act requires airline staff to ensure that embarking passengers are properly documented. Does he accept that the measure can lead to the identification of forged documents?

At the beginning of his speech, I heard the right hon. Gentleman say that he was concerned to ensure that bogus asylum seekers did not gain asylum. But in one hour of his speech, I did not hear him suggest one measure by means of which he or his party would get to grips with that very real problem. Does the right hon. Gentleman have any proposals of his own for dealing with the potential tide of immigrants into western Europe? Does he deny that that tide exists? He said that he intended to find measures to control it, but in one hour he did not describe one such measure. He sought systematically to undermine a piece of legislation that gets to grips with a real human problem.

In 1988, there were some 5,000 applicants for asylum in Britain. In 1989, there were 15,000. In 1990, there were 30,000. The projection to the end of this year is 50,000. Some 55,000 people will be waiting for cases to be processed. I welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement that the staff to deal with those cases will be increased. I believe that it is in the interests of genuine asylum seekers that their cases should be processed not in two years but in less than two months if humanly possible. I believe that it is humanly possible, and that the measure before the House will go some way to achieving that.

Mr. Bernie Grant (Tottenham): The hon. Gentleman has given us some figures. He talks about 50,000. How many of those asylum seekers are new cases and people who would enter Britain? My understanding is that the list

of 50,000 contains people who are already here and have renewed their asylum claim because they are required to do so every four years, people who have been granted exceptional leave to remain and who have to renew their case every year, and people such as the Chinese students who were genuinely here as students but could not return to their country after Tiananmen square. Do the numbers that the quotes include those people?

Mr. Gale: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was seeking to intervene or to make a speech, but I am sure that he may have the opportunity to do so if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In the interim, the figures that I quoted are for the number of people waiting for their cases to be processed.

The increase in the establishment announced by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is a sign of the Government's determination to get to grips with that backlog and to ensure that the cases of genuine asylum seekers are processed so that they are able to put uncertainty behind them, settle in this country and make a new life for themselves as quickly as possible. I should have thought that the Opposition would find that desirable but they have not even had the grace to acknowledge it tonight.

The Bill will make this country less attractive for bogus asylum seekers. It is an interesting fact that, in spite of the increase in the numbers of people claiming asylum since 1988, the number of people admitted as genuine cases of asylum has remained more or less constant year on year. That ought to tell Opposition Members something about the number of bogus cases.

All hon. Members have a duty to speak for their constituents. When anyone stands up and says, "Most people think," it is always dangerous. When we do so, we generally mean, "The chap I met in the lounge bar of the Dog and Ferret and I both agree that". It is not usually based on any sensible market research. However, I shall go out on a limb and say that most people in this country believe that there must be some form of immigration control and some control over those seeking asylum, genuine or otherwise.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook asked my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary whether he believed that the Opposition's policies would lead to an open door. Let me answer that question. Yes, I believe that that is what Opposition policies would mean. I am not ashamed to say so, and neither is my right hon. Friend. The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook appears to be an expert on my right hon. Friend's party conference speech, and he knows the views of Conservative Members very well.

Most decent people in this country believe two things: first, that this country is too small to take all comers from anywhere, at all times, incessantly, because they believe that to do so would have profound social effects on housing, employment and other matters affecting people of all races who are resident here; secondly, that the genuine asylum seeker should and shall have a proper place in this country, as he or she has always done, that their cases should be properly and swiftly considered, and that they should be properly and swiftly admitted. That is what the Bill will achieve, and I look forward to serving on the Standing Committee and supporting it.

5.23 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): There is widespread agreement that the procedures used for deciding political asylum in the United Kingdom need reform. There is widespread agreement that the most important reform is to speed up the time taken to decide applications for political asylum. We all agree that it is wrong that those who flee persecution, torture and death should be required to wait months or years for a decision to be taken.

However, there is widespread agreement that the Bill is not the best way to expedite political asylum applications in a way compatible with natural justice. Indeed, there is widespread agreement that, if the Government wanted to achieve that desirable objective, it would not require legislation, as they could expedite applications for political asylum while properly defending an applicant's rights by taking administrative action. That would mean devoting more resources, in terms of staff and money, to ensure that the applications are dealt with expeditiously, fairly and in accordance with natural justice. Instead, the Government have chosen new laws, however defective, difficult and offensive to enforce, and have thereby fed the suspicion that the Government's motive lies elsewhere.

The Bill has few friends. We have been told that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State is the most prolific letter writer in support of the Bill. The deserted Conservative Benches show the amount of support for the Bill within the Conservative party. The fact that the Bill has few friends is beyond dispute. Ranged against the Bill is a remarkable coalition of critics, ranging from community groups to the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, by way of the chairman of the Bar Council and the president of the Law Society.

Mr. Janman *rose*——

Mr. Madden: I wish to make a short speech, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity to make his usual racist remarks later.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I think that the hon. Gentleman will recognise that that was perhaps a slip of the tongue which he ought not to have made. I would be grateful if he would withdraw the remark.

Mr. Madden: It was a most deliberate remark, based on my experience of remarks that are frequently made by the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that we regard each other as hon. Members here and that was an imputation that a Member was less than honourable. I think that he will recognise that he ought to withdraw it.

Mr. Madden: As always, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I concur with your wishes and I withdraw that remark, but I shall leave the general public to reflect upon its accuracy.

There is considerable anxiety about the Government's proposal to withdraw the legal aid green form scheme. By using bribery and blackmail, the Government have sought to persuade the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service to collude in offering sole advice and representation to those seeking political asylum.

[Mr. Madden]

I found it astounding that, in his awful opening speech, the Home Secretary sought no opportunity to refer to those matters in any way. The words "green form legal aid scheme" and "UKIAS" did not fall from his lips once during that long speech. Could it be because he and his colleagues in the Home Office are enormously embarrassed about this proposal?

The Commission for Racial Equality meets later this month to consider whether to instigate judicial review proceedings against the relevant Ministers on the ground that the withdrawal of the legal aid green form scheme from cases involving refugees, asylum seekers and other immigration matters constitutes unlawful discrimination contrary to section 20 of the Race Relations Act 1976.

In response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) the Home Secretary said that the Government did not support the view of the CRE, based on a legal opinion that I, like my right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook, have read.

On 2 October, the Home Secretary wrote to Mr. Michael Day, the chairman of the CRE. The last paragraph reads:

"You also suggest in your letter that the Government's proposal to withdraw Green Form legal aid in immigration cases might contravene the Race Relations Act 1976. This is a matter for the Lord Chancellor and he will be replying separately to your letter to him."

I find it strange, as I said on a point of order at the beginning of the debate, that no Law Officer is present to give advice to the House on whether the proposal breaches the 1976 Act. Like the CRE, I suspect that it does and that we are likely to be faced with judicial review applications being made by the CRE within a few days which are likely to be upheld in the courts. The House will then find itself in a ludicrous position—the Bill will be in a Standing Committee—as it is being asked to consider this wholly unnecessary legislation when the courts may find at a later stage that it is unlawful. Is it any wonder that the Home Secretary declined to say a word about that matter in his opening speech? If nothing else, that constitutes grave discourtesy to the House.

Virtually every clause in the Bill has attracted severe criticism. Clause 2 is most offensive as it requires those seeking political asylum, who are entirely innocent of any crime, to be fingerprinted, thereby criminalising the act of seeking political asylum. Many of us fear that fingerprinting is the thin end of the wedge that will lead to identity cards.

Even Conservative local authority representatives have criticised clause 3 and its recommendations on housing provisions. Clause 5 has rightly attracted the most considerable alarm. Anybody who, in the view of an adjudicator, has a clearly unfounded case may have his appeal dismissed without evan an oral hearing and without the right to legal representation. I am sure that that is an abuse of natural justice, and it is of concern to many hon. Members on both sides. This so-called fast-track procedure could well be a death warrant for an applicant who is not believed and who could be returned in as little as 48 hours to the country from which he fled.

A little earlier the Home Secretary caused some amusement to some hon. Members with his anecdotes about domestic difficulties in some Cypriot households. I wonder how many people will laugh at this factual account of the problems that a Kurd experienced when seeking political asylum in the United Kingdom. He fled persecution in Turkey. He had lost an arm as a result of torture in a Turkish gaol. On arrival, he was imprisoned in Pentonville and the Home Office said that it would refuse his asylum application and return him to Turkey. His lawyers arranged medical examinations to support his torture claims. They got him released from prison and proved conclusively that he was a refugee.

Under these provisions that man could have been returned to Turkey and an uncertain fate. Before hon. Members rubber-stamp this legislation, I appeal to them to think not of the anecdotes from saloon bars in Surrey, but of factual accounts from those who over the years have sought to help people with a genuine cause for seeking political asylum here.

Mr. John Carlisle: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Madden: I will not give way, for the same reason that I gave the hon. Member for Thurrock. I intend to conclude my remarks in a moment.

The Bill is rooted in bigotry and racial prejudice. Its inevitable repercussions will be to increase racial tension, thereby damaging race relations. It denies natural justice to the most vulnerable. It may well breach race relations legislation passed by this House in 1976. This is a bad Bill and, by common consent, an unnecessary one.

I conclude with the words of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster who in *The Times* today wrote:

"In signing the 1951 convention on the status of refugees, the country accepted the moral responsibility which is also a Christian duty, of welcoming the true asylum seeker who knocks on our door. There is little virtue in proclaiming a willingness to open the door to genuine asylum seekers if the path to it is effectively blocked by provisions which obstruct rather than facilitate access to fair adjudication on appeal.

We hope it is not too late for these points to be carefully considered and the provisions amended so that they do not exclude the genuine refugee."

Those wise and sensible words reflect the views of the vast majority of British citizens. I hope that the Government quickly respond to them.

5.34 pm

Mr. David Evans (Welwyn Hatfield): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on his robust opening speech. The Government have a fine record on providing a safe haven for persecuted refugees and on defending the rights of the oppressed abroad, as our actions in the Gulf showed. Conservatives do not need to take lectures from the Labour party, least of all the shadow Home Secretary, whose speech today was that of a racist.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. It is difficult to hear the hon. Gentleman at this end of the Chamber as he is so far away, but did he refer to the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) as having uttered racist remarks? [HON. MEMBERS: "He did."] In that case, he should reflect again and help the House by withdrawing that comment.

Mr. Evans: The right hon. Gentleman uttered pompous remarks.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I thought that the hon. Gentleman attributed to the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook racist views. If so, he must withdraw that comment.

Mr. Evans: I withdraw.

This country has unfortunately become a victim of its own success. Our democratic tradition and the economic opportunities offered under this Government are well known throughout the world, just as it attracts those with a legitimate fear of oppression who hope to build a new life, it also, unfortunately, draws in the unscrupulous, bogus applicant.

The number of people claiming asylum in the United Kingdom has increased dramatically from 5,000 in 1988 to nearly 50,000 this year. How many will there be in two, three, four or five years' time? One hundred thousand? Five hundred thousand? We are one of the most densely populated countries in Europe and our asylum policy should reflect that. The Bill will.

The problem is made worse by the disturbing reduction in the percentage of applicants who are recognised as refugees under the conditions laid down in the 1951 United Nations convention on refugees. From 1979 to 1983, on average 60 per cent. of applicants complied with the convention's benchmark. Last year, the figure went down to 25 per cent.

It is not the legitimate applicant that we need worry about: it is those who come here on visits and holidays, students and those with no intention of leaving. These men and women are not persecuted minorities, but freeloaders eager to taste the good life. They are seeking to circumvent immigration rules and procedures passed and approved by this House. That puts a huge strain on the resources of the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service. As a result, only 4,000 decisions were made in 1990, compared with more than 7,000 in the previous year. That discrepancy is because of the problems of handling increasing numbers of bogus applications. The overall backlog is now running at 60,000 cases. That hurts the genuine applicant whose proper assimilation into this country is delayed.

It is worth remembering that, despite the Opposition's scandalous smears, the Government have made it perfectly clear that, as a signatory to the United Nations convention, they will not return refugees to countries where they face persecution. It was deeply offensive for the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook to claim at his party conference that the Bill represented a squalid appeal to racism.

While on the subject of the Opposition, I must say that we would all relish the opportunity to scrutinise their policies, but unfortunately they offer not a shred of policy. Their solution is to stick their head in the sand and pretend that nothing is wrong. It is laughable that a so-called European party is ignoring an issue that is afflicting and affecting the rest of the continent.

Since 1985, the number of applicants for asylum in Europe has doubled every three years. More than 500,000 are expected in 1991. Who knows what the figures will be in 1992, 1993 and 1994. We all know that millions of Europeans—we have heard that there are 7 million from the Soviet Union alone—are looking to taste the good life in the west. Only Germany and Italy have received appreciably more applications than the United Kingdom. The Labour party would not only leave us high and dry but would passively agree to the most extreme EEC proposal that would allow our policy to be determined by Eurocrats in Brussels.

I find the Labour party's approach surprising, for this is a party that knows all about political refugees. After all, it has supplied enough of them to other political parties. Alas, no one can teach the Labour party anything about political persecution, as there are at least two Opposition Members who know all about being hounded out for their beliefs.

The source of the Opposition's dithering is the shadow Home Secretary—the Member of Parliament who took the spark out of Sparkbrook. The right hon. Gentleman is reputed to have a good mind, but the trouble is that he just cannot make it up. The right hon. Gentleman is as indecisive on this issue as on every other that crosses his desk. I should have thought that the right hon. Gentleman had learnt by now that all that blustering, laughing and chivvying is no substitute for statesmanship. It would appear that the right hon. Gentleman has been out of office for so long that he has forgotten how to face up to a real problem. The right hon. Gentleman may carp and whinge, but my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) hit the nail on the head when he asked whether the Opposition would have an amnesty. Of course they would—they would let them all in.

I am reluctant to give the Labour party too much advice, because its non-policy is so hopelessly out of step with the needs of our nation that it is a sure vote loser. In a recent poll, 78 per cent. of those questioned backed the Government's stance on this issue. That should surprise no one but the Labour party. The inevitable conclusion is that the Labour party would just let anyone in, genuine or not, and to hell with the consequences.

The Government are right to provide extra resources to process the backlog of applications. The Opposition have been free with their spending commitments, subject to Beckett's law, but they have set their face against any such sensible, necessary measure. It would appear that, unless a grand scheme of reform costs billions of pounds, the Opposition are not interested. The Opposition are, however, quite happy to see taxpayers' money squandered on people who have no legitimate right to be in this country.

Of asylum applications made, 75 per cent. come from people already in the United Kingdom. Two thirds of those applicants arrive with forged or mutilated documents, or no documents at all. Their aim is to confuse and complicate the processing of their cases. In other words, they want to get into Britain because we give them money for doing nothing. That is what they come here for. They come in, go up to the social security and collect the money—no problem.

I heard about one applicant who claimed that her father had been killed because of his membership of a political group. Inquiries made by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office revealed that the man was not only alive and well, but was also paying regular visits to offices openly run by the political organisation to which he belonged.

A waitress on a Soviet cruise liner sought asylum while the ship was in port. She had experienced no persecution in the Soviet Union, but just did not like living there. She had had shore leave in France, Italy and Germany, but she said that she had not sought asylum in those countries because she was unable to speak any of the languages. It transpired that she could not speak English, either.

[Mr. Evans]

Faced with multiple comparable cases, it is only right that the Government should seek to speed up the scrutiny procedures. The privileges accorded to those seeking refugee status represent a significant burden on the state, and it is therefore essential that bogus applicants are quickly weeded out and sent packing.

I am particularly worried about the thousands of people who come to Britain under false pretences, never to return to their country of origin. They and their families draw social security benefits to which they have made no contribution through the tax system. I suggest to my right hon. Friend that such people should receive no benefits, such as housing benefit or any other free handout, until they have paid tax for five years. That might make them think twice about coming here. *[Interruption.]* The Opposition may laugh, but is it fear of persecution or the free handout that generates such people's interest in this country?

There is increasing evidence that multiple applications are made for benefits and that false identities are assumed for the purpose of making fraudulent social security claims. We are all aware that such fraudulent claims are estimated to cost £100 million. Perhaps the true figure is £500 million or £1,000 million—no one knows. The clause relating to fingerprinting should help to combat that problem. The Opposition always claim that we do not spend enough money on social welfare, but they want to block legislation that will stop abuse and put money in the hands of those who truly deserve it.

I particularly welcome the specific provisions that will limit the duty of local authorities to find permanent accommodation for asylum applicants while their claims are considered. Many of my constituents believe that the priority accorded to such people constitutes little more than queue-jumping. It is only right that the new rules will require applicants to pass stiffer tests before qualifying for help with housing. However, the homeless legislation will still provide a safety net for those asylum seekers in genuine need.

Can my right hon. Friend tell me what steps are being taken to provide secure accommodation for applicants whose claims are being considered? At present, far too many use fake addresses and are never heard of again. Surely genuine refugees would not object to the provision of such secure accommodation. I recognise that there will be a pressure on beds, so will the Home Secretary consider commissioning army camps for this purpose? There are many suitable sites close to ports and airports.

I welcome the Bill, and I hope that it will dispel this country's image as a soft touch for reprobates from the international community. However, I would bet the last pound in my pocket that, in the event of a Labour Government, the number of applications for asylum would plummet. Who would want to live in a country run by the Labour party, which would be plagued by high taxation and rocketing inflation, and where civil liberties would be protected by a Home Secretary who makes announcements between courses at the best London restaurants?

If the Asylum Bill is found wanting for not being tough enough, will the Home Secretary consider instituting a moratorium that would not let anyone into this country for two years? That would give us a breathing space to deal with the backlog of inquiries and it would give us the opportunity to assess bogus applications. Why should this country be the world's permanent dumping ground for asylum seekers? Charity belongs at home.

5.47 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): In so far as it is true that there are those who abuse the right to claim asylum, the case put by the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) has been answered effectively by Christian Aid, which has stated:

> "Immuring ourselves behind a punitive system of controls will not make the problem go away".

If the hon. Gentleman is interested in effectiveness, he would do well to scrutinise the Bill with a little more care than his speech revealed.

I believe that the proposed Government measures to stem the flow of applications for asylum in Britain will do nothing to remove the international root of the increase in the number of people seeking refuge here. At best, their planned measures would displace the problem from our own shores, violating our international obligations in the process. At worst, those measures will inflict hardship and danger upon very many innocent people seeking from us the protection of their fundamental rights.

The rules proposed for the consideration of asylum applications are a denial of the due process of law. They will seriously undermine any claim that this country is governed by the rule of law when dealing with such matters.

The problem of sifting unjustified claims from justified ones has grown to its present scale in Britain and other European countries because Governments in those countries have ducked their responsibilities to take effective international measures to reinforce the protection of human rights and deal with civil conflicts that create refugee populations. Our Government have compounded the difficulty by not providing adequate manpower resources properly and fairly to screen the applications within a reasonable time limit.

The hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield who railed at the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) should recognise that his party has been in government for more than 12 years and the problem has become worse only in the past two years. He should show a sense of perspective because the record of previous Governments in those matters was somewhat better.

The manner in which these draconian measures are being implemented and the lack of proper parliamentary debate of the proposed changes in the immigration rules are grotesquely undemocratic and they are a further stain on the country's dwindling reputation as a protector of human rights. How little the Home Secretary is interested in representations on the Bill. It is demonstrated by his absence from the Chamber during the debate. It is extraordinary, when he has had representations from the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, the British Refugee Council, the Bar Council, the Law Society and all humanitarian groups, and when letters have appeared in *The Times* from the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster and the Archbishop of Canterbury, that the Home Secretary is not interested in the opinions being voiced in the Chamber. They are the democratic expressions of the views of people in this country. The Home Secretary

makes his partisan speech and stalks out. It is an insult to the procedure and shows how scant is his regard for democracy.

Mr. Janman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maclennan: I am happy to give way to the hon. Gentleman, who is well known for being willing to take part in the debate.

Mr. Janman: Before the hon. Gentleman goes through the rainbow coalition of the great and the good referred to earlier by the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), does he accept that a much bigger, wider coalition supports the Bill? It is called the British people.

Mr. Maclennan: The Home Secretary's obligation is to listen to what the representatives of the people to whom he referred think. If he considers that he has anything more important to do this afternoon, that raises legitimate questions about his commitment to undertake to listen to representations.

The Prime Minister spoke in Harare of the problems that have given rise to the difficulties facing this country. He spoke with considerable sense and insight and said:

"Recent history shows us that striving for individual rights leads to discontent, economic failure and ultimately collapse."

His prescription was:

"The bedrock of what we must do must be the general application of democracy and human rights. It is on that basis that we can build good government and economic prosperity."

The Prime Minister's speech, delivered be haut en bas to other Commonwealth members, is perhaps the first attempt that the Government have made in all their years in office to draw attention to the consequences of denying human rights, not only in the countries concerned but for us in this country.

People sometimes delude themselves into thinking that this country has a good reputation for welcoming those who flee oppression. Unfortunately, that is a myth, because we have no such reputation. There is no belief now, nor has there been for many years—as the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield suggested—that this country is a soft touch. We were a disgrace to the international community in the 1930s because we kept out refugees from the Nazi regime. Many people, through sheer fear, sought recourse to devices to protect themselves. The daughter of the great novelist, Thomas Mann, married—an unlikely marriage—the poet W.H. Auden to acquire a British passport because she knew that she would never be given one, despite the fact that she was a satirist who lost no opportunity to denounce the Nazi regime in her country and elsewhere. Britain has a bad reputation for looking after the interests of the oppressed.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman goes a long way back to the 1930s. There are sad and tragic stories, and in retrospect all countries should have behaved differently. However, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not exaggerate and mislead the House about this country's role then. In the 1930s, we gave refuge to more Jews than any other country except for the United States, so although our record may not be perfect, it well stands comparison with other countries. The hon. Gentleman was denying that it did.

Mr. Maclennan: I made no such comparison. I said that Britain has a bad reputation and I adhere to that view. I am more concerned about the future than the past——

Hon. Members: The hon. Gentleman raised the subject.

Mr. Maclennan: Those who suggest sentimentally that there was a golden era when we looked at refugees' interests more sympathetically than we do today are simply distorting history. I remind the Minister, a lawyer who was substantially responsible for the provisions that we are debating today, what the gospel of St. Luke says about lawyers:

"Woe unto you also ye lawyers! for ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers."

That was a statement by our Lord Jesus Christ in chapter 11, verse 46, of the gospel of St. Luke.

Mr. John Carlisle: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maclennan: I have no intention of giving way again.

The Government have been neglectful, in the international forums in which they participate, of the growing problem of refugees. They have been trying to prevent the European Community collectively from considering the issue—it is one of the subjects being debated in Maastricht—and they have thought fit only to lecture other countries at the Commonwealth conference.

There has been a substantial increase in the number of people leaving countries because of oppression. In the first six months of the year, some 26,140 asylum seekers arrived in Britain. They did not arrive from the countries to which the Home Secretary drew attention in his infamous speech to his party conference. They were not streaming in from eastern Europe or the Soviet Union as he implied. Rather, 60·5 per cent. came from Africa, 24·5 per cent. from Asia, 11·5 per cent. from the middle east, and only 2·5 per cent. from Europe.

Most refugees come from oppressed communities who, when they are in this country, are seen as part of the ethnic community. If those who are anxious about the position of immigrants and ethnic minorities in this country are worried, it flows from that very fact. The Bill is not colour blind in its consequences, as the Home Secretary suggested: its prime impact will be on people who are not of the same ethnic background as the majority of those living in this country. That is why the Government have chosen to whip up the sort of emotions that have characterised the response to the Home Secretary's disgraceful speech, in which he took a few undoubtedly bad examples of abuse and tried to suggest that a majority of the 26,000 people applying for asylum could be ridiculed and characterised as bogus asylum seekers. There is no evidence of that, and the Home Secretary's anecdotal speech was contemptible.

Many people with much knowledge of handling asylum cases have expressed concern about the Bill. The overwhelming worry expressed by lawyers has been that the right of independent legal representation is to be withdrawn. The Government boast about making it more difficult for asylum seekers to come into this country—the Home Secretary used the word "tough" to describe the package of measures—and it is thus more necessary to provide independent legal representation. Independent expert solicitors should be available as of right to handle claims when asylum seekers arrive on these shores. The

[Mr. Maclennan]

Government's threat to withdraw funding from the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service is a regrettable piece of blackmail of which the Minister should be ashamed. If there is to be a streamlined procedure to deal with manifestly ill-founded applications, the need for legal aid becomes greater than ever.

The second major worry expressed by the legal profession is that penalising asylum seekers who arrive without passports is not only conspicuously unfair but a direct violation of our international obligations under article 31 of the United Nations convention on refugees of 1951. Such a breach is serious.

The Bill contains other offensive provisions which amount to a denial of justice. I can hope to touch on only a few of them on Second Reading. One such is the provision that anyone acting on behalf of an asylum applicant, whether or not acting with the applicant's express approval, may also be considered when judging whether asylum should be granted. A claim for asylum status may thus be defeated by something that was done by someone wholly unauthorised by—even unknown to—the asylum seeker. That is a gross violation of the rule of law.

Another serious defect in the measure is the time allowed for appeal. The three-day proposal is clearly not enough time to allow evidence to be procured or for the procedures to be understood by the applicant.

Mr. Lawrence: Three days have been allowed merely to lodge an appeal, which does not actually require even five minutes, so that the applicant can seek advice from UKIAS or some other independent adviser.

Mr. Maclennan: The hon. and learned Member will know that the form in which the appeal is lodged is critical to the chances of its success. The measure states that full disclosure of all the relevant facts must be made, but a person wishing to enter this country may have no knowledge of our procedures and may even have language difficulties. Such a person cannot be expected to know all that is required to establish a claim within the time proposed. The time limit is manifestly unfair. There is no guarantee that the claimant will be heard. The only evidence that has to be put before the special adjudicator is that provided by the Secretary of State. That is inherently unfair.

The Bill contains many other offensive procedures, such as the proposal to curtail the leave to remain of asylum seekers who fail to establish their rights to asylum. The Bar Council has drawn attention to that proposal as being

"disingenuous and likely to push asylum seekers into committing the criminal offence of overstaying before applying for asylum."

The measures proposed for fingerprinting are offensive and disproportionate to the problem. Asylum seekers will be the only people other than suspected criminals required to give fingerprints in this country. There is no adequate guarantee that the information will not be passed to others or that it will be properly covered by data protection rules.

Clause 3 describes arrangements about the right of asylum seekers to benefit from legislation relating to homeless persons. No one has welcomed the proposal to restrict local authorities' responsibility in this matter. Local authority associations have made the strongest representations against the proposal, on the ground that it will be damaging to the interests not only of asylum seekers living within their district of responsibility, but of taxpayers. The cost of temporary accommodation can be considerably greater than the cost of housing people in the manner prescribed in law. The provisions on detention are unacceptable. The power of detention is to be extended to those who are already here, but no provision is made in the Bill or any other associated, subordinate legislation for challenging the lawfulness of a detention. We are all aware of the stresses and strains on the system and the inadequacy of places in this country. The Government promise to increase the number of people held in detention by providing 250 extra places, but that addition will merely make a small dent in the pile if we are to deal with 25,000 people per half year.

The absence of a right to an oral hearing on appeal and the fact that there is no right of appeal when an initial appeal is refused is a matter to which we shall return in Committee.

Provisions to extend the liability of carriers under the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987 have been widely criticised by everyone with a knowledge of how that Act has worked. The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook gave some examples of difficulties encountered by British Airways. But other, more ludicrous examples have been brought to my attention. Hoverspeed was fined for its failure to satisfy itself on the adequacy of the papers of a military band from Nepal.

The most disturbing aspects of the Bill, and the ones which reveal most about the Government's true intentions in introducing the deplorable package, are the criteria for decision-making which are to be used under the amended draft immigration rules. I deplore the absence of the possibility of debating and amending those rules in detail as is required. The representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in London has said that if those rules are applied they will certainly constitute a violation of our international obligations.

Paragraph 6 of the rules provides that failure to apply immediately on arrival in Britain can lead to asylum applications being rejected. But it is perfectly possible that conditions will change following the arrival in this country of a person who subsequently seeks to claim asylum. In any event, he may be fearful when he arrives here, and it takes time to obtain advice.

The requirement for prompt and full disclosure is not defined. What is required is not made known and those who have escaped from oppression have every reason to fear the circumstances with which they are faced, the more so if they are unfamiliar with this country.

Most difficult of all to justify is the proposal that if an asylum seeker arrives without a passport, that in itself may be taken as a reason for rejecting his claim if there is reason to believe that he destroyed the documents that he used. That, too, is a direct violation of the 1951 United Nations convention.

In a short passage of his speech, the Home Secretary sought to justify the repugnant provision that applicants might have their cases rejected if they had been involved in any activity calculated to enhance their asylum applications. Of course, had they been engaged in any such activity, the matter would be considered by tribunal, but the fact that this has been singled out for special mention suggests that it is to be given weight and makes it clear that the purpose of the proposal is to prevent those seeking to stay here from raising their voices against the regimes of which they are fearful.

The provision that requires the applicant to show that he did not have an opportunity to move to another part of the country from which he has come is almost indescribably harsh. It might be called the international on-your-bike rule. If a Tamil is being persecuted in the north of Sri Lanka, is he supposed to believe that he will be better off in some other part of the island? How is he supposed to prove that to an adjudicator? How is all this to be done within the 42-day period, the maximum time allowed for consideration assuming that all internal appeals are allowed? Is he supposed to adduce evidence about the conditions in certain villages in Sri Lanka—about the balance of the racial makeup there, or about the nature of the policing of the village, or about whether representatives of the Sri Lankan Government are seeking to enforce the law?

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that if the circumstances in a village in Sri Lanka or in a town in Yugoslavia prove to be unsafe, no questions may be asked about the rest of the country, so the applicant has carte blanche for asylum here?

Mr. Maclennan: No, the Minister is trying to reverse my argument. I say that the onus of proof should not rest on the applicant in this case. The surrounding facts of an application are of great importance, but they cannot be dealt with in 42 days. That is why there have been such long delays in dealing with these cases—it takes time to get at the truth of the matter. Making the asylum seeker prove that he cannot safely move to another part of the country is quite unthinkable.

Then there is the extraordinary proposal that if an applicant is "part of a group" his case is not to be considered individually. That is a clear denial of justice. The rule does not describe or define what a group is and it is certainly a violation of the 1951 convention, which specifically provides that each applicant must have his case individually assessed.

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. At the beginning of the debate Mr. Speaker said that if we kept speeches short we should all be able to speak, but the hon. Gentleman has gone on and on and on.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Mr. Speaker did express the hope that speeches before 7 pm would be brief enough to avoid the necessity to impose a limit between seven o'clock and nine o'clock. I very much hope that hon. Members will respect that.

Mr. Maclennan: A number of Members from the Conservative party and from the main Opposition party are participating in this debate, but I am the only speaker from my party and I have a right to be heard. If Conservative Members are not interested, they can do what they did earlier, and what the Home Secretary has done throughout the debate, and go out.

An asylum application supersedes any other application and removes any other right of appeal under the immigration appeal system. That is designed to put strong pressure on people to stop them claiming asylum—even if they are entitled to it—if they happen to be here in any other guise, for instance, as students or visitors.

The provisions are truly repugnant in a civilised society. They are a disgraceful reflection on our reaction to the international problem which this Bill does nothing to resolve. There will be attempts to amend the Bill to render its provisions less harsh and more effective at weeding out truly bogus claims. As it stands, the Bill is harsh and will not weed out such claims. The proposed immigration rules are monstrous and should be completely rejected if they cannot be substantially amended.

6.17 pm

Sir Philip Goodhart (Beckenham): There were moments, I confess, during the past half-hour when my attention wandered a little, but I think that I detected a gap in the speech of the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan). I do not recall a single reference to his party's policy on the asylum problem.

It is ironic that it should be necessary to bring in an Asylum Bill at this time. In the past three years, there has been an unprecedented collapse of oppressive regimes in many parts of the world, from Chile to East Germany, from South Africa to the Soviet Union, from Albania to Ethiopia. Governments who had little respect for basic human rights have been replaced or overthrown, yet while organised totalitarian tyrannies have been in retreat on almost every continent, the numbers of people seeking political asylum in this country have increased 10 times, and it is that surge in numbers that makes a new Asylum Bill necessary.

Procedures and practices which more or less work when we are dealing with a hundred applicants for political asylum each week clearly do not work when applications approach 1,000 per week. There is also the problem that the most perfunctory request for political asylum temporarily overrides all immigration controls. Unfortunately, that is understood in many parts of the world. No one who utters the magic words "political asylum" can be removed from this country before his case has been determined by the Secretary of State.

The Bill is necessary, but I doubt whether it will have the impact that some people expect. I am sceptical, because I know how difficult it is to draw a precise line between economic migrants and genuine refugees. I have seen that problem at first hand in the camps for Vietnamese boat people in Hong Kong, and I see it regularly in my constituency surgeries. I was visited in my surgery on Friday by a doctor from Somalia who wanted to discuss his application for political asylum. His brother came here from Somalia almost exactly two years ago and was accepted as a political refugee almost immediately. The doctor has four sisters and a brother-in-law living in my constituency, and one of his sisters has 10 children with her. Most members of the family arrived with counterfeit visas in their passports.

In the past couple of years, a sizeable community of Somalis has appeared in my constituency, and most of the 20 houses made available by Bromley council to the admirable Refugee Arrivals Project, which is based at Heathrow, have gone to people from Somalia. I have great sympathy for those people, because it is plain that law and order has collapsed throughout most of Somalia. Life in the capital, Mogadishu, has become so hazardous that western embassies have closed and western aid workers and western journalists have all left.

However, my constituency cannot sensibly be expected to house a significant fraction of the 500,000 residents of Mogadishu whose lives are presently at risk. We face a difficult and philosophical problem because Somalia is not

[Sir Philip Goodhart]

the only country in which law and order have virtually totally disappeared in recent months. Whatever we say, we are hardly likely to force Croat visitors to this country to return to Dubrovnik at this time.

I was slightly surprised by the opposition to clause 2 expressed by the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland and by all other Opposition spokesmen. That clause requires the fingerprinting of applicants. As my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) said in an intervention during the Home Secretary's speech, there is pressure from many of our European partners to standardise asylum procedures. I hope that we will resist that, but there is no doubt that Opposition Members are anxious to see full harmonisation with our partners, and plainly the pressure to have identity cards with fingerprints will grow. Identity cards are a rather good idea, because they will reduce the pressures on immigration officers carrying out checks at the points of entry.

As a London Member, I am particularly interested in clause 3, which makes substantial changes in the requirement placed on local authorities to house asylum seekers. Most if not all the London boroughs will welcome that clause.

However, I am concerned that the clause does not solve or even address the key issue, which is the fact that London authorities have to bear the substantial cost of housing and looking after asylum seekers. London charge payers have to meet those bills even though the problem is national. The problem substantially affects my London borough, but it has a much worse effect in Westminster, which this year expects applications from about 320 households which require housing. That represents about one third of the people on Westminster's homeless list. The social services departments of many London boroughs also face substantial costs.

Mr. Dicks: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I am sure that he is aware of the provisions of the Housing Act 1985. The problem faced by all local authorities, not only by those in London, is that they have to prove that a person who has applied to be listed as homeless has not made himself homeless intentionally. It is difficult to check the genuineness of a claim by someone from the other side of the world. That problem arises in my constituency and in my borough of Hillingdon, which contains Heathrow.

Sir Philip Goodhart: That is an important issue, and no doubt it will be examined closely in Committee. In the past year, Hillingdon has spent about £800,000 on looking after 42 unaccompanied children. The problem is pressing, and the Government will have to find money to help the London boroughs.

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): The problem of Somalia to which my hon. Friend has referred in his excellent analysis is causing considerable concern to London boroughs, because it is necessary for unfortunate people from that country to be accommodated in boroughs all over London and in cities as far away as Liverpool. There is not enough emergency accommodation to house those people.

Sir Philip Goodhart: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has reinforced my point.

Many of the German lander—the provincial governments—both Socialist and Conservative, have come together to institute—this is now German Government policy—hostels and transit camps for asylum seekers in abandoned army camps. I suspect that the demand for hostels here will be heard more widely in the months to come.

The best method of dealing with refugee problems lies in finding alternative shelter for potential refugees close to their normal homes. This point was stressed, quite rightly, by the Home Secretary. We need the Bill, but I hope that we shall substantially increase the amount of help given to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, so that potential asylum seekers can be helped closer to their homes. The autumn statement increased in real terms the Overseas Development Administration budget. I hope that we shall give a lead, so that our European partners will support the UNHCR as generously as we do. The Bill is necessary, but it is also necessary to give more help nearer home, to those at risk from famine and anarchy.

6.32 pm

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): It is right to reorganise the asylum division of the Home Office and increase its staffing and resources. It is ludicrous that so little has been put into it hitherto. It is also right that, as we have been urging, the asylum claims should be examined more expeditiously. Under-resourcing over many years had led to inordinate delays. Cases are taking 16 months or more, with a backlog of 60,000, and this must be rectified, especially as, we have been told, the number of applications has increased by 10 times in four years—from 5,000 in 1988 to 50,000 this year.

While remedying the deficiencies in the procedures and ensuring that cases are dealt with properly and without delay, it is vital that each application is dealt with fairly and adequately, that each applicant has access to independent legal advice, and that there is a right to proper appeal—a right that the Bill does not give. Reference is often made to Britain's honourable and proud tradition of welcoming refugees, but in those days they consisted mainly of persecuted individuals. One thinks of someone like Karl Marx who, expelled from continental countries, was allowed into this country to sit in the British Library and write books. Our record in allowing in Jewish refugees from Hitler was not quite so good.

The world has changed radically since the admission of individuals such as Marx and vastly in the 40 years since the 1951 convention was drawn up. Then, what was uppermost in people's minds was the second world war and its aftermath and the convention was framed mainly to deal with Europe rather than Africa or Asia. Much of the third world was colonised then.

Forty years on, the world is transformed. The UN tells us that there are now 17·5 million officially registered refugees—there are probably many more who are not registered—with an extra 2 million refugees in the past two years. In addition, there are many more millions of migrants and what might be termed environmental refugees—people leaving because of natural disasters or because the land, as the result of soil erosion, deforestation and the spread of deserts, can no longer support the population. These people are fleeing starvation.

Throughout history, there has been migration. Among the greatest migrants were the British, who populated

Canada, Australia, New Zealand and large parts of Africa, often without so much as a "by your leave" to the local population. The United States was created by migration and the modern world has been sculpted by migration. In our strife-torn world, millions of people are on the move, in fear or in hope. Hundreds of thousands were displaced by the Gulf war and hundreds of thousands seek to escape misgovernment, civil conflict, wars, economic collapse and starvation. This affects countries such as Somalia, which has been mentioned, Ethiopia, Sudan, Zaire, Liberia, Mozambique, Uganda and Angola. There are millions of refugees in Afghanistan, as there are in Cambodia. There are millions of Palestinian refugees and Sri Lanka is being torn apart.

There is then eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. For years we urged rulers there to let their people go and to make their people free. That is being done, so many people may turn up on our doorsteps not with their tanks but with their suitcases. We have a new phenomenon across the world, whose economic and social dimensions are beyond our previous experience, and we must address this. In doing that, we should beware of too much partisan debate, of playing the race card and of charges and counter charges that sweep away reason.

In dealing with this new phenomenon, I have two points to make. First, it is obviously impractical to solve the problems of war-torn African states or of conflicts in countries such as Sri Lanka by moving their populations to western Europe. Presumably, if any of those Kurds who desperately clung to snowy slopes at border mountains, trapped between the armies of three states that did not recognise them, had been able to reach an aeroplane and fly to Britain, they would have qualified for asylum under the 1951 convention. That could not happen now because of the so-called safe havens.

That may give us a pointer to one approach. It is vital for the affluent countries to do much more through the United Nations to get support and assistance in situ. Most refugees go to neighbouring countries, which are often living at subsistence levels themselves. On a far more extensive scale than we have done hitherto, we must help refugees in their own and neighbouring countries. The world is divided into a number of zones of wealth surrounded by vast hinterlands of poverty. It would be impossible for the affluent to live in peace if conflict after conflict exploded in the third world. We need a much stronger global response and more active aid policies. There cannot be stability while 25 per cent. of the world's population consumes 80 per cent. of the planet's resources. The affluent world found millions for the Gulf war and must find millions to tackle the problems of refugees at source.

My second point—about which the Bill is silent—concerns refugees who gain access to Britain. There should be an official Government refugee resettlement programme. At the moment, refugees coming into the ports of entry are left on their own. They have no guidance and they are left to their own devices. The Government take no further responsibility for them. They wash their hands of the matter. As a consequence, the refugees gravitate to a handful of boroughs that are primarily—I heard the hon. Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart) refer to Bromley—Labour boroughs, in London and in one or two other cities. These boroughs, like the London borough of Newham, are weighed down with more than their fair share of problems. In Newham, our housing is officially the worst in the country. There are thousands on the housing waiting lists and there are hundreds of families in bed and breakfast. One in five of the male population is unemployed. The borough is struggling to raise its low levels of educational achievement. The borough willingly assumes its responsibilities to help and cope with refugees. Many other London Tory boroughs, however, do not help; nor do the Government give hard-pressed Newham the assistance that it needs. That is intolerable. The Bill is silent on an issue that, so far, has never been addressed in the House.

Newham's refugee population amounts to between 5 per cent. and 10 per cent. of its entire population, and many different communities are involved. A fortnight ago, I was invited to a meeting of Somali refugees in East Ham town hall. The meeting was packed; many hundreds of people attended. I was presented with a document whose contents I discussed two days later with community leaders. According to that document, the borough of Newham contains 7,000 Somali refugees. Describing the plight of Somali children, it explains:

"Many of them have not been in school for several years when they arrive in this country".

The problem is not just that the children have not attended a school where English is taught; they have not been to a school of any description for years on end. They then come, in vast numbers, to a London borough.

The document continues:

"It is difficult for them to adjust to the schools in this country. The problem is especially great with the over 16's who do not know English and who cannot go to school. It is getting increasingly difficult to get into further education".

How, indeed, can someone who does not speak English do that?

"Most of the Somali students don't speak English and have no idea about the British curriculum".

Somali students, says the document, would like to be provided with home tutoring; but who will pay?

As I have said, my borough's levels of educational achievement are low. League tables of exam results will soon be published; given that a class may contain 20 children who cannot speak English, its position in any league table is bound to be low. That is a problem also for teachers if they are to be paid in line with examination results.

As I have said, Newham's housing provision is officially deemed the worst in England and Wales. According to the Somali document, accommodation provided by the council is normally in one of two categories—bed and breakfast, or hostels. On arrival, refugees and immigrants are

"classified into families with small children and elderly people who are re-accommodated into temporary accommodation".

Each bed-and-breakfast place costs £14,000.

The document complains that few people are given council housing. That is a reasonable complaint, but our current waiting list amounts to nearly 10,000. How can Newham help, unless it in turn is helped by the Government?

Health is another problem. The document talks of

"Inaccessibility . . . the majority of Somali people do not speak English."

It talks of "lack of information", and of "cultural and social problems". The Government seem to have washed their hands of the problem: they are taking no responsibility for it, and that is not good enough.

Mr. John Carlisle: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Leighton: No; I am taking up too much time already. I am glad, however, that the hon. Gentleman is paying attention to what I am saying.

The document says that Somalis who visit DSS offices are treated in a humiliating manner. So many people are now visiting the office at Jubilee house that they cannot get in. When Newham Members raise the problem with social security Ministers, they are given the official answer that it is caused by the number of Somali refugees. Apparently, they are happy for the people of Newham—and the Somali refugees—to stand outside in the rain.

It is difficult for Somali refugees to obtain employment. That does not surprise me, given that 20 per cent. of the male population in Newham are currently unemployed. I understand that 250 unaccompanied children cost a social services department £5 million. Are the Government at all interested in that figure? Have they a point of view? It is clear that they do not wish to take responsibility. If they did, they would be forced to answer parliamentary questions and they might find that they were responsible for feeding the refugee population. They would like all the refugees to go off to Newham and similar boroughs, and for the Home Office to hear no more about the matter. But that cannot continue: I think that London Members on both sides of the House will say the same.

Let me make it clear that my borough is willing to help. It accepts its responsibility. But what of the Government's responsibility? A national programme must be set up. The Government must face up to their obligations. It is no good operating a policy of laissez-faire, and leaving the task to the few hard-pressed London boroughs.

6.45 pm

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): The hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) began by criticising the Government for being ill prepared for the tenfold increase in the number of asylum seekers—which, he went on to say, was entirely unexpected. He did not tell the House that the Government had increased the number of Home Office staff dealing with the increase by the same amount.

The hon. Gentleman also spoke of the millions now on the move from east to west. He could not, of course, be expected to remind us that they are on the move from socialism.

Finally, he made the important point—very convincingly—that the problems which emerge from relaxed immigration and asylum laws are monumental in terms of employment, education and housing in his own and many other boroughs. The question is whether we should be doing something about those problems—and it is precisely the need to answer that question which justifies the Bill. That is the "national programme" the hon. Gentleman called for and it is a pity that he will not be supporting it.

I do not want to take up the House's time by repeating what I said in last week's debate on the Gracious Speech. I fear, however, that many people will be concerned about the no doubt well-intentioned but somewhat muddled assertion made by some churchmen in the past day or two. It is strange how often their observations on Government policy just happen to sound as though they are speaking for the Labour party when it is well known that the church is entirely apolitical.

For example, I have just heard Bishop Butler, the Bishop of Leicester, say on the BBC that he doubted whether the flow of refugees was overwhelming, as there had been a decline in the past month or so. He went on to say—provoked, no doubt, by my impertinent suggestion that he might not be living in the real world—that the ordinary people to whom he spoke every day were not worried about the possibility that too many immigrants or asylum seekers were coming into the country; they were concerned, he said, about whether Britain was still a haven for the oppressed.

But in the real world, we are seeing an explosion—a tenfold increase in the number of asylum seekers over three years, 75 per cent. being bogus applicants who were merely trying to dodge the immigration procedures.

Mr. Corbyn: How do you know?

Mr. Lawrence: The hon. Gentleman must have heard my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary give an example. Applicants who had not enclosed their passports were asked to come forward and reply to questioning, and 129 out of 130 did not turn up. That, surely, is as good an indication as any that all is not well with their applications—and it is a much higher proportion than 75 per cent.

Mr. Corbyn: Rather than bandying such figures about, and then praying in aid one example given by the Home Secretary, will the hon. and learned Gentleman be a little more cautious and consider the circumstances in which people seek political asylum? They do so because of fear of oppression, of the murder of their families or of a repetition of what they have suffered in prison under repressive regimes. The hon. and learned Gentleman has cast doubt on the validity of many applications. The danger is that, given attitudes such as his, people will be returned to the oppression from which they have tried to flee.

Mr. Lawrence: The hon. Gentleman knows that he is talking nonsense. The purpose of our asylum-seeking provisions is that we should be able to identify clearly those in fear of persecution, and we do so. The whole business is before the House because so many people are making applications that the procedure is breaking down and we cannot make such identifications. Such a criticism does not lie in the hon. Gentleman's mouth; he has often drawn to the attention of the House one case of a person suffering in the national health service as proof positive that the NHS is breaking down. We can all bandy cases about, but the example that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary gave was not one case but 129 cases out of 130—a good cross-section.

I can provide more statistics. Three-quarters of those applying for asylum were already living here. They are not terrified refugees who have just landed on our shores complaining about persecution. They are people whose temporary visitors' permits were expiring, and who came forward to tell us that the real reason that they had applied to come here, which they did not tell us at the time, was their fear of persecution. When faced with the facts, some then stand up and loudly declare that Saddam Hussein is the most pitiful creature known to man. Then they explain that it would be unfair to send them back because they would be likely to be suspended by their various parts as soon as they returned, so they are in fear of persecution. If the system is being abused in that way, it is only right and proper that it should be examined and that appropriate steps should be taken.

Two thirds of applicants at ports just happen to arrive with forged or mutilated documents, or say that they have lost their documents, which blew away in the wind on the boat. All that makes processing their applications slower and more difficult, and often in two or three years' time it is not possible to send the people back because they have married and have children, and parish priests and others come forward to say what worthy members of the community they are and what inhumanitarian hardship would be caused if we sent them back. The fingerprint provision in the Bill is therefore important, and eminently sensible.

Mr. Ashby: Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that, good as his argument is, the mark of the true refugee —the really oppressed political refugee who has been living in terror—is that he will arrive with a forged document? It is important for the person adjudicating to be able to separate people who have forged documents for bogus reasons from people with forged documents who are true refugees and have a right to British protection.

Mr. Lawrence: I agree. What my hon. Friend says is always sensible, and would not benefit from any further comment of mine.

What I have described has led to the present situation, in which the system for checking asylum seekers is breaking down. There was a stockpile of 27,000 cases last year, and this November the number has risen to 60,000. The fact that the backlog is taking three years to deal with is making things worse—for example, in the constituency of the hon. Member for Newham, North-East.

That is the real world, with 16 countries in western Europe and north America adopting legislation similar to ours, and 78 per cent. of Britons, according to a MORI poll, supporting the need for such legislation, with only 15 per cent. opposing it. If the bishops met more of the 78 per cent. and fewer of the 15 per cent., churches might not have to close due to empty pews.

The consequence of doing little or nothing about the explosion of numbers not only in Britain but throughout western Europe—it is estimated that there will be half a million applications this year—would be an increase not just in nationalism, including all the hideous examples of which my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary spoke, but in racism and communal unrest. If the Government responded to the bishops' disquiet and did nothing, there would be much communal unrest and racial outbursts would follow—and no doubt the bishops would then attack the Government for causing them.

The views of their Graces the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, who wrote a letter published in today's edition of *The Times*, must always be treated with the utmost respect. The media and hon. Gentleman today in their speeches described that letter as revealing the churches' total opposition to the Bill, but on closer reading it reveals nothing of the sort. Their Graces say only that "some aspects" of the Bill and the draft procedure give cause for concern. They accept that

"the difficulties faced by Governments in coping with unpredictable influxes of refugees should not be minimised".

The concerns raised in the letter involve appeals. The specific worry is that in some cases there will be only a right to seek leave to appeal, and that an application for such leave will have to be lodged within three days of the refusal, without the applicant seeing the grounds. Their Graces consider that such procedures are too tight and do not take into account genuine refugees' fears on arrival. They ask, reasonably, that those points be carefully considered and the procedure amended to take account of genuine refugees.

I do not consider that to be an all-out attack on the Bill. In any event, I consider their Graces' fears groundless. Under British law, the right to appeal often requires, as step one, that leave be sought. That means simply that those who have to consider the appeal have a preliminary look at the claim to see whether it may have a sensible basis which requires further consideration. That is all part of the appeal process. Anyone can call that process up by exerting their right to appeal. Anyone who says that that cannot happen or does not happen, that it is not part of the appellate process, is playing with words and talking nonsense. A British citizen seeking justice often has to have his case passed through a preliminary sieve so as not to waste time on considering hopeless appeals. Otherwise the system would clog up. It is not unreasonable to expect asylum seekers to go through the same procedures. Their Graces' concern mystifies me.

Their Graces' concern that the applicant will have only three days to lodge an appeal has no merit either. The asylum seeker will have three days, not to prepare his case and make his appeal—he will have six weeks for that—but to lodge his appeal. That can be done in five minutes, but my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has allowed three days so that the applicant can seek advice from the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service or other independent legal advice. That is a benefit, not an obstacle. Here again their Graces' fears are unfounded. The letter to *The Times* is not the all-out attack on the Bill portrayed in the debate and by the media, and in any event their Graces' concerns do not have foundation.

As one might have expected, a more pungent attack came from the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley). I doubt whether there was much merit in any of his arguments. If the decision, not yet made, that we should not give limitless expensive legal aid, involving solicitors and barristers, free to 30,000 people refused asylum, whatever their race or colour and wherever they come from, is against the Race Relations Act, so much the worse for the Act—in that case, it should be amended. But the right hon. Gentleman discredited his speech by sinking to abuse. I am used to the right hon. Gentleman claiming for himself and his party monopolies on decency and caring but, frankly, it is a disgrace when a right hon. Member stoops so low as to play the racist card. I can understand the right hon. Gentleman doing so at his own party conference, but there is no need for him to attract media attention by doing it in the House. It would have been much better if he had not done that.

According to the MORI poll, 78 per cent. of the public back the Bill. The right hon. Gentleman should have more sense than to brand that overwhelming majority of the British people as racist. If that is the level of his political judgment, that 78 per cent. will know whom to choose as the more credible, caring and decent Home Secretary, fit to guide the nation's home affairs.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): I remind the House that we are now in the period during which speeches must be limited to 10 minutes.

7 pm

Mr. Mike Watson (Glasgow, Central): As a signatory to the 1951 United Nations convention on refugees, the British Government are legally obliged to provide asylum to people fleeing serious human rights violations. That needs to be stated again, because Conservative Members do not seem to have grasped it. The Bill before us can only result in the Government's failing to meet those obligations.

The Home Secretary presented the options in terms of extremes: either we accept his proposals or we are left with what he terms "an open-door policy". That is palpable nonsense, yet the right hon. Gentleman continues to repeat it. No Opposition Member has advocated—I certainly do not advocate—that people who are not genuine asylum seekers should be admitted through that door, but the very purpose of procedures to cover asylum applications must surely be to distinguish between those who are genuine and thus qualify and those who are not genuine. If people fleeing persecution do not have effective access to the procedures set down by the Government of the United Kingdom, that in itself signifies that the Government are failing to meet their obligations under the United Nations convention. The fact that the number of applicants has increased, as so many Conservative Members have stressed, should not in itself be used as an excuse for escaping those obligations.

That is not to say that the current asylum procedures are satisfactory. Like many other hon. Members, I have had cause, on numerous occasions, to intervene with the Home Secretary on behalf of asylum seekers because they have been facing deportation to a future which was at best uncertain. They have included Kurds and Shias from Iraq, Sri Lankans and many others. All too often, they have not received the sympathetic response that I believe they deserve.

The need to institute a right to appeal is long overdue, but the so-called "fast-track approach" introduced in clauses 5 and 6 is hardly the right means of achieving that. Such is the speed involved in the 48-hour appeal that it could better be termed the "supersonic-track approach" than the "fast-track approach". An application for leave to appeal to the special adjudicator—and I stress that it is only an application for leave to appeal—must be made within 48 hours of the applicant's receiving notification of the Home Office's decision to refuse asylum. If an applicant is allowed to appeal, a determination must be made within three days. Not only does that allow the special adjudicator precious little time to undertake what should be a rigorous examination of the applicant's case; worst of all, such applications are to be determined without the applicant's even having recourse to a hearing. That will do nothing for the United Kingdom's standing in terms of its obligation to apply the 1951 United Nations convention fairly and effectively.

Perhaps the most serious aspect of the Bill is the removal of the right to legal aid at the appeal, which will deny asylum seekers access to the expertise of many solicitors who currently provide invaluable advice and assistance with asylum applications.

It is said that the refugee unit of the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service will fill the yawning gap that the withdrawal of legal aid will leave, but UKIAS has already rejected the part of the Bill in question as "a denial of natural justice". UKIAS admits that it is quite unable to provide the legal advice necessary. Few of its staff are even legally qualified and, in any case, there are too few of them. UKIAS deals with many immigration cases and I have had regular recourse to consulting it, so I know that it is understaffed. I know that extra resources are to be made available to it, but, if UKIAS itself says that the resources will not enable it to do the job, the Government ought surely to reconsider the whole question of legal aid.

Quite apart from that, there are only eight UKIAS offices in the United Kingdom. What happens if an asylum seeker finds himself or herself in an area without a conveniently placed UKIAS office, bearing in mind the fact that he or she has only 48 hours to apply for the right of appeal? How will that be achieved? Effective legal representation is surely indivisible from a credible appeals procedure which, clearly, there will not be in this case.

The time limits within which applications for leave to appeal must be submitted and determined leave applicants little opportunity to consult an independent legal representative—a right which everyone, whether a United Kingdom citizen or someone seeking asylum, should have. Where is the justice in that? There is none. But justice is not really the name of the game when it comes to the Bill. The rules accompanying the Bill, which outline plans for the detention and fingerprinting of asylum seekers, are discriminatory and will undoubtedly criminalise innocent people. The assumption is that every asylum seeker is guilty of a bogus application unless he or she can prove otherwise. There is no benefit of the doubt.

We have heard in what I can only describe as the intemperate rantings of the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr.Evans) what the extremists—the hardliners in the Tory party—really feel about foreigners. The hon. Gentleman's speech was one of the most distasteful that I have had the displeasure to hear during my time in the House. It revealed the kind of xenophobia and paranoia that are stirring up hatred in France and Germany and are fuelling increasing support for neo-Nazi parties in those countries—the Front National in France and the Republican party in Germany. The hon. Gentleman's speech might more appropriately have been delivered at a National Front rally. If it had been, it would have met with rapturous applause, doubtless followed by a forest of "Seig Heil" salutes. Heaven help us if the hon. Gentleman and his type ever become influential in any political party that gains electoral support. [HON. MEMBERS: "Really!"] Convervative Members may boo and hiss, but the fact remains that such ultra-right views fail to accept that anyone has the right to seek asylum here. *Hansard* will show that the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield illustrated that all too clearly. He said, "Close the door and bolt it, as of now, for a period of two years." Who is to say that, if that happened, the two-year period would not be increased?

The Government, of course, do not go that far, but they, too, fail to understand what is involved in fleeing persecution. Clause 7, for example, places restrictions on airline and shipping companies, requiring passengers to provide what is termed "valid travel documentation" at the point of exit. In many cases, that is simply impossible. Companies are to be instructed to reject anyone travelling on false documents. But how else are people fleeing persecution to leave the country in which they are being persecuted? It is hardly likely that they will be issued with a passport and a neat visa stamp, yet the Home Office

appears to think that they are in the same position as someone seeking simply to emigrate from the United Kingdom. That is nonsense. By denying genuine political refugees the right to leave their country to seek asylum, the Government are denying them justice and are thus in breach of the 1951 convention.

The Bill is wholly inadequate and will do nothing to improve the rights of asylum seekers. On close inspection, it seems designed simply to reduce the numbers being admitted, irrespective of their right to be admitted. What we need is a fair procedure which respects human rights and is capable of ensuring that genuine asylum seekers are allowed to stay. That the Government are clearly incapable of introducing such procedures is yet one more illustration of the fact that they have lost the right to govern. Asylum seekers, among others, must be thankful that they will not be required to do so for much longer.

7.8 pm

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): The hon. Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson) will forgive me if I do not follow him in everything that he said. I am pleased to see him in his place, but would wish to point out to him that the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) were made with great knowledge and reflected the views of many of my hon. Friend's constituents and of many people in this country. The hon. Gentleman castigated my hon. Friend in a way that brought shame both to him and to the Labour party.

Conservative Members are fed up with the pompous and almost privileged accusations from Opposition Members that we do not understand the problem of large-scale immigration and the different cultural activities in our towns and cities. Forty per cent. of the occupants of Luton come from ethnic backgounds and some of them are second and third generation immigrants.

I need no lessons from the hon. Member for Glasgow, Central or his colleagues on the Opposition Front Bench about community relations. If the accusation of racist, something with which Opposition Members castigate us, means that we are concerned about anxieties expressed by parents about the fact that some schools in my constituency have an intake of children 95 per cent. of whom cannot speak English, then I am a racist. If I am concerned about the cultures in the town that I represent, which have changed so much over the past few years because of so many activities, then I admit to being a racist.

Conservative Members are aware of the genuine and honest fears expressed by many people in this country about the large number of people who have entered this country over the past few years. We are also aware of the danger to the excellent community relations in my town and elsewhere of the continued acceptance of such large numbers of asylum seekers, the majority of whom are bogus, as hon. Members on both sides of the House have explained tonight. Such excellent relations may be exacerbated by the kind of remarks that we have heard from Opposition Members today.

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Carlisle: I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me if I do not; I have only a few minutes in which to speak.

Many people will share the view of some Opposition Members who have claimed that the Bill was a long time coming. It is regrettable that it has taken the Government some time to recognise that the problem was growing and is likely to get worse. My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart) pointed out that it is extraordinary that as the world is, we hope, becoming more tolerant and as barriers are being broken down, people will not be fleeing from their own countries in quite the same way. However, the number of people involved is considerable and, when they spill out into our towns and cities, they cause enormous problems in terms of pressure on social services and on the communities themselves.

Some hon. Members will recall a recent case in Luton which received national publicity in which three refugee seekers with suspected typhoid jumped hospital beds. Some of them visited an Indian restaurant in Luton and claimed that they were related to the restaurant's proprietor. Understandably there was immediately public panic and the restaurant was closed. Those three illegal immigrants jumped the hospital not so much in fear of their lives, but because they had no respect for the law or for the other people who were affected.

I am glad that the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) is in the Chamber. He was involved in the case of Kirujit Singh Chahal. It was typical of him to become involved in problems in another constituency, because he often does that. He took an interest in that case and tried to support that Sikh leader in his anxiety to avoid deportation. That matter is still before my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. Perhaps the hon. Member for Bradford, West does not realise that there are as many people in Luton against Mr. Chahal's views who want to see him deported as there are who support them. The poison spread by the hon. Gentleman and the campaign were encouraged by local churches. I was told by the church that that man, who was a threat to national security, should be allowed to remain in this country for the sake of good community relations. That shows that not every case that comes before hon. Members is totally proved and perhaps we should all be a little more careful before jumping on a particular bandwagon.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) drew attention to the now infamous letter in *The Times* from the Archbishops of Westminster and Canterbury. My message to the Archbishop of Canterbury is simple: if he is concerned, as he should be, about the welfare of people in this country, and if he is concerned that the Bill will have such a devastating effect on relationships within this country, and if he is worried about what might happen to asylum seekers, why does he not open up Lambeth palace, a large and comfortable residence, and take some burden off local authorities—in response to a point made by the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton)—and let them sleep there? There must be plenty of empty rooms there. Let him put his money where his mouth is. Why does he not tell the Church Commissioners to divert funds away from the stipends of priests and vicars to help those co-called asylum seekers? That kind of practical help and opinion would be better received on the Conservative Benches than pious words in opposition to a Government who are genuinely trying to tackle a problem which the Opposition parties have refused to face.

As Conservative Members have explained, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr.

[Mr. Carlisle]

Hattersley) gave us no idea what a future Labour Government—should there ever be one—would do to tackle the problem. There is a genuine fear—and this is something the electorate should know—that if the Labour party were returned to power, it would prove true to form and return to its practices of the 1970s and grant not one, but two amnesties to people seeking political asylum or waiting for their immigration status to be proved. That is what an open-door policy means.

All I could gather from the long and boring speech by the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) was that he said nothing about what the Liberal party would do about what has become a considerable problem in this country. [HON. MEMBERS: "Where is he?"] My colleagues are right to ask that. Liberal Members disappear as soon as they have made their contributions.

The number of bogus applicants at the moment—about 75 per cent.—is costing the rate and tax payers of this country an enormous amount of money. My hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman) quoted the figure in today's *The Times* of £100 million on social security. That is a yearly figure. One wonders how much money will go into legal aid and how much will go into UKIAS. One wonders about the additional cost of the staff necessary to cope with such numbers.

Unless the Government, as they are doing tonight, take decisions to reduce those numbers and can then give proper consideration to the genuine refugee seeker—something we all want to see—unfortunately people will be hurt. It is always the case, as I have found with immigration cases in my constituency, that the people who are against further immigration are those who have had to go through the tortuous process—a process known to virtually all hon. Members—of waiting many years for relations and loved ones to come into this country legitimately and have then become very cross when other people jump the queue and enter before them.

That is why I am glad that the Government have had the courage to introduce the Bill. It will be welcomed throughout the country on the basis that our system, which must remain fair and equitable to those who genuinely seek a haven here, can be retained only if we sort out the numbers. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on his tenacity in introducing the Bill and I hope that it will receive a fair wind.

7.18 pm

Mr. Bernie Grant (Tottenham): The way in which asylum seekers are treated must be changed, but the major change must be in the length of time that it takes for people to receive asylum and for their families to be reunited.

The Bill is thoroughly disgraceful, racist and xenophobic. That was clear from the contribution of the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans). If it is not racist, why is the Commission for Racial Equality considering taking the Government to court over the issue? If it is not a racist Bill, why are there so many well-known racists present on the Conservative Benches?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am certainly not going to allow accusations of that nature. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will withdraw them and rephrase what he has to say.

Mr. Grant: I am not prepared to withdraw that remark. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am asking the hon. Gentleman whether, in the best interests of the debate, he will rethink his claim and withdraw the accusation that he has just made.

Mr. Grant: A number of Conservative Members have played the racist card in several immigration debates. I am prepared to say that after your advice, Madam Deputy Speaker. One of the major reasons why the Bill——

Hon. Members: Withdraw.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Do I understand that the hon. Gentleman has withdrawn his accusation? That is what I am asking him to do, in the best interests of the debate and of the House.

Mr. Grant: I have substituted the words that I have —*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The Chair will deal with this matter. I am asking the hon. Gentleman to withdraw the accusation that he has made. I understand that he is now going on to make his speech, but I need a clear withdrawal of the statement that he made.

Mr. Grant: I am not prepared to withdraw.

Madam Deputy Speaker: In that case——

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. On three occasions, the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) admitted to use of the word "racist" as it applied to himself.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have been listening extremely carefully to this debate. Passions have been raised, understandably, very high. I am asking the hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant) in good faith to withdraw the statement that he made. I wish to hear his speech—the House wishes to hear his speech. He has a contribution to make, but we cannot and I will not allow such accusations to be made.

Mr. Grant: On the basis of your advice, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will withdraw my remark.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am obliged to the hon. Gentleman. We will now hear what he has to say in the good faith that he has shown in the Chamber.

Mr. Grant: The Bill is certainly racist. The majority of asylum seekers are people of colour. I am not aware of millions of white east Germans, Poles or Russians flocking into this country. However, I am aware that many people of colour, whether they be Turkish, Kurdish, Somalian, Eritrean or whatever, wish to come to this country. The Bill is meant to play on racism. I suspect that the issues around the Bill will feature strongly in the run-up to the next general election.

There is a big problem for asylum seekers coming to Britain. Britain applies visa restrictions as soon as it is realised that there is a possible refugee problem. For example, in 1984, visas were slapped on in Sri Lanka when the problems started there. In 1989, when problems started for the Kurds in Turkey, Britain slapped on visa regulations. The same happened in Uganda in 1990. Britain then tells airlines and carriers that they cannot

bring anyone from certain countries without a valid visa. The Bill will double carriers' fines to £2,000. Last year, the Chancellor made about £15 million clear profit as a result of that practice. Some people might say that the Government are making a profit out of people's misery.

An asylum seeker cannot get a visa from a British embassy overseas. Therefore, that person must lie to get a visa. He or she must obtain a false visa or false documents of some sort. According to the Bill, that would be used against them and they would almost certainly be refused political asylum. Incidentally, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) said, that is contrary to the United Nations convention on refugees.

If asylum seekers come to Britain via what the United Nations terms a safe country, they are returned to that safe country. The British Government do not investigate whether a country is safe. They automatically accept that, if a country has signed the United Nations convention, it is safe. Therefore, India returns refugees to Iran, Austria returns refugees to Lebanon, and Kenya returns refugees to Somalia.

The next problem of the Bill is the way in which the Government have introduced it—that is, by playing the numbers game. I shall quote some figures to try to ensure that we at least have an answer from the Government. According to the United Nations, there are 17·5 million refugees. Five per cent. of those refugees have asylum in Europe—a mere 875,000 are admitted. Pakistan has 37 times more refugees than the United Kingdom. Iran has 27 times more refugees than the United Kingdom. Malawi has more refugees than any other country. All those countries are considerably poorer than Britain, yet we have whingeing from the Government about how terrible it is that 50,000 applications are received every year.

The Government have said that only 200 refugees arrive at our ports every week. The impression that they give in the newspapers is that a flood of people are about to come to this country. The figures that the Government quote include reapplications from people who have been granted asylum and need to renew that asylum every four years. A similar situation applies to people with exceptional leave to remain. They need to reapply every year initially and then every three years. That group includes people who are legitimately here as students and visitors, but who have had to change their status because of political upheaval back home. The number of applications depends on what is happening in the world. In 1986, there were fewer applications than there were in 1985, and, in 1988, there were fewer than in 1987. Applications occur in cycles.

The Government also have a few other tricks up their sleeve. Until the mid-1980s, most people who applied were granted asylum status, and a few were given exceptional leave to remain. In the past five or six years, the Government have changed that trend. The majority are given exceptional leave to remain and the minority are given asylum status. The reason for that is that an asylum seeker's family is allowed to be reunited with that person. A person with exceptional leave to remain is not allowed to bring his or her family. Purely on the numbers game, the Government are giving more people exceptional leave to remain, not asylum status.

Also, the Government do not tell us how many refugees go back home. The hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) will know that thousands of South Africans who have been living in exile in this country have returned home. There are resettlement programmes to enable them to go back to their country. We never hear from the Government how many refugees go back home. Now that the situation has changed in Ethiopia, people in my constituency have started to go back to Ethiopia. Why do the Government not publish the figures if they want a decent debate on the issue?

The Government try to give the impression that refugees are totally hopeless and living off the dole. The majority of refugees whom I have come across are middle-class people who are in opposition in their own countries. That is why they are asylum seekers. They are doctors, nurses and so on. If they were given the chance, they would be able to look after their own interests in this country.

In the short time that is now left to me, I shall mention only two of the Bill's other problems. When asylum seekers arrive in this country, they have to make a prompt and full disclosure of all material factors. That is often difficult. Rape is a lawful method of torture in some countries, but women who have been raped are confronted by male immigration officers, while men who have been raped are confronted by female immigration officers. People who are disoriented are expected to give full and prompt disclosure of material factors because, if they do not, their claim could be refused. That is another aspect of the Bill that needs further consideration.

Finally, the Bill's provisions on fingerprinting are an insult. I was pleased when I heard the Prime Minister talk about a classless society and about the fact that all those who are admitted to or who live in Britain can expect equal treatment. I cannot see how the Bill can help the Prime Minister to achieve his vision. It will create not second-class, but third-class citizens who can be picked up at any time and fingerprinted. Their fingerprints could be held for 10 years or more and circulated to virtually all and sundry.

I oppose the Bill and suggest that the whole House does the same.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Just to prove what a softie I am, I gave the hon. Gentleman a couple of minutes of injury time.

7.31 pm

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): This important Bill seeks to address the real problem of bogus asylum seekers. I shall confine my remarks to that precise aspect of a much bigger problem, because I do not want to become involved in a discussion of immigration as such. I want to deal only with the question of bogus asylum seekers. I am not alone in believing that that problem should be dealt with, because the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) replied to an intervention from me on 5 November, stating:

> "I have made it clear that I do not wish to see and would not allow in the bogus asylum seekers." [*Official Report*, 5 November 1991; Vol. 198, c. 370.]

He then drew attention to comments made by his hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) in calling for penalties to deal with bogus asylum seekers. There is, therefore, a measure of agreement between the Opposition Front Bench and my right hon. and hon. Friends about the principal reason for the Bill.

[Mr. Michael Shersby]

There is an urgent need to deal with that problem, because we know that there has been a sharp increase in the number of asylum seekers, of whom a considerable number are bogus. On 2 July, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary told the House that the number of asylum seekers rose from 5,000 per year in 1988 to more than 30,000 in 1990. He added:

"From January to May this year, 21,000 applications were received—a rate of nearly 1,000 a week."—[*Official Report*, 2 July 1991; Vol. 194, c. 165.]

There is no doubt that some of those applicants are bogus and there is every reason to believe that many applicants attempt to gain permanent admission to the United Kingdom through corrupt agents operating in this country, some of whom have already been prosecuted and convicted. That places a considerable burden on all those who are responsible for detecting and apprehending people who prey on other people's misfortune and misery. One has only to look at the numbers who claim asylum several months after their original arrival in the United Kingdom to understand that a proportion of them are not genuine. More than 26,000 such applications were made in the first nine months of this year, compared with 7,530 applications at the port of entry. The figures are higher due to the delays in recording applications.

I do not have the time to talk in detail about the mechanisms that are proposed in the Bill for dealing with that problem, so I shall confine my remarks to certain aspects that might interest the House. The Bill does not deal with legal aid. It does not need to, because the Government and the United Nations fund a free legal aid advice and legal representation service through the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service. In addition, the Government fund free solicitors' advice through the green form scheme. That anomalous double provision will almost certainly be brought to an end. At 5 o'clock this afternoon, I received an answer to a written question in which I tried to ascertain the cost of legal aid to asylum seekers. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department replied:

"I understand that legal aid for all immigration cases was £2·65 million for 1990-91. No separate figure is available for asylum related costs. For the year—[*Interruption.*] Perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) will stop interrupting me."

The Minister's answer continues:

"For the year ending March 1991, the Home Office provided UKIAS with £72,690, as part of the annual grant in aid, towards the cost of its Refugee Unit."

That is a comparatively small sum, as I am sure that Opposition Members will agree, but they will also agree that, because it is being increased by £1·6 million in a full year, UKIAS will be provided with a total of £1,672,690—a substantial amount which will be extremely valuable to that organisation as it deals with the problem of asylum.

I turn now to another matter of great importance that I should like my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to consider carefully. One method used by bogus asylum seekers to try to remain in Britain is to enter into marriage as quickly as possible with a United Kingdom national. The information that I am about to give the House was given to me by registration officers in the London area. It is astonishing that an individual arriving at a port of entry can enter into a legal marriage with a person who is free to marry by licence, provided that that person has been resident in the United Kingdom for 15 clear days. I am told by registrars in the London area that a wide variety of nationals are marrying British and/or EC nationals with visitors' passports who themselves may be overstaying their leave to remain in Britain. In addition, Irish nationals are marrying EC foreign nationals. If they do not marry by licence, those who come here from overseas are free to marry after seven days, plus 21 clear days before marriage.

Mr. Vaz: That has nothing to do with the Bill.

Mr. Shersby: I am introducing this matter because many registrars are encountering major problems relating to people's identity. Problems occur where a person gives a false identity by using another person's birth certificate. As a result, bogus marriages of convenience are taking place. Marriage to British and/or EC visitors within six months gives the spouse leave to remain in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Vaz: How many such marriages have there been?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Shersby: There is clearly wide scope for abusing the immigration laws by those means, because there have recently been four cases of proven false identity—and that is only the tip of the iceberg. I should like to know what my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is going to do about that. Why is there no provision in the Bill for registrars to question a person wishing to marry if that person is clearly overstaying the provisions of his or her visa?

Will my right hon. Friend consider implementing the recommendation on access to recent records as set out in paragraph 6.7 of "Registration: Proposals for Change", Cmd 939? That paragraph makes it clear that

"the right of anyone to look up events—especially births—in public indexes, and then to buy certified copies of the records of them, offers scope for these certificates to be used too readily for the creation of false identities, for purposes of personation and fraud".

I call on my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to amend the Bill in Committee to give the registration services legal powers to insist on evidence of identity in all cases of marriage, as recommended in paragraph 3.15 of the White Paper. That would give registrars the statutory power to call for documentary evidence of the age, identity and marital status of those who are married.

The General Synod of the Church of England has welcomed the proposal. That might be a matter of some interest to the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), who is seething in his seat below the Gangway. The proposal would go a long way to stopping the fraudulent use of birth certificates as identity in creating bogus marriages.

I have no more time, but the matter that I have raised is important and, as far as I am aware, has not been raised before in the House in connection with the problem of bogus asylum seekers and those who would bend the immigration laws. The information that I have given the House is based on facts which have been supplied to me in good faith by registration officers.

7.40 pm

Mr. David Young (Bolton, South-East): There is no division between Conservative and Opposition Members about the nature of the problem. However, there is anxiety on this side of the House about the means by which the

Government seek to deal with it. The real issue is not the number of illegitimate asylum seekers who try to gain entry. It is how many genuine people may be denied the right of asylum as a result of the methods used. I am not the only person who feels such disquiet. The Law Society, the Immigration Law Practitioners Association, the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, the Bar Council and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees all express some anxiety that legitimate refugees may be turned away.

My anxiety is caused by the methods adopted. For example, there will be only two days for an appeal and the impression is given that appeals will be made available when in fact only the right to appeal will be provided. The figures for 1990 show that 25 per cent. of asylum seekers were granted refugee status and 65 per cent. of applicants were allowed exceptionally to remain in Britain. That does not suggest to me that there has been an abuse of the system by applicants. Or do the Government admit that they knowingly allowed into Britain people whom they now claim were fraudulent asylum seekers who entered with the Government's full knowledge?

I am worried about the so-called fast-track process. It seems to me like throwing away the wheat with the chaff when doing some weeding. The process does not seem to aim to safeguard the genuine applicant for refugee status. It seems more like a neat bureaucratic method of getting rid of as many people as possible and granting them no redress once that bureaucratic decision has been made.

I am worried above all about the removal of legal aid. It is true that lawyers do not appear at immigration tribunals, but often solicitors prepare the case. To suggest that the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service, excellent organisation though it may be, can do the preparation is entirely misleading. For one thing, many towns, including my own town of Bolton, do not have a UKIAS office. For another, many offices do not have the resources or legal staff to prepare cases. The preparation of a case is as essential and as much the key to its favourable conclusion as putting the case at the tribunal.

One must also draw the attention of the House to the 1951 convention on refugees, which states that there should be free access to all courts. It is no good granting free access to courts if the means by which people may go to court—legal aid—is withdrawn. Everyone in the House knows that to go to law costs a great deal of money and that it is not simply a question of appealing to a court to obtain justice. Unless one has the financial resources to reach those courts and to brief solicitors and barristers, one's case is decided by default. Justice may be blind in this country, but one requires an awful lot of cash to have her make the decision. That is where the legal system comes in.

Like many of my colleagues, I am worried about the Government's appointment of the airlines as virtual immigration officers. The staff of the airlines are trained to deal with air tickets. They are not immigration officers and they are not so trained. When they decide simply by going through the documents whether a man is carried or a woman is not carried they may condemn those passengers to death. No entry certificate is offered to a refugee. In order to become a refugee, a person may have had to falsify papers. To ask airline staff to decide whether those papers were obtained by false or fraudulent means in order to become a refugee is to dodge the whole question and turn one's back on those who may be in danger for their life. It was for the reason that I have described that, as *The Independent* reported on 1 August 1991, UKIAS voted against the plans because it considered that they were contrary to natural justice. That is exactly my feeling.

In my constituency the proposals are viewed in a racialist context. When the Home Secretary made the proposals way back in the summer, he said that legal aid would also be withdrawn from other immigration cases. While that matter may not be under discussion tonight, to many of my constituents it is the thin end of the wedge. I am from a multi-racial town and I am worried about the raising of the spectre of mass immigration. It seems to provide the emotive atmosphere in which people are more worried about blocking fictitious immigration claims than applying justice.

It is not so long since one of our allies in the Gulf war appealed to the Iraqis to revolt and fight against oppression. We have no right to join in making such statements if we turn our back on the right of refugees legitimately to enter Britain. We know the danger that people face in countries such as Iraq. If only one man or woman is wrongly returned and sent to torture or death, the Government will have turned their back not only on that refugee but on everything that Britain has stood for. Britain has stood above all else for the right of individuals to protection from oppression, no matter from which country they come.

One aspect of the debate which gives me anxiety is the amount of time spent arguing about illegal immigrants. We are against illegal immigration. We are against the person who tries to get refugee status fraudulently. The important thing is that this measure should deal positively with the person who is in need of safety within our shores but who is perhaps without the right documents.

The Government are sending out the message, "We do not want you here, we have changed our policy and Britain is no longer the home of those who are persecuted in their own countries."

7.50 pm

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): Refugees have been coming to this country for centuries. In the 12th, 13th, 14th and 15th centuries, Jews from Germany and elsewhere came to this country; in the 17th century it was the Huguenots. The French came in the 18th century; Jews from Latvia and Estonia in Russia came in the 19th century; and this century those seeking refugee status from Nazi Germany, Uganda and Chile have found a safe haven in this country, which has a tradition as a refuge against oppression. We stand for that and I know that the Government also stand for it.

I am chairman of the south and central European committee of the British Refugee Council and I would fight for the 1951 convention to be preserved. I believe that the Bill does that, and I think that it is misunderstood by Opposition Members and by some Conservative Members. The Bill does not intend to change status, but merely deals with the procedure of achieving the 1951 convention and with ensuring that it works.

If we are to continue to be a country with a tradition of providing refuge against oppression, it is essential that we should be in a position to maintain the 1951 convention. The water has been muddied by bogus applications, which have resulted in all the problems that we have had to face. That is why the Bill has been introduced.

[Mr. David Ashby]

I cannot accept that the Bill is racialist. I would not support it for one moment if it were, because I am certainly opposed to racialism; in some ways, I am myself a refugee from it. By their very nature, refugees are from another nation or another race, but that does not make the Bill racialist. I deplore what has been said about racialism. The Bill is neutral—it deals with refugees and it tries to enhance the 1951 convention.

I am grateful to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) for giving way during his speech, although he is not in his seat now. I asked him to comment on the fact that refugees are usually the very people who do not have passports.

I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is in his seat to hear this, as we must remember that true refugees have suffered physical and mental torture, have often lived in fear, underground, and their departure is often an escape. They have lived a life of lies and they may well have escaped on forged documents. When they arrive here, their first words may well be lies. It is essential to bear in mind the fact that ordinary immigration officers may turn round people—I am bound to say the very people that Conservative Members have been so sceptical about—who may be refugees, whom we must preserve under the 1951 convention.

I am pleased that we have an appeals service. I do not agree with the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) about that. The issue of leave to appeal was dealt with by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton, and he was correct to say that, in the main, appeals are dealt with that way.

I am pleased that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has confirmed reports that the Bill provides for matters of law to be dealt with directly by a judge. It is essential that the people who adjudicate are of the highest calibre and that they can understand that the very person the immigration officer turns away may be the most genuine refugee. That is my most important argument. That is why the man on the ground and the adjudicator are so important.

The Bill has a positive side—it will speed up the process of dealing with applications for asylum status. The greatest injustice may be the long wait for leave to stay. I can think of no greater injustice than people waiting three or four years only to be told that they cannot stay. That is awful. The asylum procedure must be dealt with as quickly as possible but in a just way, in a manner that allows applicants access to help and advice.

The true asylum seeker may need advice, and the number of true asylum seekers is small. There has been an influx of applications, but they are from people who live in this country. People who arrive at the port or airport seeking asylum are few and far between.

I would like to think that, when people seek asylum, they at least get a helping hand, and that the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service was there to help them and to try to get to the truth. We must remember that a man who has suffered mental and physical torture will take a long time to come to the truth.

I hope that, in Committee, provision will be made so that, where the adjudicator is satisfied, an adjournment can be granted on applications so that certain matters can be dealt with and there really will be a search for truth.

There has been an enormous change in the world, and there should be less demand for asylum. Perhaps, as has been said, bogus applications account for the increase. However, we must not forget that, at the beginning of the century, people were as complacent as I am being about how wonderful the world was, but the Russian revolution took place in 1917. Who knows what will happen in the future? It is therefore essential that the groundwork of the Bill is well laid.

The person at the door of our country—the port or the airport—needs a friend, and I hope that UKIAS will be sufficiently funded to be that friend. Also, I hope that it will get the message loud and clear that it should not support applications that are not well founded. Good lawyers advise a client to plead guilty when they are satisfied that the evidence is overwhelming. I hope that UKIAS will be sufficiently well funded to provide support for those who really need it and will employ someone of sufficient calibre and strength to tell bogus applicants, "I am sorry, we can't help you. You will have to go elsewhere or plead your own application, because we don't think you have a case."

The British Refugee Council, certainly my committee, has been supporting a committee that has been helping refugees from General Pinochet's Chile to return. They have been here for many years. We are extremely grateful to the British Government for the funding that allows the programme to exist. We have managed to return several families. It is difficult to do so after 10 years, but they want to go. I hope that the Government will continue to be as generous, so that we can return other refugees to Chile.

8 pm

Miss Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): It is nice to follow the first Conservative Back-Bench Member who seems to have looked at the Bill without blinkers.

We should not discuss the Bill without understanding the climate and context in which it is being introduced. We are seeing a growth in neo-fascism and fascist groups throughout Europe, particularly in Germany, Austria and France. There is growing hostility to asylum seekers within Europe, spearheaded by organised right-wing groups. In this country, even some of our popular newspapers have attacked all asylum seekers as cheats who have no right to be here. I was disappointed that the Home Secretary spent so much of his time this afternoon outlining a few examples of asylum seekers who have been proved to be lying. The "bogus" tag has been used indiscriminately and has created a climate of hostility to new arrivals.

Furthermore, the unfavourable climate may have repercussions on the general attitudes to the black population in the United Kingdom. The Home Secretary said that we must not provide the opportunity for the organised violence against asylum seekers in Europe to spread here. The Bill will do exactly that. No matter how much the Home Secretary genuinely may not want that to happen, the Bill will stir up racist feelings and will play on fears and prejudices. It will give the various groups and Tory Members who seek to play the race card the opportunity to do so. This afternoon, we have seen evidence of that here. If such passions are aroused in this Chamber today, there must be real concern about what will happen when it is discussed throughout the country.

Hon. Members should be aware of the widespread feeling among all the agencies that deal with asylum

seekers and refugees that there are no merits in the Bill as it stands. I am thinking of Amnesty International and the Churches. I abhor the criticism made by the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) of Lambeth palace, which is in my constituency. I pay tribute to the work of the churches in my borough and other inner-London boroughs on this issue.

This is not the time to press this Bill, even if there were merits in it, considering the climate in Europe. If the Home Secretary meant what he says about keeping public sympathy for genuine refugees, he would address the need for extra resources for the Home Office and Lunar house to speed up the procedures for asylum seeking. If those resources had been given three or four years ago, we would not have the long delays that lead to so much misery, and the small number of non-genuine asylum seekers would not be here for longer than we would all want.

The British Refugee Council is in my constituency, and I pay tribute, as will other hon. Members, to its work in helping to give support and advice to refugees. Of all organisations, it has an interest in ensuring that those who apply for asylum as a means of avoiding immigration regulations should not be allowed to enter the country. I know that it shares that view. The Home Secretary should have listened sooner to its representations.

No matter what the Home Secretary has said, clauses 5 and 6 mean that there will be no absolute right of appeal. All must seek leave to appeal from the special adjudicator who is to be appointed by the Lord Chancellor. The special adjudicator will not grant leave to appeal if he, or perhaps she, is satisfied that the applicant does not have an arguable claim for asylum. That decision will be made without an oral hearing, and there will be no appeal against refusal. That is against natural justice.

Applications for leave to appeal must be made within 48 hours of the asylum seeker receiving notice that the application has been refused. It is assumed that the asylum seeker will receive that notification the day after it is posted. That is not something of which we can be certain. The British Refugee Council's concerns about these proposals must be listened to.

Many asylum seekers live in overcrowded, temporary accommodation, including hostels, where access to mail is not necessarily foolproof. Mail can be delayed. People who speak little or no English may not understand the need for speed, and it may take time to get the information translated. At this stage, asylum seekers may not have a legal adviser. They may not even have a friend.

Even when they have an adviser, that adviser will have to be contacted and an appointment made. The adviser will have to complete the relevant documentation based on the reasons given for the refusal of the application. The obvious implication is that many asylum seekers may miss the deadline and lose the chance to appeal.

Clause 7 raises the question whether the asylum seeker wishes to submit any variation or amplification of the notice of appeal. If so, it must be done within five days of receiving the notification. I do not believe that the genuine asylum seeker will be treated fairly.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) went through the various clauses in detail and I do not want to add to anything that he has said. The Government could be taking many measures to ensure that refugees who have the right to stay in this country are assimilated and given equal opportunities. Apart from their security, the need for independence and self-sufficiency is of paramount importance to them. Training and employment play a key role, yet there is no planned or co-ordinated policy to facilitate it.

Special programmes must be provided where needed to address the problems that refugees face through their past circumstances to give them equality of opportunity and to avoid eroding their talents and initiative. I get fed up with people always assuming that refugees have nothing positive to offer this country and that they are merely bringing or being problems. For too many, the lack of financial security, savings and a clear future mean that they have to live at subsistence level. Obviously, after what some of them have gone through, they can at least live in safety, but that is no basis for a completely new beginning after a shattered career, education and family life.

The definition of the Confederation of British Industry of the United Kingdom work force as "under-educated, under-trained and under-qualified" ironically does not apply to the majority of refugees, many of whom are highly qualified and skilled. Employers should be taking note.

No one is responsible for the education and training of refugees. The British Government are a signatory to the United Nations convention on refugees. As such, they have an obligation to ensure satisfactory resettlement. Unlike some European countries, there is no centrally planned and co-ordinated policy for educating and training refugees. They are expected to find their own way into our education system.

Much more could be done to help assimilate our refugees—for example, help with schooling and specialist support. Boroughs such as Lambeth need extra resources to provide the back-up. We have a large number of refugees, and we need extra resources. The Bill provides no support for the genuine refugee or assistance with the resettlement of refugees here. The Home Secretary has an opportunity to extend the scope of grants to local authorities under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1989.

Local authority associations have identified the need for additional resources to provide both housing and education of the children of refugees. My borough has a large number of refugees, and I am concerned that the Bill may enable some authorities to avoid any responsibility for refugees. The Bill will do nothing to assist the settlement of refugees in the United Kingdom.

Asylum seekers to this country are exactly that—they are seeking asylum in the United Kingdom, not in a particular local authority. It is vital that those boroughs that have, for historical or accidental reasons, a large number of refugees should not be financially penalised. Many of those boroughs also have the worst housing, longest waiting lists and highest poverty levels of the country.

There is no need for the Bill and for the hours of debate that will accompany it. We need an effort to be made to bring about international co-operation to remedy some of the factors that lead to people seeking asylum in this country. What is needed is an acceptance of our responsibilities under international law.

The Labour party wants application procedures to be speeded up so that we have a proper, fair and effective system that ensures that this country continues its long

[Miss Kate Hoey]

honourable tradition of providing asylum for refugees. The Government will convince no one that they too wish to continue that tradition.

8.10 pm

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): I support the Bill, but I have some criticisms of past Government policy.

I agree with the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) about the cost of immigration and the cost of refugees. That cost is increasing because of the number of children who are abandoned at Heathrow. My local authority, quite rightly, takes on those children because they are in need, but it receives no financial assistance to cope with them. My right hon. Friend should bear that in mind. It is no good arguing that we should take in asylum seekers and that we should process their applications quickly if, in the interim, no financial assistance is given to local authorities for that purpose.

I accept that the number of immigration officers at Heathrow has increased, but for a long time the numbers employed were well below what was required. Those officers do an excellent job and have a great understanding of the needs of that job. However, it would be extremely helpful if those officers were medically trained.

In many instances, when asylum seekers and others reach Heathrow they can walk straight into the community with any kind of illness, unless they seek medical attention. Unless an immigration officer feels that someone needs such a medical examination, he is unable to intervene. To my knowledge, no immigration officer at Heathrow is medically qualified. The ports of entry should be better manned and in some instances medical advice should be on hand so that certain people have a medical examination before they are allowed into the community. That would benefit not only the individual, but the community in which he intends to live.

Hon. Members on both sides have argued that the processing of applications takes an awfully long time. The present problems may be a precise result of that delay. In the past, however, insufficient priority has been given to processing such applications. It is ridiculous that people wait up to three years until a decision is reached.

In some instances an applicaton may be deemed to be bogus after a two-year delay. However, because the individual has settled here the Government say that they cannot send that person back.

If an application is processed quickly and is found to be bogus, the person concerned is sent back to his country of origin. However, if that application process takes a long time, it is felt that one cannot upset that person's lifestyle —he may be married—and he is allowed to stay. That is nonsense.

There is a suspicion—no more than that—of which I have no clear evidence, that blanket decisions are taken on some applications. I accept that individual cases are studied carefully, but Sikhs from the Punjab think that the Home Office department in Croydon does not believe any Sikh from the Punjab who claims political asylum. It appears that, because we are great friends with the Indian Government and the Indian community, and because they tell us that there is no political persecution in the Punjab, we must accept that. However, I and others find it difficult to accept that, but I repeat that I have no hard evidence to substantiate my claim.

Tough action is needed. People seem to forget that Britain is a small island with limited resources of all kinds. Bogus applicants offend ethnic minorities as much as anyone else. Sikhs in my constituency are totally opposed to the so-called immigration advisers who extract large amounts of money from would-be applicants. Many of those applicants do not understand the system and they are misled about their applications. Perhaps my right hon. Friend should consider introducing a law to make the exploitation of those weak and innocent people—many cannot speak the language—a criminal offence. Such exploitation has been widespread for too long.

We must accept that the bogus traveller—that is the best title to give to such a person—is seeking no more than a better life. At times perhaps that is sought at someone else's expense. I do not agree with the hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant) that all such people are middle class and able to make a contribution to our society. Many asylum seekers are middle class, but one need only visit Brick lane to see Bangladeshi people who are suffering a great deal because they are poor. They cannot speak the language, so they cannot get work and they need help.

When we allow people into the country, be they middle class or poor, we must not run away with the idea of helping them. If such people are not genuine asylum seekers we must take action to protect the rest of the community, including the ethnic minorities, from them.

Many hon. Members have spoken about the pressures on our social services and educational and housing provision. The current employment situation is not conducive to allowing in more people to seek work. Often there is no such work to be had, but if there is, the asylum seekers should not take it at the expense of people already here.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): Surely the hon. Gentleman would accept that problems have been associated with unemployment, bad housing and lack of social services for far longer than before any immigrant entered this country. One cannot accredit those problems to immigration.

Mr. Dicks: It was a mistake to allow the hon. Gentleman to intervene. I accept that there have always been some problems, but if one keeps filling the pot with water it will overflow. Given the current circumstances and strains, we cannot afford to let anyone else into the country.

The British people are not prepared to be conned by the bogus political asylum seeker. As my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) said, Britain is not a soft touch. We will help those that we have to help legally, or perhaps those whom people want to help, but we will not have foisted upon us those who come here for a good time and a good life. They seek to come here because it is a nice place.

I welcome the Bill, but I do not believe it goes far enough. Applications for asylum should not be accepted from nationals of certain countries. Only last week my right hon. Friend said that people had sought asylum from Canada. How can anyone be politically persecuted in Canada? How can people be politically persecuted in America or in many western European countries? We must

start to define where we expect genuine refugees to come from. If we did that, we could probably reduce the number of applications by about 75 per cent. overnight.

If someone arrives here from Canada, how can we say that we will consider properly and carefully his application for political asylum? That person's backside should be kicked and he should be put on the first Air Canada flight home.

I am concerned about clause 3 and its effect on local authority housing. Why is it that bogus applicants, and even genuine asylum seekers, are given housing when they claim to have no alternative accommodation? How can we test the authenticity of their claim that their homelessness was not self-inflicted? My local authority has had to cope with that problem for many years, as I did when I was housing chairman of my local authority.

Unless we send someone back to his country of origin, it is almost impossible to test the authenticity of the statements that he makes. My local authority has a great many people in bed-and-breakfast accommodation, which costs the local poll tax payer a great deal. I believe that it is nonsense that we should give such asylum seekers any form of accommodation. The possibility of getting that accommodation encourages many refugees to come here in the first place.

Mr. Madden: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dicks: No, I shall not give way.

The other subject that I wish to mention is the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987. It is ludicrous that the Government should say that airlines and other carriers should be punished for doing something that is not their job. They are not immigration officials. They have people at airports to check in passengers and to push them through. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary commented on people who arrive here having torn up or got rid of their documents on the aeroplane. It is interesting that, in sush cases, the Government still fine the airline concerned and expect it to pay. That seems to be wrong. There are 77 airlines at Heathrow and the Government expect them to act as immigration officials to ensure that people arrive with the right documentation. In the past, people have destroyed their documents on aeroplanes and in one case someone came with an outdated passport. Anyone could make that mistake in the urgency of a business flight, yet the airline concerned must pay the Government for that. That seems crazy.

My hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield may have had a point when he said—it was a tough line to take—that all admissions into this country should be suspended until we have caught up, and then we could reduce the waiting period to six weeks.

If the Labour party, the churches, the Hampstead white wine whingers and the bleeding hearts all oppose the Bill, it must be right. After all, the majority of ordinary, decent working class people support it.

8.22 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I listened with great fascination to the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks), thinking that he might take this opportunity to tell the House about his relationship with Professor Bedi, who is now awaiting trial in Brixton prison. I thought that he would explain why, although he legitimately supports the cause of human rights of the Sikh people, he has made so many abusive remarks about Afro-Caribbean and West Indian people in the past, especially in an interview in the *Tatler* in 1989.

The debate is being held against the background of the most appalling racism, promoted by the popular press, some Conservative Members and especially the Government. For example, today's *Daily Mail* decided to have on its front page—coincidence I am certain—to go with the Bill:

"Cheating Refugee Rang Up £117,000 Phone Bill".

I have no idea of the circumstances connected with that but it has nothing to do with whether someone may be an asylum seeker. The *Daily Mail*, the *Sun* and many other such papers have contained a series of unpleasant, vituperative stories against individuals in the past few months. They have sought to damage the interests of people legitimately seeking political asylum, having fled from oppression, who if they returned to their own countries would face further oppression and possibly death.

A few days ago, we saw the appalling spectacle on television of Vietnamese asylum seekers being dragged forcibly on to a plane to be sent back to Vietnam, a very poor country that has suffered economic embargos since 1976, which have caused great poverty there. The embargos were supported by the United States and this country. I fear, as do many others, that the start of the rot was the forced repatriation of the Vietnamese from Hong Kong.

Not so many years ago, a terrified young Kurdish man from Turkey sought asylum in this country. Despite all the entreaties that we could mount, including substantial medical evidence, the Home Office decided—the matter went to ministerial level—that he must return to Turkey. He could not face that prospect and took his own life by covering himself in petrol and setting himself alight. Siho Iyuguven died. Fortunately, his family was able to come here later and I am pleased to say that they now live here safely. However, they have never forgiven or forgotten what happened.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey) said in her excellent contribution, the degree of racism and racist violence on the rise in Europe must be dealt with. It cannot be dealt with by appeasement or by saying that those people have a legitimate point and that is why they are burning mosques in France and Nazi gangs are attacking migrant workers in Germany. It must be totally condemned, because anything less encourages the further rise of fascism. The slightest understanding of the history of Europe in the 1920s and 1930s shows that.

I want the House to consider the circumstances under which people seek political asylum. It is now part of the history of this country that many people came here to try to avoid the holocaust that Nazi Germany became. Unfortunately, many did not reach this country, the United States, Canada or any other safe country but ended up in the gas chambers of Auschwitz and Dachau because they were denied the right to asylum. I know of people who have fled the most awful oppression in other countries in later fascist regimes, such as that of General Augusto Pinochet in Chile, which killed so many. Many succeeded in gaining political asylum, but unfortunately not everyone. Now, as democracy is being reborn in Chile, the unmarked graves are being uncovered, the secret prisons are being discovered and the names of the missing are at last being revealed. If anyone believes for a moment that

[Mr. Jeremy Corbyn]

we should forget about the cause of asylum seekers, I ask them to read some of the evidence of people who fled from Chile, El Salvador, Burma and so many other places where they could not cope with the oppression against them.

It is not easy for people to leave their own country, possibly never to return. Such a decision is not taken lightly. It is a sense of defeat and having to start over again. This country has not faced such a decision in the past 300 or 400 years and I hope that we never shall. But we should understand those who face such oppression and recognise that, in framing legislation, we should not introduce the remotest chance of anyone being wrongly returned. If they are, in many cases it means certain death for them.

The concept of a safe third country was mentioned so glibly by the Minister. He should think for a moment what that means. Is he saying that France, Germany or the United States are automatically safe? They are not. Is someone who has moved to Louisiana safe from the Ku Klux Klan and David Duke? Is a Moroccan asylum seeker safe in the suburbs of Paris? Is a Vietnamese migrant worker safe living in Leipzig with Nazi gangs going around? The Home Secretary should think much more carefully about the concept of a safe third country.

We should also think about the problems of the world as a whole, which cause mass migration in the first place. People do not lightly take the decision to migrate. The poverty that is created in some African countries by a combination of the debt crisis, poor harvests and droughts forces people to seek survival somewhere else. Indeed, Irish people have sought survival elsewhere, and people often left this country because they did not wish to stay in the slums of London, Birmingham or Liverpool but sought a better life in Australia or elsewhere. We should not be quite so narrow-minded, blinkered and xenophobic about the rest of the world.

The House has not had a good record in the past years. The Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987 was an abominable piece of legislation, privatising immigration and putting it in the hands of aircraft and shipping companies, encouraging the use of bogus identity documents and, in many cases, making it impossible for legitimate asylum seekers to leave their own countries. People living under oppression cannot go to the British embassy and seek an entry clearance document, present it to an airline office, take a plane to this country and then seek political asylum. The world is not like that. The British embassy may be observed by the secret police, as may the airline office and many other places. We should think more carefully about the effects of the legislation.

We should consider the psychological condition in which people arrive. I know people who were prisoners of war in Japanese camps during the second world war and who, even now, find it hard to talk about the abuse that they suffered. I was talking to an old man in my constituency only last week. He found it hard to describe to me the abominable way in which he was treated in a prisoner of war camp. The same is true of victims of the holocaust who were placed in concentration camps. People who have been in prison in Zaire, Somalia and many other places find it hard, after the long, arduous and frightening experience of travelling abroad to seek asylum, to talk instantly about everything that happened.

The excellent organisation, the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, collected evidence showing the psychological condition in which people arrive in this country. The procedure proposed—the fast track, the instant decision, the lack of proper appeal—continually works against those people. It is hard for people fleeing from oppression to explain everything that has happened. They have to reveal all, and if something goes wrong how are they to know that all that information will not be handed back to the secret police from whom they are trying to escape by seeking asylum?

I hope that the House will reject the Bill, but I fear that it will not. We shall fight it in Committee, and I hope that there will be a campaign in this country against the Bill, the xenophobia that it perpetrates and the principles behind it which are so wrong.

8.32 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): The Bill must be one of the most sensitive to come before the House for many years. It affects people and this country's reputation. We have given asylum to political refugees over many centuries: the Huguenots, the Jews from eastern Europe and Russia at the turn of the century, continental Europeans during the last war—including my father—and many others. This country has a proud record to uphold.

In this day and age, continuing problems around the world throw up refugees. One such problem is particularly close to home for many of my Gravesham constituents. My constituency includes a large community of Sikhs from the Punjab in India. I do not need to detain the House with a contemporary history of that sad state. Grievances against the federal Government of the republic of India go back to the time of independence,when many Sikhs felt that Nehru and his Congress party reneged on solemn undertakings.

Since then, relations between the Sikhs of Punjab and the federal Government have been poor and there has been an escalating round of rebellion and repression. The conflict, highlighted by the sacking of the Golden temple at Amritsar, has thrown up refugees fleeing from the conflict in fear of their lives. But those represent a comparatively small number, and we must continue our tradition of granting political asylum. The Bill provides a framework within which to do so.

Race relations in this country are good. Gravesend and Northfleet contain 7,000 Sikh residents who live in the local community in peace, a condition of which I am proud. They can hold their religious processions to celebrate their Baisakhi festival without disturbances. The National Front has declined into oblivion.

However, there are immense pressures on this country from economic migrants. I believe that our tight immigration laws provide a safeguard for British residents against overpopulation, and are a major cause in avoiding racist unrest. As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said, we have only to contrast our recent experience with that of France and Germany—the French action against north African immigrants and the way that the Germans treated eastern European and third-world immigrants. The way that neo-fascist mobs smashed up hostels in Germany is a dire warning to us to heed the pressures.

Despite the political claims of Opposition Members, this is a wonderful and prosperous country in which to bring up a family. Millions of people in the less-well-off

parts of the world would migrate here on precisely those economic grounds. Given the immense pressure caused by economic migrants, it is natural that loopholes and weak points in our immigration law have been sought out. Application procedures for asylum have proved a major weak point. Only last year, some Sikh constituents came to tell me of that very problem, which shows that the Bill is somewhat overdue.

Under the guidance of paid Mr. Fixits, the political asylum applicants have begun to abuse the system on a grand scale. There have also been instances of fraudulent multiple applications. My right hon. Friend cited the case in Gravesend of 47 applications being received from just one address. The measures in the Bill will allow us to investigate the veracity of those applications.

My right hon. Friend said that, only three years ago, applications numbered 5,000 per year, of which only 25 per cent. proved genuine. Since then, applications have vastly escalated and clogged up the system, causing delays of up to two years. There are now 60,000 outstanding applications. Why? Have human rights around the world deteriorated so sharply while dictatorships have tumbled? No, it is merely that thousands of people are attempting to charge through the loophole in our immigration controls.

I know of many cases in Gravesend. People come to Britain to visit relatives, or as tourists or students, on six-month visas. At the end of that period, they suddenly receive letters from home telling them that their return would imperil their lives because of their political views, so they apply for political asylum which gives them two more years in Britain. Most of the applications are turned down, as the claimants are identified as economic migrants. However, by that time they may well have married and have British-born children.

Some 25 per cent. of applicants are identified as political refugees, and a further 60 per cent. are granted exceptional leave to remain on compassionate grounds. The remaining 15 per cent. of applicants appeal, and months, if not years, ensue. At the end of that period, the applicants succeed or are granted exceptional leave to remain on compassionate grounds. The few unsuccessful applicants frequently embark on an appeal to the European Court of Human Rights. That shows that, if skilfully handled, applications for political asylum are a one-way bet to overcome our immigration laws. Ministers are right to act on grounds of equity.

Equity must be given not only to the British people but also to those such as my Sikh constituents. We should not overlook what happens to applicants while they are waiting. Some of them occupy council housing at the expense of local people who are in housing need. Many of them take low-paid jobs in the local labouring market, thus forcing down wages at the expense of my local Sikh residents.

Mr. Corbyn: The hon. Gentleman is making a case for the minimum wage.

Mr. Arnold: Opposition Members may laugh and jeer, but labourers in the Sikh community in my constituency do not welcome cheats who force down their pay. Not only do my Sikh constituents resent such people, but such activities dent their belief in British justice and fair play. The Sikhs in Gravesend and Northfleet have accepted the need for tight immigration rules, and they resent what is, in effect, queue jumping.

The Bill deals with cheats, who cheat my constituents —native Britons and Sikhs. Screams of racism from Opposition Members show just how far they are from understanding the views of their ethnic minority communities. The Bill will speed up procedures, help the real political asylum seekers to obtain approval for their application, limit the scope for Mr. Fixits who batten expensively on human misery, and restore justice and equity. It will close a vast loophole, and it certainly has my support.

8.38 pm

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): Exactly four years ago, in November 1987, the then Home Secretary, now the Foreign Secretary, introduced an Immigration Bill saying that it was being introduced, rather like this measure, to provide better customer service. He said that the procedures under the Bill would mean that people would be able to obtain a better service from the immigration and nationality department. In exactly the same way, the Government hope that this measure will mean that applications will be dealt with swiftly and, in their words, bogus applications will be prevented.

We are dealing not with bogus asylum seekers, however, but with a bogus Home Secretary who seems to think that he is in charge of immigration policy. Judging by the way in which he presented this measure to the House, it is clear that he has no understanding of the misery and anxiety caused to hundreds of thousands of people by the operation of the Government's immigration policy. The Bill will make matters worse, not better.

As the House knows, I serve on the Home Affairs Select Committee which in 1988 published a report severely critical of the Government. The Committee discovered that there were more than 250,000 unopened letters at Lunar house in Croydon, and it described the manner in which Home Office Ministers handled the immigration and nationality department as scandalous. Certain targets were set by Ministers, targets to do with naturalisation and applications. Today, a person who applies in this country for naturalisation and who has already waited five years to make an application will have to wait a further three years for his or her application to be dealt with.

That is the problem at the heart of this legislation: the need to provide more resources. The Government's failure to provide them has meant that outstanding applications for political asylum have not been dealt with more speedily. The way to solve that problem is not to pass a measure that has been condemned by every reasonable and right-thinking group in this country. It is to pass legislation that will have a positive effect on the situation.

This legislation is wholly unnecessary. If proper resources had been deployed to deal quickly with the problems at Lunar house and with the applications for political asylum, we would not need to be debating this Bill today.

If the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) is honest, he will bear testament to the fact that, if he writes to the immigration department about a political asylum case, it will take many months for that case to be dealt with. Perhaps the Under-Secretary will tell us exactly how long it takes for a political asylum case to be dealt with. If he claims that it takes a long time because there are so many applications, that too is his fault. He is charged by Parliament with dealing with these matters, and he has

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failed, as have successive Home Secretaries in the past 12 years. They have not provided the extra staff needed at Lunar house.

This is why so many critical reports have been published by the Select Committee and why so many independent studies by organisations such as the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants have condemned the Government's management of the service. The customer service provided by the Home Office in respect of applications for immigration or political asylum is the worst provided by any Government Department. If we applied the Prime Minister's citizens charter to the way in which the immigration service operates in Lunar House, the charter would fall to pieces.

The Home Secretary today tried to link immigration to race relations. I came to this country when I was nine years old. My family came from Aden in south Arabia, although we were of Indian origin. My parents chose to come here because they believed that this was a stable country and because they wanted the best possible education for their children. They exercised the rights to which they were then entitled to bring us to this country.

When we left Aden, people were being blown up in cars and in the buildings in which we lived and visited people. The situation was dreadful. So we arrived and settled in this country. In 1968, Enoch Powell made his speech predicting that rivers of blood would flow through the cities of Leicester, Bradford, Manchester and London by 1990-91. But the fact that we have had good order in our inner cities has been due to the good work done by members of both communities in those cities. It has nothing to do with the Government's immigration policy.

Race relations are in no way linked to the Immigration Act 1971 or the British Nationality Act 1981 or the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987—or this measure. Relations are good because people of good will have decided together that there should be no disorder, and Powell's prophecy has been shown to be hopelessly wrong.

Those who try to play on the prejudices and fears of people of any colour will be rightly condemned by all right-thinking people. If the Government believe that passing this legislation will in some way help race relations in this country, they are hopelessly wrong.

I do not believe that the amount of money spent on legal aid—we heard earlier that it is about £2·6 million —is a great deal. I should like to examine the way in which legal aid is dispensed among the agencies that perform immigration work. If there are solicitors who take green form and legal aid work but who do not do a proper job, they should be rooted out. I am prepared to look carefully at the arrangements in our cities: they should suit local needs.

There may be a strong case for providing an even bigger grant for UKIAS, which is already stretched—not as a means of taking legal aid from other organisations but as a way to give the service more money with which to set up branches in different parts of the country. I know that the citizens of Leicester would welcome the establishment of a UKIAS branch there, because they know it is a good organisation. It does good work, but it does not want to take all the money provided by the Government if that means that other agencies that have built up expertise in immigration legislation will suffer.

I, and other hon. Members, and representatives of the carriers and one of the aircraft companies, Air India, met the Minister to discuss the results of the carriers' liability Act. The Minister was rightly condemned for failing to take the carriers' views into consideration. They told him that their check-in staff could not become immigration officers.

In the middle of the meeting, the Under-Secretary produced two identical-looking pieces of paper. One was a genuine passport, the other a forgery. He asked us to examine this example of a forgery. I ask hon. Members to imagine turning up to check in for a flight and boarding an aircraft where immigration officers check the traveller's passport against samples supplied by the Home Office. The Home Office says that it will provide more training, but the carriers want no part of that because they do not want to be immigration officers. They lack the expertise and the inclination to do that work.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Will the hon. Gentleman go on to recount what else happened at that meeting? I made it perfectly clear that only forgeries that could be identified by a reasonably competent member of an airline's staff would give rise to fines. If there was disagreement, the airline would be expected to appeal to the Home Office, which would adjudicate the matter. I invited the carriers to bring me specific cases. They may have put some in the post to me, but they have not yet arrived on my desk.

Mr. Vaz: They will supply examples for the Minister, and they will say, as I do, that he must think again about the carriers' liability Act. I also urge and beg the Government to think again about this Bill.

8.49 pm

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): I am glad to have an opportunity to speak about the Bill. Over the years I have gained considerable experience of both ends of this internationally increasing problem. Far from what has been suggested—that the problem is becoming less serious —there may be 17 million refugees worldwide, but there are up to 30 million displaced persons who are not classified as refugees. The suggestion that the problem is decreasing internationally cannot be supported.

I have been chairman for many years of the African committee of the British Refugee Council whose helpful work has been praised by the Minister. I have also travelled widely to many countries in Africa and south-east Asia with the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs. The regimes in those countries are such that they create a demand for asylum.

The majority of the people who are currently displaced are likely to be neither political refugees, as strictly defined by the 1951 convention, nor economic migrants—people who seek to move only for personal betterment—about whom there has been much debate. Many of the people are not targeted for persecution, but they have good reason to believe that they will be in danger if they remain in their countries of origin. That is far more relevant to the present international situation than a division between economic migrants and political refugees.

Anyone who has seen the camps in Mozambique, which have been mentioned in the debate, and heard about the

many millions of people who have fled from that country because of the activities of Renamo would not say that those people have fled for reasons of economic betterment. Some hon. Members spoke about bogus applications. A dispassionate analysis of the situation in Africa, which I know best, will show a clear relationship between war, civil war and breakdown of countries and regimes and the number of migrants who seek access to other countries. Some 60 per cent. of applications for asylum in this country this year were from Africa. They come from countries in Africa which I shall list in order of size. They are Zaire, Angola, Ghana, Somalia, Ethiopia, Uganda, Togo and the Sudan. For some reason or other those countries either have civil war or a totally disruptive national situation which forces people out.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): Does my hon. Friend agree that that says something about the utter incompetence of the regimes that run those countries? We are constantly being told that we have to bale them out. Is it not time that they put their house in order?

Mr. Lester: I am discussing the current situation. As some hon. Members have said, terrible regimes in Germany and many other countries have caused people to flee. The greatest problem at the moment is in Africa.

As I have said, I am chairman of the Africa committee of the British Refugee Council. I listened with interest to the speeches by the hon. Members for Tottenham (Mr. Grant) and for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey).

No one supports bogus applications, but the vast majority of applicants are well motivated and qualified. We know from the training they have received that they are anxious to get into work and not to make multiple claims. Not all of them seek permanent settlement here. I have had to deal with Uganda for many years. That country has had regimes under Amin and Obote and now that country has the Museveni Government. One sees the refugees change depending on the nature of the tribal leader and the persecution. The happiest days have occurred when there was an opportunity to go home. People returned when human rights were established and they felt safe. We must look more dispassionately at the problem rather than engage in some of the lurid language that we have heard in the debate.

During the Iraq-Iran war many of the students at Nottingham's very good university applied for exceptional leave to remain. They had worked and studied together in this country and the last thing that they wanted to do was to return home and be recruited to fight each other in a war with which they did not agree. Many of the 50,000 current applicants are in such categories.

Economic migration has been mentioned. It is likely that many of those who buy false documents can afford to do so. They are not in countries suffering from civil war and they seek economic betterment in more affluent countries. One can foresee that happening in Vietnam. As a result of the war there, Vietnamese people went to affluent countries such as Australia and places such as California. They write to people in Vietnam living in abject poverty telling of the lifestyle that they enjoy, and that is a clear incentive for people to get into a boat and seek a better life. Many of us are aware of the consequences of that, and, in spite of what the Opposition say about the return of people to Vietnam, no country is prepared to take people from Vietnam who cannot be screened as refugees. It is hard enough to get those who have been screened accepted by other countries, never mind the majority of those people.

I agree with the Home Secretary about the prospects for eastern Europe. In Russia I have heard it said that 7 million potential refugees could leave what used to be the Soviet Union—if they get the opportunity. There should be no confusion about what we seek to do. The proposed measures must be transparently fair. We all agree that we need speedier procedures, but we must recognise the nature of the trauma suffered by those who leave familiar landscapes and end up at Heathrow and Dover.

I am sorry that the Bill has given rise to such intense political differences. I had hoped that we could deal with such legislation impartially. The legislation should not be linked to nascent immigration fears, and I hope that in Committee we shall seek a wider consensus with those who have been most critical of the Bill and who have the most contact with asylum seekers.

I hope that we can solve the problem of fingerprinting. It is one thing to fingerprint people who have no evidence of their identity, but it should not apply to all people seeking asylum. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) about the need to give sympathetic advice to people who arrive in this country. Somebody should be there to guide them and prevent them from making embarrassing statements or putting a foot wrong, because such actions could be used against them.

During the debate on the Gracious Speech I spoke about this problem. I recognised that we need to expand our foreign service in the countries from which immigrants are likely to come. Those of us who know our foreign service appreciate that in almost every country it knows the problems, the dissidents and the opposition. Those of us who have travelled in eastern Europe have had meals with people who used to be dissidents but are now running their countries. For example, I remember the President of Czechoslovakia coming straight from his boilerhouse as a member of Charter 77 to have a meal with us. Our foreign service knows what is happening and can be helpful in ensuring that those who need asylum are guided.

We need to move faster than we have done. For example, the time to move on Yugoslavia was when Milosevic started his campaign of hate in 1987. It is now too late to deal with the consequences of that. I got the intimation from my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary that he agrees that we should also devote as much energy and funds to tackling the political and economic catastrophes that cause people to flee from their homes and to dealing with the imbalances in living standards from which the majority of people on this globe suffer. We should not rely on a system of control to stem the potential tide.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. The winding-up speeches are expected to start at 9.20. I hope that the three hon. Members who are seeking to catch my eye will agree to divide the time between them. That would give them about six minutes each.

8.59 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester), who made a reasonable and considered speech—one of the few such speeches from Conservative Benches. I agree that the level of abuse of the system by asylum seekers is debatable. Even the Government's figures show that those granted leave to remain and those allowed to stay because of exceptional circumstances account for nearly 90 per cent. of the applications last year. Therefore, only 10 per cent. were considered unreasonable, and that is not a large proportion.

I do not deny that there are some fraudulent applications that are without merit, and nobody will defend those who apply on bogus grounds. We all agree that, even though there is so much intimidation and fear and such wretched conditions around the world, there must be priorities to ensure that those who apply to come here do so because they are genuinely in danger.

It is worth reminding the House that we have a responsibility. Who sold these countries the weapons that they are using to tear themselves apart? Who burdened developing countries with huge and crippling debts that are causing massive economic problems and adding to the misery and difficulties that they face?

Only a tiny minority of those seeking asylum want council houses and income support. Many of those who seek asylum—I have experience of this in my constituency—do so, first, because they have a great respect for our record of caring for people in danger and seeking asylum and, more importantly, because in many cases their families are already living here. They know that jobs and accommodation can be found with their families, so they will not be a burden on the country.

The less reputable papers have been trying to blow up the problem of demands for council houses. This causes resentment because there is not enough council housing to go round. There is a deepening housing crisis and, even if not a single applicant were granted asylum, that would not detract from that crisis, which is a result of the failure of the Government's housing policy.

For genuine applicants, I am worried by the changes that the Bill will make to such factors as legal aid. For example, the proposal to abolish the green form system, which enabled those seeking legal advice to go to specialist solicitors, both locally and nationally, will make it more difficult for applicants to obtain such advice. In my area, the Humberside law centre deals with many such cases and the nearest advisory centre is that at the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service office in Leeds. I have the greatest respect for UKIAS, which does a good job and works hard. It is to its credit that it has turned down the bribes and temptation to take extra resources for becoming the sole advisory centre for asylum cases. It knows that in many cases that would cause problems for those seeking advice.

I am also concerned about the way that people arriving here with forged documents will be treated. I accept that some people try to enter the country on bogus grounds, and that unscrupulous individuals may make a living from selling forged documents and encouraging that trade. The fact remains, however, that often the only opportunity available to someone who is living in fear of persecution and wishes to leave his country is provided by the sale of such documents. A person who is in fear of his life, or who faces the threat of gaol or the persecution of his family, can hardly go down to the local consulate, or the relevant office, to obtain proper documentation. Such action would undermine his position and, indeed, put him in considerable jeopardy.

The pressure on this country may be increased, given the break-up of the system in eastern Europe and the civil unrest in such nations as Yugoslavia. Many of my constituents, however, have relatives in eastern Europe. One has a mother living in Dubrovnik, and he and his wife are very concerned about her treatment and what will happen to her. It might be impossible for her to obtain the necessary travel documents to enable her to escape from the bloodshed, the chaos and the breakdown of law and order that have been caused by the rise of extremist nationalism—which, in many countries, poses a greater threat than the communism that it has replaced.

There is no need for the Bill, and I am surprised that the Government are presenting it at this stage—although many people have their suspicions about the reason. One problem with the handling of asylum applications has been delay, but that problem could be solved if the immigration service were reorganised so that applications could be dealt with more quickly and efficiently. Dare I add that more staff should be employed?

I do not feel that legislation that could jeopardise the lives of genuine asylum seekers can make up for the incompetence, delay, underfunding and general mismanagement from which the immigration service currently suffers. It has brought many problems on its own head, and it will not be improved by such restrictive and ill-thought-out legislation.

9.7 pm

Mr. Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) for curtailing his remarks. Unfortunately, one of the problems of speaking at the end of a debate is that everyone else has already grabbed one's best lines.

I understand and approve of the principles behind the Bill. Without doubt, immigration procedures are abused, as is illustrated by a letter from a firm of letting agents in my constituency:

> "I have in mind the case of refugees in distress in search of accommodation. In this instance accommodation was provided on a short term tenancy for six months. At the end of this period the refugees no longer were interested in alternative accommodation but demanded eviction notice for the purpose of obtaining a council house on the basis of strict court procedure and its effects . . . What can be observed is that some refugees use the strict procedures for their own purpose which is an abuse of the system and the system working as a social mechanism obliges."

Is this country to accept asylum seekers at all, however? We are signatories to the 1951 United Nations convention on refugees, and we have a long and proud history of offering hospitality to those who are fleeing from persecution. The answer to my rhetorical question is yes; that being so, however, we must ensure that a proper legal framework exists to deal with such people. Nor must we assume that they are conversant with that framework. It exists to protect them, but they may not be aware of its existence. They must be made aware of it, and proper legal advice must be available to them so that they can interpret it.

Early-day motion 130, in my name and in those of other right hon. and hon. Members, is a cross-party motion

expressing considerable concern about the proposed withdrawal of legal aid for immigration and asylum advice. In the words of the Bar Council of England and Wales, in its paper, "Proposals for Asylum Seekers":

"it is essential that the advice of an independent expert solicitor should be available to those seeking asylum. Such assistance under our system of law is available to all whose means are such that they cannot afford to pay for legal services and who face serious penalties as a result of legal procedures. There can be no excuse for seeking to remove this elementary protection from this particularly vulnerable class and the Bar objects in the strongest possible terms to the arbitrary proposal which was made by the Government without any prior consultation that legal aid should be withdrawn . . . The need for legal aid is obvious and it is further a matter of regret that the Government is seeking to achieve the removal of legal aid not in the new statute itself but by way of amending regulations. It is to be hoped that this device will not preclude debate in both Houses of Parliament on this important issue."

The matter is indeed being well debated.

On fingerprinting, I fully understand the Government's intention to prevent multiple and fraudulent applications, but I have some reservations. There appear to be no safeguards in the Bill covering the following matters: first, the release of the information to third parties, possibly even Governments in the asylum seekers' own countries; and, secondly, the consent of the asylum seeker to the release of the information.

I shall go straight to the heart of the question raised by clause 5—is three days long enough to make an application for leave to appeal? Three days is a lot better than two days, but even three days is not quite long enough.

I have reservations, too, about the apparent fact that the immigration officer or the Secretary of State shall send the special adjudicator the application, together with the notes of interview, and so on, whereas the applicant has no right to send any such papers. As Amnesty International puts it:

"When determining an application for leave to appeal the Special Adjudicator will have before him or her only the Home Office's notice of refusal together with 'the notes of interview and any documents upon which reliance was placed in reaching the decision [to refuse asylum]'."

I have one or two final comments on the Home Office rules under the heading, "Consideration of Cases", whereby

"the Secretary of State will have regard to the following matters".

I shall pick out two of those matters. The first is:

"that the applicant has failed to apply forthwith upon arrival in the United Kingdom, unless the application is founded on events which have taken place since his arrival in the United Kingdom."

The asylum seeker may not be aware of the existence of what will become the Asylum Act 1992, or of the existence of the Home Office rules—or even the Home Office.

The second consideration is:

"that the applicant has failed to make a prompt or full disclosure of material factors, either orally or in writing or otherwise to assist the Secretary of State to the full in establishing the facts of the case."

The applicant may not be aware of the various processes involved in seeking asylum.

There must be guarantees of competence, independence and impartiality. Apart from those few reservations, I am delighted that the Government are committed to the convention on refugees, and I fully accept their wish to do justice to genuine asylum seekers.

9.12 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson) and to the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) for kindly curtailing their speeches to allow me to participate in the debate.

In a sense, this is a revisitation of the subject on which the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) and I sparred on 8 May when he presented his Bill on asylum seekers.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is right to resist any notion that this is a racist Bill. That accusation, made by the Labour party, reflects that party's paranoia about any discussion of asylum seekers or immigration. Such matters are important to our constituents and they should be discussed as dispassionately as possible. The Opposition do not do themselves, or the interests of rational debate, a service by calling us all names.

The United Kingdom has a record on this matter of which it is right to be proud. It is absurd of the Opposition to suggest that we have not played our part in shouldering the burden of providing refuge for those who suffer persecution in their homeland. Let us take some examples. Since the war, we have taken in many thousands of people from eastern Europe, virtually all of whom have made enormous contributions to the life of our country. I have many Poles in my constituency—as, I suspect, have many hon. Members on both sides of the House. It is right and proper that we should have taken them in. In the 1970s, we took in the Ugandan Asians. The Vietnamese boat people have been taken in. Most recently, the House resolved that 50,000 heads of household and their families should be admitted from Hong Kong. That is a very good record. Add to that the hundreds of thousands of economic migrants from the new Commonwealth and elsewhere, and I do not believe that anyone can hold a candle to our record in showing compassion and humanitarian concern for the victims of persecution.

Of course, people want to come to this country in ever-increasing numbers. We have had a splendid Conservative Government for 12 years. Every day, the United Kingdom becomes more attractive to hundreds of thousands of people who wish to make their way to these shores. How sensible of them: one cannot question their judgment. But the logic of the Labour party's position is that, if we must take in the victims of persecution, we must take them all in, and that is simply not a sensible or practical proposition. What distresses me—and, I suspect, some of my hon. Friends—is that Opposition Members do not criticise the regimes from which those people are being forced to flee. Indeed, Opposition Members nearly always request that we should grant further aid to those countries.

Labour Members and the Social Democrats refer solely to the obligations that we are said to have to migrants. There is no reference whatever in their speeches to the genuine and reasonable concerns of our fellow citizens—the electors and constituents to whom we are accountable. In my view, if ever the Labour party were returned to office, it would display the contempt for the fears of ordinary British people—including many migrants already here—that has been the hallmark of Labour Governments in the past.

I think that we all agree that good race relations depend on the tolerance of the indigenous population and on newcomers' willingness to adapt. Attempts to get us to

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change our nursery rhymes and demands that we adjust our customs are not guaranteed to help. The fact that the Commission for Racial Equality has sought legal advice on its opposition to the Bill reinforces my conviction that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has it right. I only wish that he would add another clause seeking to abolish the CRE, as such a step would be widely welcomed throughout the country.

Mr. Henry McLeish (Fife, Central): Disgraceful.

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman may think it disgraceful, but many people feel that the CRE does not help to maintain good race relations.

The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe mentioned the existing pressure on housing. I cannot understand how, having acknowledged that we have a housing problem, the hon. Gentleman can apparently be almost oblivious to the impact that the failure to tackle the problem of asylum seekers is likely to have on many communities in our country. I understand that each week something like 300 people from one country alone are admitted to certain parts of London at present. We must address the intolerable position facing housing officers when they try to house those people. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State have done well to ensure that that point is encompassed in the Bill.

The Bill is fair and reasonable. It establishes a sensible framework for speedily processing the applications of asylum seekers. It addresses a serious problem honestly and squarely and I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on introducing the Bill, notwithstanding the unwarranted accusations about his motives. He will have the support of the British people in introducing the Bill and I hope that people will have noticed that the intransigence of the Opposition means that the matter will not proceed as speedily as it should through the House.

9.19 pm

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): The hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth) is an example of the many Conservative Members who seem to derive pleasure from deliberately confusing asylum with the more general issue of immigration. The House will have noted that the Home Secretary appeared to derive an unsavoury relish when he cited examples of what he referred to as bogus asylum applications. He appeared to derive pleasure from raising the spectre of millions of people threatening to come to this country. He did that tonight; he did it in his statement to the House on 2 July; and he did it when he spoke to the Tory party conference a few weeks ago.

All that is unfortunate because there are serious issues which must be addressed rationally. There is no doubt that the number of people seeking asylum in this country is rising. It is running at about 3,000 to 4,000 a month. There is no doubt that the number is likely to increase and that the existing system cannot cope. There is already a backlog of 60,000 applicants. The reasons for that are obvious. There continue to be civil wars and starvation in many parts of the world and that means that it is inevitable that people will try to move to countries where they might better their lot. Among those people seeking to improve their economic, social and political circumstances, there are some people who are entitled to asylum.

Nothing in the Bill will stop the increase in applications. That should be made clear to those Conservative Members who spoke earlier this evening, but are no longer in the Chamber. We can do nothing about the increase in the number of applications. Instead, we should consider how we deal with those applications. Nothing in the Bill will stop the pressure to migrate from former USSR and eastern bloc countries, although we should get that into perspective. I believe that 175 applications have been received from the USSR this year. Although for the most part that pressure will be felt by Germany, France and Italy, that is clearly a problem for the European Community as a whole. That pressure will be resolved only by economic assistance to eastern Europe, to the former Soviet Union and to other parts of the world.

Reference has been made to the rise in racism, particularly on the continent. We should not pander to that racism. We should condemn it and remember that immigration is not the cause of racism. Immigration is simply an excuse for racism. If there was no immigration, those who propagate racist sentiments would find something else.

It is common ground that asylum claims take far too long to determine and in some cases that undoubtedly helps people who want to abuse the system. I agree that the procedures could be streamlined provided that there are safeguards. However, instead of that, the Government are proposing to remove some of the present safeguards.

It is also common ground between us that among those who apply for asylum are many who are not entitled to it, in some cases, despite their circumstances. The Home Secretary referred to the question of bogus refugees and no doubt the Under-Secretary of State will refer to it when he replies to the debate. It was referred to in the Home Office press notice issued last week which stated:

> "The myth is: most asylum claims are genuine, because nine out of ten are allowed to stay. The fact is: only a quarter are genuine refugees."

How on earth can the Department say that, because more than 90 per cent. of the people who apply for asylum receive asylum or exceptional leave to remain? Or are the Government saying that those who have exceptional leave to remain should not have received it? If that is so, why did they grant it in the first place?

What is a bogus refugee? Is it someone who has applied and been rejected? That is an important point, because the Government seem to suggest that, by definition, if one does not receive asylum, one must be bogus. I should have thought that a bogus refugee or a bogus asylum seeker is someone who knew all along that he had no chance and that his application was ill-founded. That does not seem to include the classification of people who were referred to by the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester), who are probably not asylum seekers in the proper sense of the word, but, because of the difficult circumstances in their country, it makes it difficult to return them. Indeed, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State said as much on "Panorama" a couple of weeks ago when we both appeared on it. He must accept that, although many people do not obtain asylum, it would be wrong to characterise them as bogus. The term "bogus refugee" is

referred to time and again by Ministers to justify what they are proposing tonight and to encourage and cheer the crowds at the Tory party conference.

The question is, what system do we put in place to ensure that claims for asylum are properly dealt with in accordance with our international obligations? Such a system is possible, but the Government have not proposed it. Under the Government's proposals, there is a substantial risk that individuals will be returned to torture, or even death in some cases, because the Government's approach is simple and cynical—it is to make it more difficult to apply for asylum and far easier to reject claims without full and proper consideration.

The Home Secretary has repeated time and again that there is a new right of appeal before removal for all applicants refused asylum. He said that in his press release, he said it today, and he has said it on many occasions. That statement is simply not true. On 2 July, when the Home Secretary made his statement to the House heralding the Bill, he said that there would be a new fast-track system. We understood that it would apply only to some asylum seekers. It appears from the Bill that it applies to every asylum seeker, because all appeals would be handled in the same way.

At the moment, applicants for asylum in the United Kingdom have a right to appeal. Now no one will have a right to appeal. Instead, all applicants will have only the right to apply for leave to appeal, which is quite a different matter.

Under clause 4, if people appeal they risk losing their existing rights of limited stay under the Immigration Act. That is clearly a disincentive to apply. For example, I refer to students from Croatia who are currently in this country on study visas. They would have to weigh in the balance whether to apply for asylum—if they believe that, if they return to Yugoslavia or Croatia, they will have a genuine fear of persecution—in the certain knowledge that, if they lose that claim for asylum, they will lose also their right to remain in this country because of the way in which the Bill is phrased.

Applicants have two days to lodge an application for leave to appeal. That time limit expires on the day after posting. Knowing the postal service in some areas, that should certainly dispose of several claims without any examination.

In addition, the special adjudicator will have only the material that the Home Office wishes the special adjudicator to have. The initial interview that the asylum seeker gives is absolutely crucial. Those are the facts on which the adjudicator will base his decision, yet asylum seekers will not know what is in the initial statement because they will not have an opportunity to see what is being said about them. Immediately, the asylum seeker is at a disadvantage. He will not know what the case is against him—rather like the people who were detained by this country during the Gulf war. In addition to that, under schedule 2, the adjudicator must determine all other claims in respect of immigration matters that may be outstanding.

What does the adjudicator have to consider? That point is important in the light of what the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State attempted to establish in interventions during the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley). The adjudicator has to establish whether the applicant has an "arguable claim" before he decides whether the applicant will have leave to appeal. In deciding whether he has an "arguable claim", he has to look at everything that the Home Secretary is entitled to consider before deciding whether someone should be granted asylum. It is no use the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State shaking his head. That is what the Bill says. Therefore, in deciding whether there is an arguable claim, the special adjudicator has to look at the criteria set out in the draft immigration rules. He has to see whether the applicant failed to apply forthwith upon his arrival in the United Kingdom.

As the hon. Member for Broxtowe said, there may be many reasons why the full facts were not disclosed. The applicant may have left a difficult situation. He may well be in a state of shock and there may be other good reaons why he did not place his full story before the immigration officer at his interview at Heathrow, Dover or any other port of entry.

An applicant could also be faulted on the ground that he or she failed to make a prompt and full disclosure of the material factors, but who is to judge what those material factors are? Even after that interview, the asylum seeker has no right to know what material factors the immigration officer considered important. This is where the relevance of obtaining proper legal advice from the start becomes important. If an individual has not been properly advised, he or she is in no position to judge what is a material factor that should be disclosed.

Similarly, if an applicant has destroyed, damaged or disposed of his passport or other documents, that will be held against him. What would the Government have said to a Jewish refugee fleeing from Nazi Germany who arrived in this country with forged documents? According to the Bill, that person should have had proper documents in the first place and, if approached by an SS officer, should have said, "Yes, I am fleeing from Nazi Germany." Clearly, that is nonsense. As some Conservative Members have said to their credit, many genuine asylum seekers coming to this country have had to destroy their documents to escape persecution.

The issue of whether, after lodging his claim, an applicant has undertaken activities in this country that are calculated to enhance his claim would also be considered. Again, who is to judge whether those activities were calculated to enhance the claim? Similarly, who is to judge whether the applicant could have moved to a safer area of his own country? Are we suggesting that someone who claims that he was persecuted in the northern part of Sri Lanka could have moved to the southern part? How can the immigration officer judge that? Immigration officers are not qualified to do so and do not have intimate knowledge of each and every country that produces asylum seekers.

Under the Bill, the scope for making mistakes—no matter how innocent—is widespread. It would be far better if the asylum seeker could be properly advised and knew exactly what was being said about him and what information was being given to the special adjudicator. That would help to ensure that we do not risk returning somebody to a country without a proper examination of his or her case.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook has said, some of our greatest concern centres on the fact that the actions of other people, whether acting on behalf of the asylum seeker or not, will be taken into account when assessing the applicant's credibility. I hope that the

[Mr. Alistair Darling]

Minister will tell us what other branch of the law contains that feature. Under the law of this country, it is usually accepted that we are held responsible for the consequences of our own actions. It is completely novel to say that someone should be convicted or blamed for something that has been done by somebody else, even if that action is not supposed to be on the other person's behalf. That proposal is particularly objectionable and should be removed.

When we consider the position of the asylum seeker, it is essential that we realise that, unless he knows exactly what has been said against him and makes representations accordingly, he will be at a great disadvantage. He cannot make representations in the dark. He must be told what has been said against him, so that his case can be fairly and properly put. At the very least, an applicant should see the case against him. Better still, he should be allowed representation so that his case can be properly and rigorously examined. That would also serve to improve the quality of the administration and decision-making from the start.

he asylum seeker's difficulties start before the appeal stage has even been reached. We have talked much about the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987 and will be talking more about it in Committee when we debate increasing the fines. However, several points must be repeated now. First, the Act has not worked. More people are entering this country and having fines levied against them now than when the Act was introduced. If it was meant to act as a disincentive, it has not worked. It is a sledgehammer which has hurt innocent airlines. Fines have been imposed on people who were never intended to be the subject of such fines. I do not believe that the Government ever intended to penalise the airlines for bringing business men into this country whose passports expired just a week or two earlier, but that is what is happening. British Airways, a reputable airline and one of the world leaders, has been fined £6 million. Was that the Government's intention when they introduced the legislation? Fines amounting to over £33 million have been imposed since the Act was passed. It is not even an efficient system, because £16 million is uncollected. The legislation has not worked.

The Act discriminates against the genuine asylum seeker. Such an asylum seeker cannot obtain a visa for asylum. He certainly cannot go to the British embassy and throw himself on the mercy of its officials in the country in which he fears persecution.

Both Opposition and Conservative Members have said tonight that airline staff have in effect been made into immigration officers. They may be qualified to say whether someone has a valid ticket, but in most cases they are not qualified to judge whether the visa is correct or the passport is a valid document. The Government ought to reconsider the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987. Of course, we all want to stop people who should not be carried into this country, but the Act simply does not work.

The Government should consider the commercial implications for Heathrow of clause 7. If we want to encourage growth in the number of passengers passing through Heathrow, is it wise to require transit passengers, who do not want to enter Britain, to have a visa? Surely, if we want to build up Heathrow, that clause should be reconsidered. I should be interested to hear what the Department of Transport has to say about the matter, if, indeed, it is still in the business of promoting Heathrow.

Mr. John Carlisle: The hon. Gentleman's thesis that airlines should be allowed to build up their passenger numbers regardless of where people come from is interesting. If the Labour party were returned to power, would it repeal the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987? Would a Labour Government not impose any fines on airlines that brought in intending illegal immigrants?

Mr. Darling: The Act is in great need of overhaul because it is not working. I repeat that it seems ridiculous to discourage airlines from bringing people to Heathrow with a view to taking them elsewhere in Europe or the world. That would be the result of clause 7.

The proposal to withdraw legal aid and make UKIAS the sole provider of legal advice and assistance seems to fly in the face of the Government's philosophy. They tell us that they believe in freedom of choice. Yet they will deny people the right to choose what representation they have. As my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) said, that applies to not only asylum seekers but those who seek advice on immigration matters.

The Government tell us that the private sector is efficient, yet they seek to remove the possibility of solicitors and counsel providing advice under the legal aid advice scheme. No saving is gained for the Treasury. It is clear from its letter to the Minister that UKIAS does not believe that it could provide the service that is currently provided. It is regrettable that the Under-Secretary of State saw fit to write to UKIAS threatening it that unless it accepted the Government's proposals there would be a question mark over the funding that it already receives.

The Government must answer the point raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook. He said that the Commission for Racial Equality has written to the Government saying that there was a question mark over the proposal to withdraw legal aid in view of the Government's obligations under the Race Relations Act 1976.

On clause 3 and the proposals on housing, I shall content myself by saying that it is not enough simply to make it more difficult for asylum seekers to be housed. If we grant people leave to remain in Britain, they have to be housed somewhere. We should tackle that problem. The root cause of the problem, the resentment and the problems referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) is that there is not enough public low-cost housing. That problem was caused by deliberate Government policy throughout the term of their office. It is a major problem for the London boroughs in terms of both housing and education. The Government should consider the problem rather than simply making it more difficult for these people to be housed.

The hon. Member for Broxtowe made a good suggestion about fingerprinting. Where there is suspicion perhaps the proposal ought to be considered. As I understand it, only applicants from one or two countries are giving rise to a problem; it is not universal. Safeguards must be in place to ensure that the system is not abused and that the countries that people are fleeing from are not given information which would make their persecution more likely.

I draw the attention of the House to the fact that, following the detention of various Iraqi nationals during the Gulf war, I discovered that the names of all the detainees were passed to the Red Cross and thence to the Iraqi authorities, who now have a list of everyone that we detained who chose not to go back to Iraq. Clearly that puts them in great difficulties. The Government should think hard before they allow the development of a system whereby countries that we all accept have brutal regimes have a list of their nationals who chose not to return to the country because of the nature of the regime.

There is no dispute about the fact that there is a problem and that it needs to be dealt with. The dispute between us concerns the proposed solution, which we do not believe will be effective, workable or fair. The Government's position is simple and cynical and is designed to exclude as many as possible at the earliest opportunity. It is contrary to the United Nations convention. There is risk that genuine asylum seekers will be bundled out of the country to face torture or death. We cannot turn our backs on what is undoubtedly a serious and growing problem. The Government have failed to do it and are apparently content to wallow in rhetoric. That is regrettable and that is why we shall be voting for our amendment and opposing the Bill.

9.41 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Peter Lloyd): The debate on a range of issues that lie behind the Bill has been full, at times passionate and occasionally acrimonious. As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said in his opening speech, asylum is a complex subject. The pressures that induce people to leave their country and seek it are varied. The motives for choosing a particular country—often on the other side of the world—in which to claim asylum are mixed.

In answer to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling), I do not believe that the motives of the majority of those who claim asylum are reprehensible. However, the claims of the majority of those seeking asylum here during the past few years—and of the cases that we have determined—were unfounded in United Nations convention terms. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central and a number of other hon. Members asked me why so many have had exceptional leave to remain, as only 24 per cent. of the cases in the past few years have been found to be genuine asylum seekers in United Nations terms. The fact is that we give exceptional leave to remain because it would be inhumane to send some people, such as the Croatian that the hon. Member mentioned, back to their country at this time, even though they may not have made a claim of persecution. In some cases, because of our long waiting list, people have been here too long—they have married, put down roots and have children in school—and it would be unreasonable to send them back. I am afraid that I have to confess that we allow a substantial number of people to remain simply because we have not had the staff to pursue their claims to remain through the various hoops available to them.

Mr. Darling: The Government had an open door policy, then?

Mr. Lloyd: It may well be the case that we should have had more staff but I willingly accept that the tenfold increase in the number arriving has overwhelmed our resources. I do not think that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central, his hon. Friends or the majority of my hon. Friends would say that the Government were wrong, rather than giving no status to people who have been in this country for a number of years, to have given them exceptional leave to remain. That is how that category is made up. They are not genuine asylum seekers, but a variety of different people with a variety of claims to be here and reasons why they are.

Mr. Darling: The Minister has made exactly the point that I was making—that, in effect, a tiny minority has claims that are unfounded and without merit. He rightly said that we grant exceptional leave to remain to a number of people if it would be unjust to return them, perhaps to a civil war or something like that. As I understand it, the Home Secretary has said that he means to cut down on exceptional need to remain. What will we do when someone misses out on asylum but clearly has a case, albeit one that falls short of asylum, which is not bogus?

Mr. Lloyd: Each case is considered on its merits. There are at least two categories. With the speedier decision-making that the extra staff make possible, in which the Bill assists, people will be able to have no said to them very properly.

Beyond all the rarefied discussion of these fundamental forces, beyond the political point scoring and the political footballs, many of which have been kicked around this evening, there remains the overwhelming problem of coping humanely and fairly with the constant flow of individual human beings—now 50,000 a year, which is 10 times more than three years ago. No responsible Government could ignore that growth. No responsible Opposition could, either—yet I have heard few thoughts from them tonight about how to deal with that effectively.

We cannot ignore that growth, if only because the machinery and procedures adequate to manage 5,000 are entirely inappropriate for 50,000 and more. Despite the hard words exchanged across the Chamber from time to time this evening, it is plain that there is complete agreement on both sides of the House that those who arrive here with a well-founded fear of persecution should find a safe haven. On this side of the House and, I suspect, on many parts of the Opposition Benches there is equal recognition, although unspoken, that those who do not have such a well-founded fear, some other compelling compassionate reason which justifies their remaining or another legitimate claim to stay, should return to their country.

If an asylum claim that is not justified under the United Nations convention is to be the means of obtaining settlement in the United Kingdom, we need at the very least to explain, particularly to the minority communities legitimately settled here, why their friends and relatives who would like to come and join them are not allowed to do so because they told the truth when they made their applications, whereas others who are prepared to make an unfounded asylum claim can remain indefinitely. There is no justice in that.

I listened to the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) and it was plain that he did not understand the Bill. I had no idea whether he saw the

[Mr. Lloyd]

tenfold rise in numbers applying as a problem to be addressed and, if so, how he would deal with it. His was an exercise in misinformation and complacency.

The Bill and the rules that will accompany it are essentially practical. They aim to establish a working system that can cope with arrivals on the present scale. We need to be able to identify and give asylum promptly to those with genuine claims. It is plainly unfair if they are obliged, as at present, to live in uncertainty for many months or years. We need to be able to determine accurately and fairly those with unfounded claims. Unless there is a special compassionate feature, such as the one given by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central, we need to return them home before they have begun to establish themselves here, making their eventual removal more difficult for us and even more unwelcome for them.

There is no serious dissent from the general proposition that we should have a system which combines a thorough examination of all individual claims, a clear exposition of the criteria against which they are being assessed, all proper speed and then a clear decision, whether positive or negative, and an effective right of appeal before removal for those whose claims have been rejected. Obviously, there is room for debate about the means of achieving those objectives and how accommodating our criteria should be.

Because we want the debate to be a real one, we published with the Bill the draft immigration rules which will follow its successful passage, so those rules can be discussed at the same time as the Bill and, if and where necessary, improved. We have also published for consultation the draft asylum appeals procedure rules. The Lord Chancellor has made it clear on the front of that document that they have been issued before being finalised so as to facilitate discussion. I want to dwell upon the draft immigration rules because most hon. Members have mentioned them.

The draft rules make explicit the clear exposition of the criteria against which cases are assessed. These relate to matters of credibility. A case that is considered thoroughly is looked at in the round and all the relevant factors are taken into proper consideration. When it comes to deciding what affects credibility, the operative word is "may". If an applicant has a good explanation for his claim it may, far from harming him, enhance his credibility. There may be occasions when it is quite right or entirely understandable that an asylum applicant did not make his claim until he had been here for some time. For others, however, it will be plain that they made their asylum claim to extend their stay here only when they had failed to prolong it by other means.

I understand why hon. Members paused for thought when they first read the draft immigration rule relating to a person arriving with no papers. There could be a totally innocent reason why someone arrived with no documents. When papers are destroyed deliberately, however, as they are in half of the cases of those claiming asylum at the ports, apparently to conceal the identification of the claimants and where they come from, that must adversely affect their credibility—unless they have a convincing explanation. It will affect their credibility not least because the United Nations enjoins asylum seekers to help the authorities by providing all the relevant information to assist in establishing their claim.

Mr. Darling: What is the objection to showing the asylum seeker the completed initial statement and the reasons for the refusal? At least he could then see what was said against him and, if necessary, make representations about that.

Mr. Lloyd: There is no objection, and that is exactly what we are doing. On refusal, the failed applicant will be given the reasons why and receive a copy of the papers that will go to the adjudicator. What the hon. Gentleman wants, he will get. Not everything is set down in the rules, but it is the practice to provide those papers. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members seem to be disappointed.

Mr. Darling: The Minister is a reasonable man and he has shown even more reasonableness than I had expected. If he is now giving us a commitment that the reasons for a refusal will be made available to the applicant, that is welcome. I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman will confirm that that is the Government's intention.

Mr. Lloyd: It is our practice and also our intention.

Another rule that worried people on first reading, and I can understand why, is the rule relating to political activity in this country. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has already dealt with that issue. I accept that political activity in this country could undermine credibility, but it might just confirm credibility. Given that the rule has caused so much concern, I will repeat our case. The operative word is "may". Political activity here would undermine the credibility of a claimant only if it was designed merely to enhance a claim or to construct one that did not exist. Those who have genuinely fled from persecution and who carry on normal, non-violent political activity and demonstration here have nothing to fear.

Paragraph 7 of the draft immigration rules relates to untruths by agents. That, too, has been raised many times tonight. Unless an applicant has a satisfactory explanation, his credibility will be reduced if untrue claims are made on his behalf by his agent or representative. That is the position now. Staff at the Home Office who give fair and full interviews to applicants must look at all matters which reflect on the claim being made and on the credibility of the individual. The only difference is that we are setting that fact out clearly in the rules so that people know.

Paragraph 8, which enables some applications to be considered in a group, was raised by several hon. Members, particularly the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan). Cases will almost always be considered individually. Paragraph 8 provides that, when an applicant is part of a group of individuals all making the same claim which is clearly unconnected with United Nations convention criteria, the group may be refused collectively. It deals with the occasional situation when a holiday party arrives on a charter flight and claims asylum en bloc. The rules make it clear that an individual who can show that his or her claim is distinguishable from the rest of the group must have it heard and he or she will be treated individually.

The procedure rules were also raised by many hon. Members on both sides of the House. The major purpose of the Bill is to extend appeal rights to all asylum seekers. There was no such universal right when the Labour party was in office. The Bill provides for the right to apply to and have papers considered by the adjudicator. If there are arguable points, the rules are clear. The case must be considered orally. I have no doubt that most cases will be considered in that way, because the threshold is very low —lower for leave to appeal than in most other parts of our judicial system such as the criminal courts. I doubt whether the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook would say that there is no right of appeal in criminal cases. Yet the Bill is on all fours with that—indeed, it is rather more liberal.

Nevertheless, there must be a filter, as there is in the criminal courts, to ensure that the appellate system is not overloaded by those who enter Britain from a third safe country to which they can return if they manifestly have no claim to asylum here. For example, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary mentioned a Ugandan who came here from Italy, where he had spent four years. Another example was a member of the governing party in his own country who fled here for asylum, saying that his colleagues were rude and inconsiderate. I understand why he chose this country, where the governing party is never rude, even when provoked, and unfailingly considerate.

Mr. Vaz: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Lloyd: No. I shall not be able to complete my remarks anyway.

The Bar Council believes that there must be a fast track. I was interested to see its views. The UNHCR director for international protection, quoted by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, said in May this year that in western Europe unfounded cases clog the system. Nevertheless, we are prepared to examine the arrangements in Committee with an open mind.

Mr. Vaz: Whose open mind?

Mr. Lloyd: Mine—I doubt whether there are too many among Opposition Members.

The draft rules for the asylum appeals procedure were issued unfinished so as to aid discussion. One element has caused a great deal of discussion—the two days allowed for an applicant who has been turned down to notify the adjudicator of his wish to appeal and to present the kernel of his or her case. I am sure that many cases will be able to keep to that timetable, but I see difficulties in many others. We shall be particularly interested to hear the views of Committee Members and organisations about what that time allowance should be. The Government want to avoid unnecessary delay, but it is equally their objective that every case with a serious argument for consideration should be heard orally and fully. We are emphatically not introducing an appeal system in order to truncate or bypass it.

Many hon. Members, notably the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), mentioned the availability of green form legal aid for advice, and the proposal to end it in immigration cases. We certainly do not intend to make any change that denies any asylum seeker or immigration applicant full, professional and convenient advice.

I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 234, Noes 312.

Division No. 7] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carr, Michael
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Edwards, Huw
Enright, D. A.
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kumar, A.
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert

McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, R.
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert N. Wareing and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambaSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrea, Rev William
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Moss, Malcolm
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*

Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 60 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading):—

The House divided: Ayes 311, Noes 233.

Division No. 8] **[10.14 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrea, Rev William
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Moss, Malcolm
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony

Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Edwards, Huw
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kumar Ashok
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Neillist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'da E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen Nichol

Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ken Eastham and
Mr. Robert N. Wareing.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 42 (Committal of Bills).

ASYLUM BILL *[Money]*

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Asylum Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenditure of the Secretary of State which is attributable to provisions about the fingerprinting of persons who have made a claim for asylum, and

(b) any increase in the sums payable out of such money under the Immigration Act 1971 which is attributable to provisions about appeals to special immigration adjudicators, and

(2) the payment of sums into the Consolidated Fund.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

Social Security (Adjudication)

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The regulations have not been subject to a report by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, but we have printed a memorandum about the statutory instrument that we received from the Department, and made copies of it available. We thought it right to publish the memorandum to help the House understand the background to the instrument. In terms of the powers of the Minister, it is quite within order, but we thought that as the background was unusual we should publish the memorandum. Unfortunately, because, in this case, we are talking about not a prayer—because of the time expiry—but simply a revocation resolution, the usual notification is not given on the Order Paper. That is why I have raised the matter on a point of order.

Mr. Speaker: It is a prayer, but I thank the Chairman of the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments for his courtesy in giving us that information, which I am sure will be much appreciated by the House.

10.29 pm

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Social Security (Adjudication) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 1950), dated 30th August 1991, a copy of which was laid before this House on 30th August, in the last Session of Parliament, be annulled.

The regulations against which the Opposition are praying concern backdated entitlement to benefit where there has been official Department of Social Security error or where relevant evidence was not known at the time of the original DSS decision.

The regulations represent the Government's second attempt to amend the regulation that previously applied in such cases—regulation 72, introduced in April 1987. The Government first attempted to exclude altogether supplementary benefit and national assistance from the scope of regulation 72. By the same token, back payments of income support were to be limited only to a three-year period starting in April 1988.

In other words, the effect would have been that, even where official DSS error was proven and admitted in the case of those receiving supplementary benefit prior to 1988, no back payment to rectify the error would have been made. So, whatever else followed in the wretched little saga that I am about to describe, it is crystal clear that, right from the outset, the real object behind the Government's manoeuvrings was the cutting back—indeed, the large-scale elimination—of people's entitlement to back payments of benefits where there had been official error.

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Nicholas Scott): You are wrong.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Miss Ann Widdecombe): You are wrong.

Mr. Meacher: It is perfectly clear. I am talking about the first attempt to amend regulation 72 to exclude supplementary benefit and national assistance from the scope of that regulation. If one cuts through all the technicalities and complexities of the document, which has actually gone to the Social Security Advisory Committee, it is perfectly clear that that was the core intention behind the Government's move.

That first Government attempt to amend regulation 72 provoked universal and vociferous opposition from all the bodies from which the SSAC sought evidence and, indeed, from the committee itself. As a result, the Government backed off, and the new regulation, which should never have been proposed in the first place, was ignominiously withdrawn. However, the Secretary of State then came forward, in August, with a second, revised regulation, which dropped the exclusion of supplementary benefit and national assistance and sought instead to lay down a more restrictive set of conditions for back payments.

The reasons why the right hon. Gentleman took that action are set out in his letter to me of 14 October.

"Increasingly . . . the Regulation was being interpreted in a way which was much wider than intended with applications for review becoming ever more speculative. As a result in some areas the ability of local officers to deal with other customers was being affected by the number of review applications."

I want to deal with each of those two arguments—and, indeed, with the others that have been advanced by the DSS in support of the present regulations. First, the Secretary of State clearly blames welfare rights advisers for manipulating the regulations and for making speculative claims. The answer to that argument is very simple: manipulation is impossible in a system that requires an adjudicating officer, a social security appeal tribunal or a commissioner to be convinced that the law has been complied with. The Social Security Advisory Committee put it more tersely:

"Cases which have no merit ought to be rejected by the present wording of regulation 72. To the extent that they are not, this is a matter for adjudication and not an amendment to the regulations."

That disposes of the Secretary of State's first argument.

In his letter to me of 14 October, the Secretary of State said that the number of review applications would

"have seriously impaired the ability of the Agency to deliver a proper service."

I can inform the Secretary of State straight away that there is a much more immediate cause seriously impairing

"the ability of the Agency to deliver a proper service"

and that is the swingeing cuts in staff numbers of up to one third in each local office that the Secretary of State has carried through in the past two years under the operational strategy. Again, the Secretary of State's specious point is answered point by point by the Social Security Advisory Committee which stated:

"The number of applications for review, while it creates additional work for local offices, may simply be a measure of use rather than manipulation of the provision. If such reviews succeed on their merits, this is surely a demonstration of the extent of past missed entitlement. If they succeed without merit, the fault would appear to lie with the way the appeal system is operating rather than in regulation 72 as it is currently worded."

I could not have put it better myself. So much for the Secretary of State's second argument. That is checkmate for his argument.

The Department of Social Security has also offered arguments with which I will now briefly deal. The DSS note states:

"There is also the practical problem that the routine destruction of case papers means that evidence no longer exists in many cases."

However, the Department supports the right to seek a late appeal being kept open. If enough evidence and expertise

exists to deal with a late appeal, there must be enough evidence and expertise to deal with a review under regulation 72. There is nothing in that argument either.

The DSS then states:

"Moreover, as supplementary benefit was replaced by income support from April 1988, local offices are becoming less likely to possess the expertise to handle supplementary benefit and national assistance matters."

That is a rum excuse. The DSS has been arguing successfully for years that if a claimant was ignorant of his entitlement, that did not justify his failure to claim or justify his having a back payment. If that is so, then by the same reason, if a DSS officer is ignorant of the past benefit system, that does not justify his preventing a person from obtaining retrospective entitlement to benefit.

The only other argument that I have been able to find in support of tonight's regulations is where the DSS states that the use of regulation 72 puts

"an over-emphasis on the Department's welfare role and overlooks the fact that persons acting for the claimant could have made inquiries on the claimant's behalf."

The Secretary of State and his Ministers do not like to be reminded that they have a welfare role, but I must stress that the back payment of entitlement at issue tonight occurs under the National Insurance Act 1946, a Social Security Act and the Supplementary Benefits Act 1976 which all state that DSS officers shall:

"exercise their functions in such a manner as shall best promote the welfare of persons affected by the exercise of these functions."

Mr. Scott *indicated assent.*

Mr. Meacher: If the right hon. Gentleman agrees with that, he should be ashamed at the way in which the Department is now trying to wriggle out of having a welfare role. The majority of people who had benefited by the use of regulation 72 have suffered some kind of physical and/or mental disability. How can the limiting of regulation 72 be justified by a Department which has the declared aim of targeting benefits where they are most needed? It obviously cannot be justified. It is clear from the right hon. Gentleman's first attempt to amend regulation 72 that the Government's motive is to save money and administration—the motive is so absolutely blatant that I am amazed that even the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, whose eccentricities are well known, could not deny the obvious—while, at the same time, blocking or restricting back payments of entitlement, even where there has been official error.

Furthermore, the indecent haste with which regulation 64A was brought forward in the recess, and then—it must be unprecedented—replaced by another identical regulation 64A, designed to come into operation immediately the next day, in the middle of the 21-day period that a regulation is supposed to lie on the Table before being implemented shows not only the willingness but the eagerness of Ministers to block or restrict those entitlements.

It is sickening that the Government would never dare to treat taxpayers in that way over their entitlements to past reliefs or past allowances. Such treatment is reserved by this Government only for those who are some of the most vulnerable in our society. These are mean, niggardly and unnecessary regulations, and I call on all hon. Members who have any decency in them to throw them out.

10.41 pm

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Nicholas Scott): I was going to say that I was grateful to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) for raising this issue, because I agree with him that it needs to be properly debated on the Floor of the House. However, when I heard his speech, I was very grateful to him for having raised the issue in such a way. It gives me the opportunity to explain in proper terms why the Government took that step and to give the lie to many of the hon. Gentleman's arguments.

There has been much misunderstanding, and the hon. Gentleman has done his best to manipulate that misunderstanding. *[Interruption.]* He has, because he has totally misunderstood. If he has not misunderstood, he has deliberately manipulated the reasons why the Government introduced regulation 72.

The hon. Gentleman will know, or at least his advisers will know, that regulation 72 was originally introduced in April 1987 to provide for the unlimited payment of arrears of benefits in cases where an error in the determination of entitlement to benefit had been made by an official of the Department. All hon. Members understand why that was a perfectly proper arrangement. Until that time, the only statutory means by which payments of arrears in excess of the then statutory limit of 12 months could be made was by means of a late appeal to the social security appeal. Hon. Members know that that was a cumbersome and difficult procedure.

The annual report of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration criticised the system whereby claimants had to go through a cumbersome late appeals procedure to obtain the full arrears benefit to which they were rightfully entitled where those exceeded the statutory 12-month limit. When giving evidence to the PCA, the then permanent secretary to the Department agreed that that situation could not be defended, so we decided to put it right.

Our original intention in enacting regulation 72 was to facilitate the unlimited payment of arrears of benefits in cases of clear official—*[Interruption.]* I hope that the hon. Member for Oldham, West will listen to this because his total distortion of the case——

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Scott: Of course I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Dr. Godman: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way with his characteristic courtesy. If we can put all this point-scoring to one side, I should like to ask him a question concerning several thousand of my constituents. I think that I am right in saying that regulation 3 provides that the changes will not affect pending applications for review. Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the deal relating to the collation of the applications, which was struck in all good faith between the social work department of Strathclyde regional council and the DSS there, still holds? Will those applications, which total 4,500 from my constituency alone, be assessed fairly and reasonably by the DSS in Strathclyde and will he assure me that there will not be the delays that characterised the applications for disability benefit vis-a-vis vibration white finger and beat knee claims?

Mr. Scott: I think that the hon. Gentleman and I know each other well enough to understand these matters. Those decisions will not be held back. They will be decided perfectly properly on the basis that the claims have been made. There may be some delays, because we have to process them according to the normal procedures, but there will not be any undue delays. All the claims from Strathclyde and other offices will be properly decided according to the previous arrangements. I hope that that satisfies the hon. Gentleman. If it does not, perhaps he will come back to me on it.

Let me try to explain to the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West that we were faced with an undoubted campaign to swamp the arrangements for deciding such cases. Many genuine cases would have been put aside, delayed and not arranged in time—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Oldham, West would like to challenge me on that——

Mr. Meacher: I am very glad to challenge the right hon. Gentleman. That is an absurd claim when, irrespective of the regulation that we are discussing, there are regular delays of between two and four hours for routine applications to social security offices. Often benefit is not paid for weeks on end, so to claim that the regulation would result in some of the expeditious service from the DSS that the Minister likes to talk about is absurd. This is happening for totally different reasons.

Mr. Scott: It is not absurd. That is exactly the situation with which we were confronted. Our intention was to ensure that genuine cases could be dealt with properly, such as those where the claimant had contributed or had produced fresh evidence that was relevant to a particular decision. But the idea of people making frivolous, contrived or other cases in effect to swamp the social security system with decisions was——

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Many hon. Members have written to the Minister about appeals. We receive letters telling us that a notice was put on a board in the office telling people that they could claim. Many people are illiterate or do not understand the technical language, so people learn by word of mouth or various other processes that money is available. These folk claim, but then they are turned down. I do not know how many times I have had such replies on social security appeals that have been turned down. It seems that the Government are not prepared to accept that a lot of people are not sufficiently intelligent to understand the system and the bureaucracy that the Government have created.

I have dealt with reasonably intelligent people who have discovered that they could have claimed more money. The Government say that there can be no back payment. It is through no fault of those people that they did not receive the money, but there is no way in which they can receive it. The Minister tells us tonight that everything is hunky-dunky and everyone gets the money to which they are entitled. That is absolute nonsense.

Mr. Scott: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. As the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People, I understand, of course, that some people have the feelings that the hon. Gentleman has just outlined. However, it is important for him and the Opposition Front-Bench team to understand that when we replaced the old supplementary benefit scheme we sought to target help on the people who needed it most.

When I arrived back in the Department from the Northern Ireland Office, I appreciated the complexities of the old supplementary benefit system. We wanted to make it simpler for people to understand. We wanted to make it easier for people to get the money to which they were entitled, and I set my hand to introducing the reforms in a way that would enable people to do so. The scheme applied to elderly and disabled people, families and lone parents.

Supplementary benefit was run by this Government and their predecessor. It had become almost impossible for claimants and those who advised them to understand the system.

Mr. Graham: It is clear that many Opposition Members, and possibly some Conservative Members, have received letters telling us that claims could not be paid because a bill board had been placed in the social security office. It was: "Hard lines if you can't understand it: you get back only so much." But we are talking about people who are living in poverty. Their poverty creates worse poverty. All of a sudden, the Government run some campaign to highlight to such people that there is something else that they can claim.

I see the Minister smiling. It is not a smiling matter when one lives in Strathclyde and sees real poverty. Such people are looking for help, not hindrance, from the Government. So please take on board that it is not good enough to answer that a notice was put up to tell people that they could claim, when many people are blind or disabled or do not have the wherewithal to understand. They are living in poverty. They are in a dreadful position. The Government must help them more.

Mr. Scott: The hon. Gentleman's point is important. We do not seek to deny people their rights and benefits. Indeed, the thrust of what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I seek to do is to tell people of their rights, how they can best achieve them and how they can claim in a way which is much different from before. Through benefit inquiry line and forms designed and checked out with disability and welfare rights groups, people are given the opportunity to claim benefits to which they are entitled. The system is much better organised than before. I promise——

Mr. Cryer: I draw the Minister's attention to the explanatory memorandum of the report of the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, and specifically to the fourth paragraph. The Department stated:

"In anticipation of the proposed revision to the regulation, in some parts of the country"—

the Minister has mentioned this—

"campaigns were organised which resulted in non-specific applications for review on a scale which would have flooded the benefit system."

It seems that it is being said that, with the onset of the campaigns, the Department feared a flood of "non-specific applications" and therefore withdrew the original regulations and laid new regulations, to come into force the following day. Will the Minister elaborate? The background is at odds with his claim that he wants people to make applications. It seems that, with the hint of campaigns in unspecified areas, with no details of the

number of applications, the Department took the unusual step that we are discussing—an unusual one on its own admission.

Mr. Scott: I play cricket with the hon. Gentleman, and I know that he understands the laws of that game. I hope that I can enable him to understand the laws of the game with which we are now involved. I want to ensure that the genuine claims of those who are in need are dealt with properly, promptly and accurately, I do not want campaigns to be organised on the basis that people sign a piece of paper that has been delivered to them by a welfare rights organisation. The form may state: "Put in this claim. Sign your name at the bottom." The result is that the system is swamped.

That prevents the proper delivery of claims by those who are really in need being dealt with properly and in a timely manner. If the hon. Gentleman really believes that he has outlined a proper approach, I ask him to reconsider his position.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): I am tempted to accept the Minister's explanation of his motivation, but those in my constituency, one of the poorest in the country, who made claims at the time of the reforms found it more difficult to obtain any decent benefits from the system. That is the experience of the people. That is what I have been told in my surgeries and elsewhere. Does the Minister not understand why there is suspicion about the motivation behind the changes that we are debating?

Mr. Scott: If the hon. Gentleman writes to me about any individual cases, I shall respond in detail. I do not accept that the agency and the new arrangements that have been introduced are delivering a less good service than hitherto. We are delivering—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Meacher *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Scott: If the hon. Member for Oldham, West, the Opposition spokesman in this debate, wishes to intervene instead of shaking his head in dismay, I shall give way to him.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Scott: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Oldham, West.

Mr. Meacher: We are some way from the context of the debate, but if the Minister really wants evidence of how appallingly badly the service is being delivered, I shall be extremely glad to send him the 20-page Tower Watch survey of Archway Tower social security office. It is—*[Interruption.]* The Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), laughs and cackles, but I have no doubt that she has not been to Archway Tower. A dreadful service is badly delivered. I went there and found that people who had been waiting for four hours or more had still not received satisfaction. If the right hon. Gentleman is satisfied with that, he should resign.

Mr. Scott: Every piece of evidence that I have seen shows that the service that is now being delivered is substantially better than anything that was ever done, not least when we last had a Labour Government in office delivering those services. The hon. Gentleman has got it wrong and wrong again.

Dr. Godman: I have a great deal of respect for the officials and managers of my local offices. There is a widespread belief among claimants in my constituency—about one third are in receipt directly or indirectly of social security income—that claim applications encouraged by what are known as take-up campaigns are subjected to a form of discrimination compared with other applications that go across the desk in the normal way.

Will the Minister give us an assurance that genuine applications that are encouraged by take-up campaigns are not subjected to discrimination in terms of the length of time taken for their assessment? Why is it that, in Greenock and Port Glasgow, genuine claims for disability benefit in respect of vibration white finger are almost always forced to an appeal? That is disgraceful.

Mr. Scott: Let me try to put the point. The hon. Gentleman knows how much respect I have for his campaigns in this area. Where individual claimants submit a genuine, soundly based claim or appeal to an adjudicating officer, if there is an organised campaign it is reasonable for our adjudicating officers to consider the claim with an eye that, although fair, takes account of the fact that it is an organised campaign. The hon. Gentleman and other hon. Gentlemen will know that those cases are still looked at fairly, but perhaps with the attitude that all the claimants were given a form and asked to sign their name at the bottom of the list, rather than submitted a carefully considered claim. It is understandable for our staff in the offices to look at such claims in a different way from that of someone who comes in off the street.

Mr. George Howarth: I had not intended to intervene again, but the Minister has invited me to do so. If a percentage of those claims turn out to be valid, the process must be utterly fair. We cannot discriminate between those who happen to have been advised that they might be entitled to claim and those who, of their own volition, decide to claim. Both are equally valid.

Mr. Scott: Cannot the hon. Gentleman understand that we are running a social security system in which we are trying to deal with the real needs of people who need support? If a welfare rights organisation or some other body hands out thousands of forms saying, "Sign at the bottom and send to your local social security office," that makes it more difficult for people with problems and claims to have their needs settled.

Mr. Peter Archer (Warley, West) *rose*——

Mr. Scott: I have great respect for the right hon. and learned Gentleman.

Mr. Archer: The right hon. Gentleman never fails to show courtesy. Our problem is that we do not understand how officials can know whether a claim is frivolous until they have looked at it.

Mr. Scott: If a claim comes in in the normal sequence of events and our adjudicating officers are asked to adjudicate, that is one matter. If they have 500 claims on a pro forma where people are simply asked to sign their name at the bottom, it is not unreasonable for them to consider those claims with a certain degree of scepticism.

There may be some genuine claims among the hundreds or thousands submitted. Some welfare rights organisations damage the cause of some genuine claimants when they

[Mr. Scott]

mount campaigns that result in offices being swamped with claims, as that inevitably delays the decision on those genuine claimants.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the essence of this matter is that, if one makes a claim, one should be able to give evidence in support of it? How can anyone who has a genuine concern for the people they are trying to help or any genuine concern for the taxpayers who provide the funds have any well founded objection to producing such evidence? Just signing a form that states that one would like the list of one's benefits considered is not evidence but mere assertion.

Mr. Cryer: What concerns me is that, in effect, the Minister is saying that all campaigns are condemned before they begin. If not, does he have any figures relating to such campaigns, the number of forms that were received at offices and the percentage of claims that were rejected? The right hon. Gentleman has said that those forms were filled in arbitrarily and that they have no substance. Does he have any figures to support his claim that, in some parts of the country, such campaigns were so vigorous that the Department had to take action?

Mr. Scott: I think that I can satisfy the hon. Gentleman. In Strathclyde, 39,395 review applications were made. In Merseyside, more than 16,000 applications were made, and in the north-east, some 13,000 applications were received. Most of those applications were made in a few weeks. They came flooding in because they were deliberately organised by welfare rights groups in those areas.

The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) knows me well enough, and I hope that I can convince him that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I will seek to meet any genuine needs. However, we are aware of campaigns that have resulted in tens of thousands of applications. People have been simply asked to sign their name at the bottom of a sheet of photocopied paper that says, "I want you to look again at my rights." Such pro forma applications will not help genuine claimants who need help through the social security system. It is wrong.

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): Is the Minister suggesting that, because a claim is made on a printed pro forma, it is less valid than other claims? The right hon. Gentleman should congratulate authorities such as Strathclyde regional council on encouraging people with a genuine entitlement to such benefits to take them up.

Mr. Scott: If I were playing tennis, I would put the ball back in the hon. Gentleman's court by asking whether he thinks that those claims are genuine because they have been put through someone's letter box and because they ask the recipient to sign the form and post it back.

Mr. McMaster: How will we ever know if those claims are not assessed?

Mr. Scott: All such cases are assessed by adjudication officers. If Labour Members were sitting in my seat—[HON. MEMBERS: "When?"] Not when—if, perchance, Labour Members were in that position in 20 years' time, would they be prepared to have the whole system of assessing and adjudicating upon genuine claims destroyed by the campaigns that are being organised in some parts of this country?

Mr. Graham: The Minister will be well aware of one of the first campaigns that Strathclyde regional council ever mounted. I happen to be a former Strathclyde councillor. We were very successful in getting more than £40 million for unpaid benefits. Obviously, we have information about poverty and deficiencies in Strathclyde, and it is right that local authorities and organisations tell people that they are entitled to benefits. Surely they are in the business of improving the quality of life for people living in poverty and of trying to get further finance from the Government for that purpose. Therefore, I see people who say that the pro forma is a marker. Never in my life have I seen social security payments abound unless they were for a pound of flesh. DSS officers do not hand out money lightly, but look for evidence to support claims.

Mr. Scott: I understand and respect the work of welfare rights organisations. They do a valuable job in alerting the Government and local social security offices to need in individual areas. However, the speculative element of applications is in real danger of distorting the situation. In Merseyside, there were more than 16,000 applications for review; 11,000 were decided, and 848 of the 16,000 applicants were awarded payments. Just think of what that has done to the system there and to all the other applicants who have been seeking help from a Department that tries to ensure that people are given the awards to which they are entitled. It distorts the situation.

Will Opposition Members try to persuade the welfare rights organisations in their constituencies to behave responsibly? I promise that I want to ensure that people who really need help get it. I want to ensure that the system works properly and effectively, but I assure Opposition Members that, if they persuade and encourage welfare rights organisations to make speculative claims, they are not helping those who are in real need.

Dr. Godman: May I put Strathclyde's record straight? Strathclyde has a substantial history of take-up campaigns, some of which were undertaken with the full co-operation of the DSS. I remind the Minister of the take-up campaign that sought to improve the lot of mentally handicapped people attending adult training centres. DSS officials played a constructive role in that campaign.

I also remind the Minister that the then Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), told me in a letter that we had every right to help organise a campaign for former employees of British Shipbuilders, who had a right to 13 weeks unemployment or supplementary benefit. So let us be consistent. In the past, the DSS has even helped organise take-up campaigns——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I must tell the House and the Minister that there are only 15 minutes left for this debate; other hon. Members wish to participate and I hope that they will get the chance to do so.

Mr. Scott: I shall respond briefly. I understand that other hon. Members wish to contribute to the debate before it concludes.

There are different sorts of take-up campaigns. I certainly respect the genuine ones that have been organised in response to industrial injuries, and have been conducted properly and sensibly, and the Government have responded to them. However, there is a distinction to be drawn between those and some of the speculative campaigns.

If I allow other hon. Members to contribute, perhaps I could have five minutes or so, along with Opposition spokesmen, to make my wind-up speech and give a total justification of what the Government are doing.

11.16 pm

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): We have heard the Minister repeat the same argument in response to several interventions, and there seem to be two strands running through it: one of principle and one of administration. As the Minister stressed repeatedly, where there are take-up campaigns involving tens of thousands of vouchers or pro-formas, they undermine and devalue the system.

However, the Minister must be careful when making such an argument. One could use the intent and motive argument to claim that to maintain the standing of the House one should seriously devalue and perhaps scrap early-day motions. Even if we have not drafted early-day motions and have not seriously studied their subject matter but are broadly in favour of the sentiment, we stick our names at the bottom. Does that mean that those motions should be ignored because we have not studied the subject matter in detail in the way that the Minister says he wants people to consider social security matters? Members can present petitions at the close of business of the House each day, but in future should we disregard them because people have merely put their signatures to something which, according to the Minister, they may not give a damn about?

Surely it is particularly ludicrous to make that argument about social security, because even those with expertise on the subject find it difficult to understand fully. There are few enough hon. Members who can claim genuine expertise in the intricacies of social security matters. When we deal with constituents at our surgeries we have difficulty understanding the complexities. How can people be expected to submit detailed applications when, for a variety of social reasons and through no fault of their own, they do not have the wherewithal, information and literacy to express themselves? For many of those people it is probably a godsend when someone hands them a piece of paper that might unlock the door to access to a benefit that they would otherwise not receive. Therefore, the Minister must be careful when he argues about the principle of the matter.

As the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) suggested, the ham-fisted way in which the regulations were tabled, withdrawn, retabled and finally, under tonight's negative procedure, introduced, meant that many mentally and physically handicapped people lost out on their claims. Whether or not that was the intent of the regulations—and I am willing to believe that it was not the Minister's intent—that has been the net effect of the way in which the three-week period was cut off due to the way that the regulations were tabled.

If the Minister is saying that the proposal is liable to bog down the entire system and cause administrative chaos, he may be right as regards some of the effects. However, he should ask himself why it is that, when people are given access and are judged eligible for the benefits, the administration is so inadequate that paying out the genuine benefits breaks the system. That begs two important questions, and it would be good if the Government were to address those issues rather than the one that they are now tackling.

11.19 pm

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): One of the difficulties of debating with the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) is that if one is not careful one is sucked into the vortex of hyperbole in which he seems to live. I have had the dubious privilege over the years of debating with him on many occasions. The hon. Gentleman's grasp of detail is usually so light that the idea of actually debating with him at all is risible.

I have debated several prayers over the years, but I have never participated in a debate in which the points made by the Labour party were so bogus. The Government's proposition is simple: a person making a claim that may date back a great many years ought to be able to produce some evidence to back it up. The hon. Member for Oldham, West, echoed, somewhat surprisingly, by the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy), says that people should be able to sign a piece of paper in the hope that it will unlock riches for them.

We have a responsibility to bear in mind where the money paid out in benefits comes from. For the most part it does not come from wealthy people such as the hon. Member for Oldham, West and other hon. Members—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman seems to think that he can go to his constituents and say, "Woe is me, I only earn £30,000 a year as a Member of Parliament." The amounts given out in benefits may seem trifling to people earning that sort of money. The hon. Member for Oldham, West may giggle, but £30,000 is riches beyond the dreams of avarice to many of the people whom he claims to represent. As I say, for the most part the money is not paid by the likes of me or of the hon. Gentleman; it is paid out of the wages of people who never get beyond the basic rate of tax paying. We owe it to them to ensure that their money is not squandered. It is therefore plain common sense to require evidence.

On these occasions, the hon. Member for Oldham, West is always quick to try to compare social security with the Inland Revenue's processing of people's tax returns. He always forgets that, with the Inland Revenue, we are considering how much of a citizen's money should be handed over to the state, whereas in matters relating to benefits we are considering how the taxpayer's money is handed out on our behalf.

If the hon. Member for Oldham, West or I wrote to our local tax inspector and claimed that someone had put a form through our letterbox requiring only our signature for the taxation officer to open up our tax affairs for the past 30 years on the offchance that we might be entitled to something, that would be farcical. Yet the hon. Gentleman thinks that that is how our benefit system should be run. He was once a social security Minister and he does himself no credit by forgetting that there are two sides to every argument. He also does himself no good by laying a prayer

[Mr. Patrick Nicholls]

that has to be among the most bogus, ill thought out and badly argued measures to come before the House for many a long year.

11.23 pm

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): After Mr. Nasty, Mr. Nice Guy.

Every Member of Parliament here tonight probably represents thousands of constituents who will be affected by this mean little regulation. The people targeted by the Government include the elderly, those with learning difficulties and their carers, the mentally handicapped, and the physically disabled. Those people are not exploiting a loophole or grabbing at a large pot of gold. They are entitled to these benefits, they should have received them in the past, and they should have received them by law. The House legislated for that help for the most needy in society, and the proposed legislation will remove from many the ability to claim backdated benefits. The current legislation allows benefit to be backdated indefinitely by reason only of a mistake made or something done or omitted to be done by an officer of the DHSS. That is quite simple. A person unwittingly cheated of his entitlement because of official error would receive backdated benefit when the error was discovered. There are many people in that position, and they have been found by hon. Members and by social workers and others involved in welfare matters. Many of those people remain dependent on officials in the Department.

There is widespread ignorance about what may be claimed. Unbelievably, I discovered tonight that the majority of people in disability categories 9 and 10 fail to claim attendance or mobility allowance. Many of the claims that we are debating are made by those with a mental handicap, people who almost by definition are unable to act by themselves. Recently, it was found that a mentally handicapped woman in Durham had been wrongly denied benefit for a number of years and that the cumulative total was £25,000. That was entirely due to official error. She finally received the money, but now the Conservatives wish to obstruct such people in their pursuit of backdated benefit.

Mr. Scott *rose*——

Mr. Allen: The Minister tabled the statutory instrument when the House was not sitting and has just delivered a speech lasting 40 minutes. He has abused——

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it not unprecedented for an Opposition Front-Bench spokesman to refuse to give way to a Minister in a case such as this?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am sure that there are precedents. It is for the hon. Member who is on his feet to decide whether to give way.

Mr. Allen: It is unprecedented to deny people benefit by means of a statutory instrument tabled and coming into force when the House is not sitting. When the House finally has a chance to debate the matter the Minister of State takes 40 minutes over his speech. Conservatives seek to obstruct people who wish to claim backdated benefits.

Mr. Scott: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I impress upon the hon. Gentleman that any case of official error—[HON. MEMBERS: "That is not a point of order."] I make it absolutely clear that in any case of official error, no matter how far back the case goes, payment will be made.

Mr. Allen: One is tempted to ask why the statutory instrument is needed. The Minister is condemned by his own words and by his original statutory instrument which sought to remove entirely the words "supplementary benefit" from the regulation. As my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) has said, the Minister withdrew the statutory instrument and introduced the new one only when more than 50 voluntary organisations and others vehemently objected to what he was trying to do. The new instrument seeks to skin the same cat but in a slightly different way. This way of skinning the cat involves changing the burden of proof, extending the way in which benefits can be used, and not backdating them.

The burden of proof has switched from the Department which made the error to the claimant. The individual—perhaps an elderly or disabled person—will already have suffered through losing benefit a repetitive, accumulating and hurtful loss.

It being half-past Eleven o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 15 (Prayers against statutory instruments, &c. (negative procedure)):—*

The House divided: Ayes 211, Noes 271.

Division No. 9] **[11.30 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*	Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Allen, Graham	Corbett, Robin
Alton, David	Corbyn, Jeremy
Anderson, Donald	Cousins, Jim
Archer, Rt Hon Peter	Crowther, Stan
Armstrong, Hilary	Cryer, Bob
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack	Cummings, John
Ashton, Joe	Cunliffe, Lawrence
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*	Cunningham, Dr John
Barron, Kevin	Dalyell, Tam
Battle, John	Darling, Alistair
Beckett, Margaret	Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Beggs, Roy	Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Bell, Stuart	Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony	Dewar, Donald
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*	Doran, Frank
Benton, Joseph	Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Bermingham, Gerald	Dunnachie, Jimmy
Bidwell, Sydney	Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Blunkett, David	Eastham, Ken
Boateng, Paul	Edwards, Huw
Boyes, Roland	Enright, D.A.
Bradley, Keith	Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Bray, Dr Jeremy	Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*	Fatchett, Derek
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*	Faulds, Andrew
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*	Fearn, Ronald
Caborn, Richard	Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Callaghan, Jim	Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*	Flannery, Martin
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*	Flynn, Paul
Campbell-Savours, D. N.	Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*	Foster, Derek
Carr, Michael	Foulkes, George
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*	Fraser, John
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*	Fyfe, Maria
Clelland, David	Galbraith, Sam
Cohen, Harry	Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*	George, Bruce

Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Ilsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kumar, A.
Lamble, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Llin Golding and
Mr. John McAvoy.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Staml'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*

Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Moss, Malcolm
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown, and
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

Question accordingly negatived.

PETITIONS

Asylum Seekers

11.41 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): I wish to present a petition on behalf of 16,300 concerned members of the public, registering protest at the Government's proposals to restrict the rights of asylum seekers—the proposed abolition of legal aid for asylum seekers, the extension of the restriction on airline carriers, and the suggestion that asylum seekers be fingerprinted in a discriminatory fashion. The petition ends:

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House do not proceed with these unjust proposals. And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Export of Live Horses for Slaughter

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): I wish to present a petition on behalf of Mrs. Janet Burke of 59 Fairfield road, Scunthorpe, who has gone to considerable trouble to collect signatures protesting against any attempt to reintroduce the export of live horses for slaughter.

Since the petition was raised, there has been some progress in this direction in the European Community, and I am pleased that the EC has been especially sympathetic towards the views of people like Mrs. Burke and the many hundreds who signed her petition. However, I understand that the matter is still to be finalised in the Community, and that negotiations are still taking place. Mrs. Burke's petition is therefore a timely reminder of the issue and gives considerable support to the position that the United Kingdom has adopted in the EC.

The petition reads:

The Humble Petition of the Scunthorpe and district people sheweth That there is great opposition to any attempt to export live horses from this country for slaughter on the continent. Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House will take every step to persuade the European Community not to introduce regulations that will ever allow such trade to be introduced. And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

I wholeheartedly support the petition.

To lie upon the Table.

Pensions

Mr. Morley: I wish to present a second petition, signed by many thousands of Scunthorpe district residents. It relates to the calculation of pensions in this country. In 1979 the link between state pensions and the average increase in wages was broken by the Government. Pensions were instead linked to the retail prices index. That change has severely reduced the amount of pension that many pensioners receive.

The people who have raised the petition, in particular the Scunthorpe pensioners rights campaign, point out that they seek not only the restoration of the link that was broken in 1979, but also parity with pensions in Europe. I believe that our pensioners have had a very poor deal over the past few years——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot argue his case. He is tending to précis the petition.

Mr. Morley: I am grateful for your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I believe that pensioners have had a raw deal and I fully support the petition which states:

The Humble Petition of the people of Scunthorpe district sheweth

That there is an essential need to improve the pensions and conditions of the country's pensioners.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House will restore the link between pension calculations and average earning increases, as a first step in bringing state pensions into line with the best in Europe.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will for ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Croatia

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

11.45 pm

Mr. Peter Fry (Wellingborough): At the beginning of this debate, it is necessary for us all to hope that the current ceasefire in Croatia and the negotiations are successful. If they are not, I fear that the worries that I will express tonight will be fulfilled.

For more than 20 years in the House I have tried to be a friend to all the peoples of Yugoslavia. Two weeks ago, I revisited Zagreb having previously led a parliamentary delegation there a year ago. At the time the possibility of the present disastrous conflict was already becoming clear.

At that time, as chairman of the parliamentary group, I urged the newly elected politicians to accept that, although some change was necessary, complete separation was not inevitable. I asked them to work for a loose confederation of equal republics, largely self-governing, but with certain specified powers on a federal basis.

As an encouragement to them, my fellow officers and members of the parliamentary group called on our Government to help admit Yugoslavia to several international institutions to give greater credibility to the federal Government and greater respectability and authority to the name of Yugoslavia. Unfortunately, that opportunity was lost. The western powers misread the situation. They did not see that the rampant nationalism that had brought Presidents Tudjman and Milosevic to power would so fan the flames of separatism and so reawaken the enmities of 50 years or more, that the compromise that might well have been possible earlier this year and which the European Foreign Ministers have since tried to impose has now become impossible.

Then, greater diplomatic pressure, combined with the offer of a stronger attachment to the European Community and help to deal with the genuine grievances of Serbs and Croats, might have worked. My recent visit has convinced me that that kind of solution is now dead. Although both sides say that they want peace, innocent civilians are being slaughtered, their economies are being ruined, more than 400,000 of them are refugees and homeless and Dubrovnik, that jewel of the Adriatic, faces destruction.

Croatia is desperately calling for international recognition as a sovereign state. I do not believe that that would necessarily bring the help that the Croats think they need. Indeed, in the short term it could only further inflame Serbian nationalism, with bad results. Such recognition, which will come, should be part of a general agreement to resolve the whole situation. Once we play the card of the threat of recognition it cannot be used again.

If the current ceasefire does not hold, we will have to ask what should be done now. Diplomatic activity so far has failed, despite the gallant efforts of Lord Carrington. Perhaps he was brought in too late to succeed—I hope not.

The move towards economic sanctions is necessary, unfortunately, but sanctions will take a very long time to work. Direct military intervention on the ground would be extremely dangerous and even foolhardy without an effective ceasefire. In any event, a ceasefire has to be observed on agreed front lines. There is little doubt that

[Mr. Peter Fry]

the Serbs would want to retain most of what they now occupy, whereas the Croats would want to return to frontiers drawn up by the late Marshal Tito.

Even if there were agreement, much of the disputed territory would still be at the mercy of both Serb and Croat irregulars, acting outside the control of their Government, and those forces would continue to be a source of fighting and unrest unless they were disarmed. That would be an essential prerequisite for any United Nations force being asked to take over a policing operation.

There is one immediate step that Serbia could take as a clear sign that it wants peace. That step is to cease attacking Dubrovnik and to withdraw from it. It was an appalling mistake for the city to be attacked in the first place. Serbia has never had any legitimate claim to it, and the assault has done much to weaken the Serbian case in the eyes of the civilised world. A clear warning from the international community about Dubrovnik is long overdue. Perhaps we should even contemplate some naval action to alleviate the blockade and bring help to the 50,000 civilians still trapped there. Firm action over Dubrovnik might impress both sides that European powers or the United Nations really meant business.

On Croatia's part, the immediate implementation of its plans to establish and safeguard the rights of minorities would be a sign that it recognises that there have been and are legitimate fears, particularly among the Serbs in Croatia. Many Serbs, however, continue to live in the cities and the urban areas of Croatia, and they must be encouraged to do so, if necessary, by an international guarantee of their rights.

I met Serbs and the leader of the Jewish community while in Zagreb. They wanted to stay in Croatia, but they felt that continued conflict would only threaten their own personal security and future.

Any agreement or any peace treaty, when it comes, must recognise that to humiliate either the Serbs or the Croats would be a great mistake. It is necessary to take steps to deal with legitimate grievances and to consider how a plebescite might be organised, how more aid might be given, and how refugees might be resettled. No matter what settlement is reached, if either republic, particularly Serbia, feels that it has been unfairly treated, any ceasefire will be temporary, and sooner or later the matter will rise again.

Much more has to be done by the European Community. Already the Serbian economy is suffering from raging inflation. In the words of the Vice-President of Croatia, the economy is disintegrating.

Hitherto, European efforts have been well meaning but ineffective. My right hon. and hon. Friends must take stronger action in concert with our European partners to show the world that we take this situation much more seriously than many people in Yugoslavia seem to think. I have considerable respect and sympathy for my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg), but we must make further efforts, even if some risk is attached, or the present conflict will spread to Bosnia and other parts of Yugoslavia and perhaps beyond that to other countries.

What is most disappointing is the European Community's failure to act as we should have liked. In last week's edition of *The Sunday Telegraph*, Geoffrey Wheatcroft wrote:

> "It was a woman speaking from inside Dubrovnik against a background of shellfire who said: 'We expected so much from Europe and got so little.' Here is the reality of the 'European idea': a Community whose finest administrative minds devote themselves to deciding whether a carrot is a vegetable or a fruit, whose political leaders discuss not so much ambitious as fantastic plans for military integration —and which cannot in practice prevent Europeans tearing themselves to pieces and destroying part of what it is not exaggerated to call our European heritage."

Serious consideration must be given to further diplomatic and other action. If Europe is serious about a common defence and foreign policy, it must face and deal with the challenge of Yugoslavia. If it does not, thousands more will die and in future generations the name Dubrovnik will produce anguish and remorse at the stupidity of mankind and the failure of the international community to act effectively.

11.56 pm

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles) *rose——*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Does the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) have the consent of both the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Fry) and the Minister to participate?

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Douglas Hogg) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Fry *indicated assent*

Mr. Macdonald: I am grateful to both the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Fry) and the Minister for their generosity in allowing me to contribute to this Adjournment debate.

I recently visited Zagreb along with the hon. Gentleman. It was my first visit and I learnt a great deal from his experience. I am impressed tonight to see how much we agree about the position there and on the need for much stronger action than has been taken so far.

We have to face the facts of the current situation. Yugoslavia, as it was, cannot be brought back to life now. So long the sick man of Europe, it is now not only dead but hung, drawn and quartered. We have to recognise Serbia and Croatia as separate entities. Once that recognition is made, all else begins to fall into place. It does not make it any easier to do what we have to do, but it makes seeing what we have to do much clearer, because it then becomes obvious that Serbia has been the blatant aggressor in the war and that its aggression simply cannot be tolerated by the international community. The real danger today is not of being seen to condone precipitate separatism but, through the impotence of our response so far, of being seen to condone brutal and barbaric behaviour of a kind that has not been seen in Europe since the 1940s.

The Government, together with their European partners, should go immediately to the Security Council of the United Nations and call, in the first instance, for full and effective sanctions against the Serbian Government, including an oil embargo; and for the authority that is necessary to allow the Community to take whatever further measures, including military measures, may be

necessary to bring about an end to the Serbian Government's aggression should Lord Carrington's latest efforts fail.

Of course, everyone is aware of the difficulty of introducing an EC peacekeeping force before there is a genuine peace to keep, but the Government should urgently consider other options such as the naval action which the hon. Member for Wellingborough suggested. There is also the possibility of an air blockade which would not only guard against sanctions busting but make the Serbian air force desist from its present bombing campaign.

The British Government have a special responsibility in this matter, because British manufacture cluster bombs are being used by the Yugoslav air force, which is de facto a Serbian air force, to attack civilian targets. I have seen the cluster cases in a village on the front line in Croatia and I can testify to their British markings.

The Serbian forces must be starved of supplies and oil and denied the use of their air power. It must be made crystal clear that they must withdraw from the land that they presently occupy in Croatia before there can be progress towards a lasting settlement. The question of borders is always difficult. There is no such thing as a natural border. Every border is in some sense arbitrary, but the international community must rigorously enforce the golden rule that no border can be changed by unilateral resort to force. Changes to borders can come about only by mutual agreement and consent. That must be made crystal clear to the politicians and generals of Serbia. There can be no reward for the aggresion that they have undertaken. If the European Community fails to make that lesson stick in the context of the present crisis in Yugoslavia it will in time feel the consequences as other regions become afflicted with the same madness.

Both the hon. Member for Wellingborough and I were impressed by the EC monitoring force that we met in Zagreb. When we say that the response of the Community so far has been ineffectual, that is not a comment on the team spirit and competence of that monitoring force. It has done its best, but it does not have the tools to enable it to do the job. Now is the time to give it those tools.

12.1 am

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Douglas Hogg): I fully recognise the knowledge and experience possessed by both the hon. Members who have spoken in the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Fry) is, as he reminded us, the chairman of the parliamentary group. I have had the opportunity of discussing the matter in detail with him on two occasions and I am conscious of his considerable knowledge and experience. The hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) has also had the advantage of visiting Yugoslavia recently. Therefore, he brings to the debate a clear perception based on recent experience.

Both the hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend were perhaps slightly unfair to the European Community in their assessment of what it has done. The European Community has put in place a range of measures which are capable over a period of time of leading to a solution. As both hon. Members will have in mind, European Community monitors are now in place who have been exposed to a high degree of personal risk. At the same time we have established the conference, albeit adjourned, under the chairmanship of Lord Carrington. It provides the framework for a negotiated settlement.

As both my hon. Friend and the hon. Gentleman will also have in mind, last Friday the European Foreign Ministers approved a package of sanctions. Work is now proceeding within the United Nations to secure further action, most notably perhaps the oil embargo. The Secretary-General may well report back to the Security Council with further recommendations on what should be done. Those are all positive steps which, it is true, have not led to peace as yet. Indeed, while the parties are anxious to continue with the fighting such steps are unlikely to lead to peace. But they establish the framework within which peace could be created if the parties wished to stop the fighting.

My hon. Friend and the hon. Gentleman have established several points with which I strongly agree. Both focused on minority rights within Yugoslavia, and I entirely agree that that issue lies at the core of the problem within the country. There are minorities in almost every republic—that is not wholly true but it is almost true. There are no ethnic minorities in Slovenia but there are substantial ones in Croatia, most notably the Serbs.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): There are a few in Slovenia.

Mr. Hogg: I accept the correction.

There are important Albanian minorities in Macedonia and Serbs. There are minorities of Serba, Croats and Muslims in Bosnia.

If we are to see a solution ot the problems in Yugoslavia, it must be one that addresses minority rights. I agree with the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough about the international entrenching of minority rights. I do not envisage a long-lasting solution to the problem of Yugoslavia that does not take up the issue of minority rights and seek to entrench them, perhaps by international action.

I am sceptical about the proposition that minority rights can be protected by redrawing internal frontiers. With few exceptions it would be extremely difficult to redraw those frontiers to prevent an ethnic group being a minority in a republic.

I agree with the hon. Member for Western Isles about the importance of frontiers. They should not be changed by unilateral action, nor by force. An important presumption to which we should all adhere is that existing frontiers, however inconvenient and however arbitrarily they may have been drawn, are the lines from which we start. They can be changed only by agreement or by the adjudication of a lawful authority such as an international court. There are no frontiers within eastern and central Europe with which everyone is wholly comfortable. Best stay with what we have rather than try to change for something else.

As I have said, the critical problem is that of minorities. I do not think that frontiers should be changed by force or by unilateral action. I think that there exists the framework within which an agreed settlement could be brought about if the parties are anxious to see that happen.

Mr. Wareing: As the Minister knows, I agree with the Government's even-handed attitude towards Yugoslavia thus far. As for minorities and boundaries between Croatia and Serbia, however, there has been a suggestion

[Mr. Wareing]

that President Tudjman of Croatia and President Milosevic of Serbia would agree to a peacekeeping force. I am aware of the argument about peace before a peacekeeping force, but does the Minister agree that we should pursue the idea—perhaps through the North Atlantic Co-operation Council—that there could be a peace-keeping force within the Serbian enclaves in Croatia and along the Croatian border with Serbia while negotiations take place? It is the Serbian minority in Croatia that was part of the spark that set alight the flames in Yugoslavia.

Mr. Hogg: I shall respond to my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough and the hon. Member for Western Isles on the question of force and then come to the very issue that the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) has raised, which I recognise is relevant.

There is a slight incompatibility between the arguments that have been advanced. My hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough and the hon. Member for Wesern Isles began their respective speeches by saying, in effect, that now is not the time to introduce land forces into Yugoslavia. My hon. Friend was certainly of that mind. I think that he accepts that that would constitute a long-term commitment, and a hazardous and dangerous one. My hon. Friend and the hon. Gentleman have suggested, however, that there is a step short of that that they would recommend—most notably air interdiction or, alternatively, a naval force. There is a distinction.

There is a distinction to be drawn between an evacuation of the kind that we may see tonight in Dubrovnik and an interdiction naval force designed to prevent, for example, the shelling of Dubrovnik by Yugoslav gun boats. I shall address the second point: whether we could deploy naval units in that form of action. I do not believe that we can because there is no authority to do so. Let us be clear about this: if we were to deploy naval units, they could be effective only if they were authorised to fire. That is an act of war. We cannot commit an act of war unless it is lawful. I do not believe that it would be lawful unless it were underpinned by some appropriate resolution of the Security Council of the United Nations. It is unlikely that we would get such authority at the moment.

The same applies to air interdiction. That will not be successful unless it is backed by the readiness to fire. That, too, is an act of war. That being so, in the absence of the Security Council resolution it would not be justified or, indeed, possible. Therefore, for the moment I could not commend either proposition to the House.

In any event, I would be cautious, because once taking the path of force it is difficult to stop going the whole way. It is difficult to draw any intellectual distinction between, on the one hand, the deployment of naval and air forces and, on the other, the deployment of land forces. If we do the one, we are driven to the other. I must be honest about this: I fear greatly the prospect of committing land forces to that part of the world. I shrink from it.

Mr. Macdonald: The Minister may have answered my question. He pointed out that it was not right to take those measures without authority from the Security Council. Why are not the Government pressing harder in the Security Council for such measures? He expressed his doubts about the quagmire that we would involve ourselves in, but does he realistically expect the Serbian aggression to be halted without a sign of a more firm stance by the international community?

Mr. Hogg: I do not believe that at present the Security Council would authorise the use of force. There is no prospect of its doing so within the foreseeable future. Therefore, we are focusing on what is obtainable within the Security Council, most notably the UN underpinning of sanctions and of the oil embargo. We may be able to achieve that. We shall have to see. But I do not believe that the authority would extend to military action of the kind suggested by the hon. Gentleman.

The proposition of the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby is not unattractive. I understand the intellectual force of it. He is saying that we should protect the enclaves by some form of peacekeeping force. If I may, I shall restate the Government's position on a peacekeeping force in general and then come to the particular.

The Government do not think that the time is right for the introduction of such a force because there is no peace to keep. We would be called upon to make a peace, that is, to prise the fighters apart. That would be an extremely hazardous operation. Moreover, although both President Tudjman and President Milosevic have invited the Security Council and, indeed, the international community to deploy a peacekeeping force, it is clear from the small print that there are substantial differences between the two positions. The Serbs say that such a force should be along existing fighting lines, whereas the Croats say that it should be along historic frontiers. Those views are incompatible.

There may come a time when we would be willing to deploy a peacekeeping force. The circumstances have been defined by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary. First, there must be an effective ceasefire. Secondly, those who request it must genuinely be prepared to accept it on their territory. Thirdly, the deployment of the force must be seen to be positively productive in terms of contributing to a settlement. None of those three conditions genuinely exists. When they do, we can seriously address the question of a peacekeeping force. It may be that in such circumstances the hon. Gentleman's proposal that there shall be some deployment into the enclaves becomes an option that we shall seriously consider.

As of now, we have no peace to keep. If we were to introduce forces anywhere in that country, I am afraid that they would be shot at by both sides. They would be committed to an operation that would be lengthy in its duration and extremely hazardous in its character.

I accept, as the hon. Members have stressed, that this is an extremely distressing situation. It is beastly. I recognise that it is extremely destabilising to the eastern marches of Europe. That does not mean that we should act rashly or imprudently. We want to keep step with our European Community partners and with our friends and allies outside the EC. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough about recognition, but I think that it would be premature to do it now, as it is an important lever in our efforts to secure the protection of minority rights.

This has been an important debate and I hope that I have addressed the various questions that——

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at sixteen minutes past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 14 November 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON UNDERGROUND (SAFETY MEASURES) BILL
[Lords]
Read the Third time and passed, with amendments.

LONDON UNDERGROUND (KING'S CROSS) BILL
Considered; to be read the Third time.

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

Constitutional Reform

1. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals concerning constitutional reform he plans to discuss with representatives of the Irish Government and the political parties of Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Peter Brooke): It remains our objective to transfer substantial power and responsibility to locally elected politicians on a widely acceptable basis within a framework of stable relationships. To this end, the talks held earlier this year were constructive and valuable and, I believe, laid a useful foundation for further developments. I am currently in contact with the four main constitutional parties and with the Irish Government to establish whether a basis for fresh political talks can be found.

Dr. Godman: Will you allow me, Mr. Speaker, briefly to offer my deepest sympathy, by way of a supplementary question, to the families of those who were so horrifically murdered or injured both yesterday and today in Belfast? Do not these apparently daily murders make plain and stark the need for political developments to take place? In the short run, however, will the Secretary of State tell the House whether it is his intention to set a time limit beyond which talks will not be pursued by Her Majesty's Government until after the next general election?

Mr. Brooke: I am sure that the whole House will welcome the sympathy, which I endorse, that has been expressed by the hon. Gentleman to the families concerned.

I share the hon. Gentleman's view that talks on political development constitute a contribution to moving towards stabilisation and peace in the Province. We are continuing to explore with the parties. I have not yet concluded the exploration, and I think that it would be a mistake for me to make any premature statement about our next intentions, but I shall keep the House informed.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Will the Secretary of State take it from me that the people of Northern Ireland will appreciate his expressions of sympathy and those of the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman), directed to those who suffered in the terrible massacre that took place last night and to the relatives of the person who was murdered this morning?

When the Secretary of State sees the Republican representatives again, will he put to them the revulsion that was felt by the Unionist community and by a large section of the Roman Catholic community in Northern Ireland when Mr. Haughey attempted to foist into the Anglo-Irish Conference a new Minister for Defence? It is clear from the man's record that he was an ally of a man who escaped from Northern Ireland and who is wanted in Northern Ireland to pay part of the price for the crime that he committed. He was found guilty of attempting to murder an Ulster Defence Regiment man.

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his opening expression of sympathy. I should say in the context of the working of the Anglo-Irish Agreement that at no stage during the time that I have been Secretary of State has the Minister for Defence for the Republic of Ireland taken part in the conference.

Mr. William Ross: What protest did the Government make to the Dublin authorities about the attempt to get Dr. James McDaid into such a key position? Would the Secretary of State have been prepared to sit at the same table—*[Interruption.]* I repeat, would the Secretary of State and his colleagues have been prepared to sit at the same table with that man, within the confines of the Anglo-Irish Agreement? If not, how could they have avoided it?

Mr. Brooke: I shall first answer the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question. I have just said that at no stage during the time that I have been Secretary of State has the Irish Defence Minister taken part in any conference talks. On the first part of the question, events moved so rapidly in Dublin last night that by the time that I had heard that the Minister had been appointed, I gather that he had also resigned.

Mr. Kilfedder: Devolution may in due course come to Northern Ireland, but before it arrives do not the Government have it in their power, at a stroke, to restore some degree of democracy to the people of Ulster by establishing a Select Committee? I appeal to the Secretary of State not to deny the people of Ireland the basic and fundamental right of full democracy.

Mr. Brooke: Later I will have the privilege of answering a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) on that matter. I assure the hon. Gentleman that it is a subject in which I take the keenest interest.

Mr. Hume: Does the Secretary of State agree that it is quite outrageous that people should stand up in this Chamber and attack the character of someone who is not here to defend himself? I am the only Member of this House who knows Dr. James McDaid—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members should listen for a change. Dr. McDaid's

constituency and mine are separated by the border, so we work together on common issues. I categorically state that that man in no way supports the IRA or any paramilitary organisation.

Given the stark position on the streets of Northern Ireland, is it not the right hon. Gentleman's responsibility to set a date for the reconvening of talks, so that they can begin where they ended? Whatever difficulties individual parties may have with resuming talks, are they not put well into the shade by the stark reality of events on the streets?

Mr. Brooke: The House will have heard what the hon. Gentleman said about his parliamentary neighbour. On the question of reconvening the talks, I said consistently in the summer that our talks had concluded and that we would need to re-examine the basis for fresh talks. I think that the hon. Gentleman will know what I mean when I say that in the context of coming towards the end of a particular available time, whether it is the time for talks or the time for a general election, there is reluctance among certain parties—and I make this remark generally—to turn their cards face upwards if there is any danger that other people will not have turned their cards face upwards by the time the whistle blows.

Mr. Adley: Does my right hon. Friend accept that as time moves so does opinion on this matter in England, Scotland and Wales? If there is to be detailed discussion of constitutional change, does he accept that the politicians who represent constituencies in England and Scotland and Wales will need to be consulted, and that he may well find that opinions have shifted substantially since the House last discussed the issue?

Mr. Brooke: I know that my hon. Friend will understand if I say that I had some difficulty in persuading everybody to come round a table when I was talking only to the parties in Northern Ireland. If I were to bring in everybody else within the United Kingdom, it might be some time before we foregathered.

Mr. McNamara: Does the Secretary of State agree that there is no romanticism or glory in shooting babies—or, indeed, shooting and murdering anyone? As the whole House has shown this afternoon, recent events in Belfast have considerably underlined the need for the political leaders within the Province to come together to find some solution to the problems that is acceptable throughout both communities and within the island of Ireland?

The right hon. Gentleman said that the previous set of talks had concluded, and that we were looking at the new basis for talks. Will he take this opportunity to confirm that it is the three strands that will form the basis of any future talks, and that against that background there will always be the Anglo-Irish Agreement, until the two Governments feel that they have something that transcends it?

Mr. Brooke: I share the hon. Gentleman's views in the context of the six-week-old baby, just as I do in the context of the children in the school playground who were under threat this morning when the attack was made on the taxi driver. As to coming together for further talks, I think that I speak for all those who were involved in the talks in the summer, which we concluded, when I say that those who took part in them felt that they were valuable and looked forward to the possibility of being able to hold talks again. It was further agreed that their structure, and the basis on which we conducted them, was a sensible way of covering all the questions which are at issue.

Transport Workers (Security)

2. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he has taken to enhance the security of taxi drivers and other transport workers in the Province.

Mr. Brooke: My hon. Friend the Member for Wiltshire, North (Mr. Needham) has recently announced changes in the regulations and administrative arrangements governing taxis. Those are aimed at reducing the risk of terrorist attack to both drivers and passengers while, in the public interest, continuing to allow the easy identification of legitimate taxis and drivers.

Mr. Barnes: The terrible attack on a taxi driver in St. Mary's primary school yard today, which also affected the school children within that area, must be condemned and sympathy should be expressed to everyone who has been affected by this terrible act.

Representations have been made to the Secretary of State via the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union on behalf of taxi drivers. There might be no ready and easy solution to the problems that taxi drivers face, but there are those, such as the Peace Train organisation, who have taken up the taxi drivers' case and are concerned to alter public opinion and attitudes generally in Northern Ireland. It is that, along with political and economic change which, in the long run, will bring about a change in the situation.

Mr. Brooke: With regard to the incident this morning, we do not know at this stage whether the injured man was operating a taxi or not. However, it is clear that he was not displaying a taxi roof sign. In any event, the new regulations cannot eliminate the risk to taxi drivers. They may reduce the risk of attack, but they cannot prevent random sectarian murders.

On the hon. Gentleman's further point, although we have conducted an interim review of the regulations we shall be conducting a wider one. I pay tribute to him for his support for the Peace Train.

Mr. Molyneaux: As the Secretary of State rightly said, it is pretty well impossible to protect people in a particular occupation. With a view to improving the security of all occupations, does the Secretary of State agree that there is an urgent need to aim for a common sentencing policy throughout the United Kingdom? Given the reluctance of some courts to convict on forensic evidence and the fact that terrorists do not usually leave a signed visiting card at the scene of the crime, will it not become more and more difficult to obtain convictions?

Mr. Brooke: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman on the importance of forensic evidence in cases in Northern Ireland about which we are all aware. However, I assure him that the resources of the Government forensic services are being increased and streamlined to meet that need. I am not precisely sure that I know what the right hon. Gentleman had in mind on sentencing policy, but I am happy to engage in exchanges outside.

Mr. Stanbrook: All terrorist crime is detestable, whoever the victims, but does not my right hon. Friend agree that the recent upsurge of violence has made more urgent the granting of the Chief Constable's request for at least 400 additional men in his establishment?

Mr. Brooke: I share my hon. Friend's analysis of the issue and later this afternoon I shall be announcing in a more detailed answer an increase in the RUC manpower establishment of 441 extra policemen.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Does the Secretary of State agree that most politicians and Church leaders have asked that there should be no tit-for-tat shootings? However, will the right hon. Gentleman accept from me, speaking as the Member of Parliament for Belfast, South, that those engaged in terrorism are not inclined to listen to such appeals, and that the security situation must be dealt with? We sympathise with victims in north Belfast, with those in south Belfast last evening, and with the driver of the car who was attacked this morning. Does the Secretary of State accept that even the 400 new officers that he has announced will not be deployed primarily in countering terrorism? The Chief Constable's earlier statement that he was deploying a special search squad to deal with loyalist terrorism is itself not very helpful, when the whole of the city of Belfast is left wide open to roaming terrorists from both sides.

Mr. Brooke: I received an assurance today from police and Army commanders that there will be an enhanced security presence in those areas thought to be most at risk in the light of last night's attacks in Belfast. There will be increased RUC patrolling, and two further incident rooms have been established in addition to the special measures introduced by the Chief Constable in north Belfast last month. All possible lines of inquiry are being pursued. The unit to which the hon. Gentleman referred will of course be deployed in the situation that we are now considering.

General Practitioner Budgets

3. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will consider extending the opportunity for general practitioners in Northern Ireland to manage their own budgets immediately.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): I will be issuing next month to every general practitioner in Northern Ireland a prospectus about general practice funds. It will invite expressions of interest in fund holding, which will be available from April 1993.

Mrs. Gorman: Is my hon. Friend aware that there are already 1,700 fund holders in Britain, and that a great many more are in the pipeline? That points to the great success of Conservative health service policies. Does my hon. Friend agree that, now that the Conservative party is formally represented in Northern Ireland and will have candidates in the next general election there, we should remove the anomaly whereby Northern Ireland citizens —who are of course British subjects—have to follow the rest of the United Kingdom? Can he give an assurance that that anomaly will be removed as soon as possible?

Mr. Hanley: Northern Ireland enjoys an integrated system of health and social services care, and therefore there are far greater demands on its health boards in dealing with reforms, which do of course bring massive benefits. The boards have to deal both with health reforms themselves and community care reforms. We are just as determined that people in Northern Ireland should benefit from the Government's reforms, including fund-holding practices, and therefore they will be introduced at the earliest possible date.

Mr. Flannery: I hope that both communities in Northern Ireland will unite against any extension of the Government's desire and mania to privatise the health service.—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] I know that Conservative Memberts get upset when that is said, but that is the fact of the matter. We can see that the Government's action is another nasty step towards privatisation, and I hope that both sides in Northern Ireland will unite against it.

Mr. Hanley: I want to make it absolutely clear that general practitioners voluntarily choose to run fund-holding practices and are not forced by the Government to do so—and GPs will take that step only if they can see benefits for their patients. Last year, 300 practices in Britain decided that was the way forward, and another 300 have done so this year. Fund-holding practices are gaining ground in popularity, and patients are certainly enjoying the extra benefits that flow from the GPs' scheme.

Prevention of Terrorism Act

5. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the total number of residents of Northern Ireland who have been questioned under the Prevention of Terrorism Act and *(a)* subsequently charged and *(b)* convicted or had an exclusion order placed upon them since 1974.

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Dr. Brian Mawhinney): I regret that it is not possible to provide that information in the form requested.

Mr. Corbyn: It is highly regrettable that the Minister cannot provide information that must be available to the police and to the Northern Ireland Office about the number of people in Northern Ireland who have been questioned under the Prevention of Terrorism Act and subsequently charged and convicted. If the pattern in Northern Ireland is the same as in the rest of the United Kingdom, the Minister will know that the number of persons there subsequently convicted under the Act is very small. Many of us would like to know what happens to the information that is collected during questioning when there is no subsequent conviction. There is clearly a civil liberties aspect to what happens to that information.

Dr. Mawhinney: If the information had been available in the form requested, I should have given it.

Mr. Dickens: Does my hon. Friend agree—unlike the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn)—that the Prevention of Terrorism Act is exactly that: a measure to prevent terrorism? Its success is not necessarily based on the number of convictions; often, it is based on the number of assaults and atrocities that are prevented by the questioning of certain people. That is terribly important. The police, the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Army save many lives by means of the Act.

It is not necessary to bring convictions every time, but it is necessary to prevent terrorism. Has the hon. Gentleman not got the message yet?

Dr. Mawhinney: I have certainly got the message. I entirely agree that the Act forms a vital part of the resources needed by the security forces to combat terrorism. I also share my hon. Friend's regret that not every hon. Member appears to understand that.

Mr. Mallon: Despite—or, perhaps, even because of—the horror of terrorism, we must protect and defend the integrity of the law and its enforcement. The Minister will be aware that, in 1989 and 1990, 726 complaints of ill treatment were made. I am allowing for the fact that, in a substantial number of cases, investigations could not be concluded, and many complaints were withdrawn. In some instances, I believe, spurious cases were cobbled together for propaganda purposes.

Is the Minister satisfied that not a single case was substantiated by the independent Police Complaints Commission, or does he share the scepticism of Lord Colville and others, who feel that nought out of 726 does not reflect the world that we in Northern Ireland inhabit?

Dr. Mawhinney: The hon. Gentleman has considerably broadened the original question. He knows—not least because he and I have discussed the matter on a number of occasions—that we take seriously people's right to register a complaint, and that complaints are investigated seriously. He also knows that the Government set considerable store by having in hand arrangements that will inspire confidence across the face of the community in the activities of the security forces and the RUC. We are constantly examining policy in that light.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Prevention of Terrorism Act was introduced by a Government led by Lord Wilson? Is it not unfortunate that, since that time, some members of the Labour party have gone soft on terrorism?

Dr. Mawhinney: My hon. Friend has made his own point with extreme clarity.

Mr. Trimble: I, too, must express slight surprise at the Minister's inability to give the figures that were requested in the original question. Surely it would have been possible at least to give the number of people who had been arrested under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, and the number of people subsequently charged.

If the Minister had given those figures, would they not have shown—especially those relating to the number convicted of terrorist offences—that, over the past decade, there has been a consistent and significant decline in the number of people convicted? Is not that a consequence of the increasing sophistication of terrorist ant-interrogation techniques, such as the ability to destroy forensic evidence? Does not that point to the need to give serious consideration to other methods of dealing with terrorism?

Dr. Mawhinney: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. I must repeat, however, that, if I had had the information in the form in which it was requested, I would have given it.

Mr. McNamara: The House will welcome the Minister's assurance about the protection of people when they are in custody, but unfortunately the Minister's perception is completely different from that of the community as a whole. Yesterday, when the Government were defending their postition at the United Nations in Geneva on interrogation procedures and denying that anything untoward was happening, settlements were being awarded in Belfast courts to people who had claimed that they had been assaulted in just those circumstances. Should not the Minister introduce video recording of all interrogations?

Dr. Mawhinney: The hon. Gentleman, uncharacteristically, made a statement which, on reflection, I think he will want to amend. It is not the perception of the whole community in Northern Ireland that the security forces behave in a way that is deliberately detrimental to the rights or interests of various people in the Province. It is important to get that correction—if he will allow me to use that word—on the record. Of course, it is necessary constantly to review policy and constantly to keep in the forefront of our thinking the need for the security forces and the police to have all the resources necessary to do the job that they do on behalf of all of us, the need for which has been so tragically illustrated again in the last 24 hours. At the same time, we must keep in mind the need for the security forces to do that job in a way which not only remains within the law but inspires confidence in the whole community.

Agriculture Ministers

6. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the Agriculture Minister in his Department has any proposals to meet the Agriculture Minister of the Republic of Ireland to discuss co-operation.

Mr. Hanley: I regularly met Mr. O'Kennedy, the Republic of Ireland's former Minister of Agriculture and Food, and his Minister of State, Mr. Walsh, to exchange views on a broad range of topics of mutual interest and concern. I look forward to meeting Mr. O'Kennedy's successor, Dr. Woods, so that we can continue this co-operation in the future.

Mr. Amess: I trust that my hon. Friend will agree that co-operation between member states of the European Community is particularly desirable when considering the provision of help to those most in need. To what extent is there co-operation with the Replublic of Ireland to help our rural communities?

Mr. Hanley: In view of the similar social and economic conditions in the border areas of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, the potential for co-operation between the two Administrations is considerable. Having established our respective rural development frameworks, we have now set up the cross-border steering committee, which comprises officials of the two Departments responsible for rural development. That committee, which had its first meeting last month, will examine progress on local programmes and will co-ordinate action in response to joint plans developed by the two cross-border communities. I have every confidence, therefore, that Dr. Woods and I will be able to co-operate in resolving the issues referred to us by that committee.

Mr. John D. Taylor: In view of the call by the farmers unions in Scotland and Wales for a ban on the importation

of Irish beef, has the Minister made any representations to Republican Ministers about the widespread use of clenbuterol, or angel dust, in the Republic?

Mr. Hanley: I am grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's question. He is absolutely right that putting clenbuterol into animals for slaughter is bad for the reputation of people in general, bad for the reputation of the Republic of Ireland and particularly bad for the reputation of Northern Ireland. We have a clean and green image and produce the healthiest meat possible for consumption and we must do nothing to harm that image. We regularly discuss this matter with the Republic of Ireland, as any deficiency on its part would hurt us, too.

Tourism

7. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on tourism in the Province.

Mr. Brooke: Very encouraging progress is being made in promoting Northern Ireland as a serious holiday destination, improving the quality of the overall tourist product and increasing the contribution of tourism to economic development. In 1990, a record year, over 1·1 million visitors spent £153 million in Northern Ireland and there was a 40 per cent. increase over 1989 in the number of pure holiday visitors. Projects to increase and improve tourist accommodation and amenities are being developed with assistance from Government, the International Fund for Ireland and the European Community.

Mr. Bruce: I thank my right hon. Friend for that excellent news. Can he comment on the co-operation between the Province and the Republic in marketing the whole island of Ireland to ensure that even more overseas visitors come to that beautiful country?

Mr. Brooke: The number of pure holiday visitors from the Republic increased by over 50 per cent. last year, but the Northern Ireland tourist board is working with Bord Failte on a joint marketing programme designed to increase the number of visitors to the island of Ireland as a whole. With the help of the International Fund for Ireland, the two boards operate a joint Ireland desk in the British Tourist Authority office in London and undertake joint marketing programmes in north America and Europe. Facilities are being developed to exploit the potential in genealogy-based tourism throughout Ireland.

Mr. Beggs: I welcome the Secretary of State's statement and congratulate all those involved in promoting tourism in Northern Ireland. I should like it to be understood that we in Northern Ireland do not expect our tourism promotion to be taken over by Bord Failte. If district councils in Northern Ireland are to have a meaningful role in promoting tourism and job creation within their areas, can the Secretary of State give us an assurance that he will ask the planners to deal more sympathetically with applications that have district council approval for facilities to cater for the tourists who are coming now and the many more that we expect in the future?

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his support for the efforts of those involved and his endorsement of them. It is gratifying that, whereas 10 years ago only one in nine of visitors to Northern Ireland was a pure holiday visitor, the figure is now one in five. I shall draw to the attention of my hon. Friend the Member for Wiltshire, North (Mr. Needham) when he returns from America the matters concerning district councils and planning.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Further to that supplementary question, will the Minister also have a word with the planners about hotel accommodation, especially in the County Antrim area, and find out why so many obstacles are being put in the way of hoteliers who want to improve their facilities?

Mr. Brooke: I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Wiltshire, North is concerned to improve hotel accommodation throughout the Province, so I shall draw the hon. Gentleman's remarks to his attention.

Mr. Jim Marshall: Does the Secretary of State have any further plans for undertaking joint initiatives between the Province and the Republic? Does the Secretary of State accept that the tourist industry in the island as a whole was affected adversely by British Airways' decision to stop the London-Dublin link? Will he give an undertaking to the House that he will have discussions with the chair of British Airways to try to reintroduce that important link between London and Dublin?

Mr. Brooke: I was asked specifically about tourism in Northern Ireland. My understanding is that the decision by British Airways was a commercial one based on the traffic, but I shall discuss that, too, with my hon. Friend the Member for Wiltshire, North when he returns.

Cross-border Security

8. **Mr. Cyril D. Townsend:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on cross-border security co-operation between the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic.

Dr. Mawhinney: Measures to improve security co-operation, particularly in the border area, are regularly discussed at Anglo-Irish Conference meetings, most recently on 17 October. At that meeting both Governments reaffirmed their determination to work together to enhance security co-operation in every way possible. Close and active security co-operation remains a major objective of the British Government in their discussions with the Irish Government and both Governments are fully committed to achieving further progress.

Mr. Townsend: Will my hon. Friend make sure that close co-operation with the politicians in the south, whoever they may be, remains the keystone of the Government's security policy? Can he confirm that relations between the Chief Constable of the RUC and the Commissioner of the Garda are good and that they meet frequently? Is he satisfied with the present arrangements for hot pursuit?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He is right to stress the importance of close security co-operation between the two Governments. Relations between the Chief Constable and the Commissioner of the Garda are very good, as are relations between their respective forces.

Sir Patrick Duffy: Has the Minister noticed the press reports that a member of the Ulster Defence Association inner council has claimed that there could be further cross-border attacks by loyalist paramilitaries—a report that was echoed recently by the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary? Will the Minister therefore continue to give the highest priority to the cross-border security co-operation mentioned in the question?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman and I certainly give him the assurance that he seeks. As he will be aware, for the most part attacks have been going in the direction opposite to that to which he drew attention. We deplore attacks in either direction across the border.

Citizens Charter

9. **Mr. Hayward:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the application of the citizens charter to Northern Ireland.

Dr. Mawhinney: Although the principles set out in the citizens charter White Paper apply throughout the United Kingdom, the structures for the administration of public services in Northern Ireland are different from those in Great Britain. Accordingly, when the White Paper was launched in July, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced that he would publish a separate Northern Ireland charter. It will usefully reinforce the important principles contained in the White Paper as they will be applied in the Province. The Northern Ireland charter will be launched shortly.

Mr. Hayward: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Will he confirm that his answer does not imply that the standards applied in Northern Ireland will be different from those in the rest of the United Kingdom?

Dr. Mawhinney: I can certainly offer my hon. Friend and the people of Northern Ireland that assurance.

Mr. Alton: Given the creditable support that the Minister has previously given to integrated education in Northern Ireland, will he ensure that provision is made within the citizens charter to develop integrated education and to facilitate the opportunity for children in Northern Ireland to enter such education? Is not that the best investment that we can make in the long-term future for that troubled area?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's kind personal comment and for his continuing support over many years for the policy of integrated education. The best possible defence of that policy is that it is now available in statute as a third option which the parents of Northern Ireland can exercise. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the citizens charter and the parents charter which will follow from it in Northern Ireland will not undermine that policy initiative.

Rev. William McCrea: Does the Minister agree that the best right for the people of the United Kingdom under any citizens charter would be the right to live and to go about their daily work without the continual threat of terrorism? We have had 20 long years of murder and destruction in the Province. What can the Minister tell the people of Northern Ireland after a night of carnage in the city of Belfast?

Dr. Mawhinney: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say that the right to life and to not being molested or attacked is fundamental. He will also know of the bravery and dedication of the security forces and the Royal Ulster Constabulary as they have sought to pursue terrorists and those who wantonly break the law. He should also be in no doubt of the effectiveness of that policy bearing in mind the fact that the Chief Constable said recently that more than four out of five terrorist incidents are thwarted and never take place. I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees that that is a commendable advance by the RUC and the security forces, although it should not lead to complacency, because we shall not be satisfied until five out of five incidents are thwarted.

Training

10. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the level of expenditure on training in Northern Ireland in 1978-79; what is the figure for the current financial year; and what is the percentage increase in real terms.

Mr. Hanley: Public expenditure on training was £23·4 million in 1978-79 and £90 million in the current financial year, an increase in real terms of 45 per cent. There is also substantial private investment by employers in training for their staff which the Government encourage through the manpower training scheme.

Mr. Coombs: Does my hon. Friend agree that the people of Ulster can only benefit in future from a more highly skilled work force? In that context, are not the figures excellent? Do the figures include expenditure on work experience and, if so, what is that figure?

Mr. Hanley: I thoroughly agree with my hon. Friend that peace in Northern Ireland will be hastened by a healthy economy and by a well-trained work force. As for work experience, I am grateful for the reminder. Action for Community Employment—ACE—is providing an extra £50 million in 1991-92 and 9,850 places of work experience.

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: Does the Minister agree that it is rather pointless to train individuals in any field if, when they are qualified, their qualifications are not properly recognised? For example, when will the Minister reintroduce plumbers' registration in Northern Ireland so that consumers are properly protected?

Mr. Hanley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his comments. He is one of the greatest plumbers ever elected to the House. I shall raise the issue with my hon. Friend the Member for Wiltshire, North (Mr. Needham), who is currently trying to drum up inward investment into Northern Ireland from north America.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. French:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 November.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings

with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. French: Has my right hon. Friend seen the opinion poll in *The Guardian* this morning which shows very strong support for his stand on Europe, with the vast majority of people having confidence in the benefits for business purposes of a single market, but showing understandable scepticism about the implications of a single currency? Did he also notice that twice as many people would trust him to negotiate on Europe for this country as would trust the Leader of the Opposition?

The Prime Minister: I did notice with some interest that particular survey. I believe that a majority of people in this country want to make a success of our membership of the Community. There have been many positive developments, a large number of them led by this country such as the introduction of the single market. I see no reason for us to be fearful of developments in the Community—it is often an opportunity, not a risk.

Mr. Kinnock *rose—[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. This takes a lot of time out of Question Time.

Mr. Kinnock: Will the Prime Minister take this opportunity to tell us why over the last year the unemployment record of his Government is by far the worst of any in the European Commuity?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, unemployment is rising right across the industrial world almost without exception—in the United States, Japan, Italy, France and Canada. What we are beginning to see in this country—and I welcome it very much—is a sharp slowdown in the rise in unemployment. This is the third successive month that that has happened. I very much hope that that trend will be continued. It is too early to be entirely sure, but it looks as though the tide may well have turned.

Mr. Kinnock: In the last 12 months net unemployment in the whole of the European Community has gone up by 940,000. Of that total, 768,000—80 per cent.—has been in this country. Is not it clear from those figures that the unique disadvantage suffered by the people of Britain is that they have this Government with the right hon. Gentleman's policies, which depend on putting people out of work?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman might look close to home before he makes that general assertion. Unemployment in his constituency has fallen by 37 per cent. since the last general election. The number of new vacancies notified to jobcentres is now beginning to rise. That is a welcome sign. The change in the unemployment position is welcome and I very much hope that it will continue. I thought that the right hon. Gentleman would have welcomed that and not tried to isolate the problems of this country as he is well aware that they are occurring everywhere else.

Mr. Kinnock: My reference arose because the Prime Minister was trying to obscure his record. If he is interested in looking close to home, he should note the fact that while unemployment in my constituency has, tragically, gone up by the figure he mentioned in the course of the past 12 months, it has gone up in his constituency by 110 per cent. That is very close to home.

Will he now answer the question why in the other 11 countries of the European Community the total rise in unemployment in the past 12 months has been 130,000, while in this country, for which the right hon. Gentleman is responsible, unemployment has risen by nearly 800,000?

Hon. Members: Answer!

Mr. Speaker: Order. Shouting of that kind does not help.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman mentioned his constituency and mine, but he neglected to mention that in both constituencies the latest figures show a fall in unemployment. If the right hon. Gentleman was genuinely concerned about unemployment, he would now withdraw from the table his minimum wage policy—a policy which would increase unemployment dramatically.

Mr. Butcher: Given the opinion poll results in *The Guardian* today, which show that a clear and growing majority of people are against further moves towards European monetary and political union, does my right hon. Friend find it rather curious that both the Liberal Democrats and the Labour party favour unilateral disarmament on the question of federalism? To what does he attribute their unaccustomed bravery on that issue?

The Prime Minister: I find Opposition Members' position on Europe curious. They appear to be prepared to sign up indiscriminately to anything—to a federal Europe, to huge extensions in competence and to control over foreign policy, defence and immigration. There is no sign from either the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) or the Leader of the Opposition that they would draw the line anywhere on transfer of authority to Brussels.

Q2. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Beith: Does the Prime Minister agree that although there is scope for compromise on many matters at Maastricht, the one issue on which it is impossible to compromise is the difference between those who believe that Britain could and should join in a single currency and those who believe that we should not do so at any price and that we should never even have joined the exchange rate mechanism? Had he not better make that clear to both the Conservative and Labour Members who still believe that Britain could stay out of the developments that will take place in Europe?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman might also bear in mind the fact that his party should take account of many of the dangers of what is proposed, for at the moment the Liberal Democrats seem prepared to sign up indiscriminately to what is proposed from anywhere within Europe.

Mr. David Evans: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Conservative party is proud to have reduced the basic rate of tax from 33p in the pound to 25p and the upper rate from 98p to 40p? Can he confirm that we shall have one

Budget next year and shall not burden the British people with a massive payment of back tax, as is suggested by crackpot Opposition Members?

The Prime Minister: I can confirm that we shall have one Budget next year—and that we shall have one the year after and the year after that, as well.

Q3. **Mr. Flannery:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Flannery: When will the Prime Minister apologise to the British people for the disgraceful inequities and sheer misery caused all over the country by the poll tax, which he was one of the first people to promote? Does he realise that his failure to do so brings his integrity into severe question? May I suggest that he apologises in a broadcast from No. 10 Downing street, which I understand he occupies temporarily, and that he should give some thought——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is taking a long time. If that is done, I hope that it can be done here.

Mr. Flannery: He could then give some thought to the inequities of the council tax, so called, which is the nasty twin brother of the poll tax and which will leave debris —caused by the Prime Minister and the Conservative party—all over the country.

The Prime Minister: In case the hon. Gentleman has not noticed, we are in the process of replacing the poll tax.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: May I remind my right hon. Friend of today's unemployment figures for Wales, where both the actual and the seasonally adjusted rates have fallen? Does not that confirm that what we really need is a continuation of my right hon. Friend's policies, not a regional assembly for Wales, which would be an unnecessary quango that would cost the people of Wales £1 million a week?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree. Unemployment has fallen not only in Wales but in Scotland and in the northern region and I hope that it will soon fall elsewhere, too.

Q4. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Wigley: How does the Prime Minister reconcile the welcome emphasis that he placed at the Commonwealth conference on the extension of democratic government throughout the Commonwealth with the continuing reluctance of the Government to give any form of democratic control over their own lives to the people of Wales and Scotland?

The Prime Minister: As I have told the hon. Gentleman on previous occasions, I believe that union in the United Kingdom and the present system of government serve us extremely well. There was a referendum on devolution some years ago and the people of Wales forcefully expressed their view against the principle of devolution on that occasion.

Mr. Marlow: Could my right hon. Friend reinforce the point that he has just made? There are two alternatives. One is the preferred alternative for Scotland and Wales: the status quo. The other alternative for Scotland is independence. The crackpot halfway-house idea of the Labour party, in which Scottish institutions look after Scottish affairs and Scottish Members of Parliament dabble in English affairs, would be unacceptable to the people of England.

The Prime Minister: I am in no doubt that the right future for this country is to maintain the union between the United Kingdom and Scotland. Other proposals have no credibility. The self-styled Scottish convention was self-appointed and is unrepresentative, and the introduction of tax-raising powers for Scotland would make it the highest-taxed part of the United Kingdom and would destroy and inward investment that has done so much for its standard of life.

Q5. **Mr. Livingstone:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Livingstone: Will the Prime Minister take time this week to write to the broadcasting authorities to say that he is willing to take part in a live, televised debate between the party leaders during the next general election campaign?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman knows better than to put questions like that now.

Mr. Bill Walker: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Scottish Conservative party has debated devolution and that the proposals now on offer from the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats are flawed and fraudulent? Will he further confirm that they were not an issue in the recent by-election in Scotland?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend knows, the Government remain fully committed to the union—a point which is well recognised in Scotland. The reality of change is certainly understood by the Scottish business community which well knows the impact that some of the alternatives would have on Scotland—they would not have a happy impact.

Q6. **Mr. Sillars:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Sillars: When will the Prime Minister of England and that lackey of his in St. Andrew's house admit that they are bereft of all moral and political authority to govern the people of Scotland? Why will not the Prime Minister accept the challenge of a referendum? Is he feared that he will lose and that independence will win?

The Prime Minister: The right to govern Scotland flows from general elections. The hon. Gentleman may have noted what a Labour Member said the other day:

"The party which holds a majority in the United Kingdom Parliament has a mandate for the whole United Kingdom."

Q7. **Mr. Arbuthnot:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Can my right hon. Friend comment on the recent improvements unveiled in the Guy's hospital patients charter, with 3,500 more patients treated in the first six months, with better staff conditions and with lower waiting lists? Can he compare these facts about the national health service with the fictions put out by the Labour Front Bench?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. Just a few months ago, Opposition Members were telling us that trust hospitals would fail and that they should be judged by the simple test of whether they do more or less work on NHS patients. With regard to Guy's, we now know that they do more and are a success. We will have more of them.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Later.

Lockerbie

3.22 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Douglas Hurd): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the Lockerbie investigation and its implications.

My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate has today announced the issue of warrants for the arrest of two Libyan intelligence officers against whom, on the basis of the evidence available, the Procurator Fiscal has brought charges alleging their involvement in the descruction of Pan Am flight 103 on 21 December 1988. The American authorities have taken similar action. The text of the warrant and of the Lord Advocate's announcement are being placed in the Library of the House.

Two hundred and seventy people were killed at Lockerbie. The relatives and friends of those victims have suffered and continue to suffer great pain and sorrow and the House will be thinking of them today. As the Lord Advocate has said, a demand is being made of the Libyan authorities for the surrender of the accused to stand trial. I repeat that demand on behalf of the whole Government and I know that the House will unreservedly endorse it.

The accusations levelled at Libyan officials are of the gravest possible kind. As the warrants which the Lord Advocate will be making public make clear, the charges allege that the individuals acted as a part of a conspiracy to further the purposes of the Libyan intelligence services by criminal means and that those means were acts of terrorism. This was a mass murder which is alleged to involve the organs of government of a state. Libyan officials have been accused of such a crime, not only in Scotland and America, but in France where arrest warrants were issued on 30 October over the destruction of flight UTA 772 in September 1989. We are consulting the United States and other friendly Governments, many of whom lost nationals in Pan Am flight 103, about the next steps.

I understand that the investigation has revealed no evidence to support the suggestion of involvement by other countries. I pay tribute to all those whose untiring work under the direction of the Lord Advocate over almost three years has produced this remarkable outcome. In particular, I pay tribute to the work of the Dumfries and Galloway constabulary and all those in many parts of the world who have helped with the gathering of evidence and information. We are grateful for all the help given to the investigation in many countries.

We expect Libya to respond fully to our demand for the surrender of the accused. The interests of justice require no less. This was a fiendish act of wickedness and it cannot be passed over or ignored.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): I thank the Foreign Secretary for his statement, and I join him in congratulating the Dumfries and Galloway constabulary and all other law enforcement agencies and forensic experts, both here and in other countries, whose dogged work, obviously of great brilliance, has resulted in the successful outcome of the investigation.

Nothing can ever console those bereaved by that atrocious act of terrorist mass murder for the loss of their loved ones. However, they may be reassured to know that not for one day have the police rested in their determination to bring the perpetrators to justice. I note that the investigation continues. Have we learnt all that we can learn and implemented all appropriate recommendations—such as reconciling baggage tags with passenger lists—emerging from that terrible tragedy?

The Libyans have for some time been sending signals that they wish to resume relations. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that a test of their sincerity will be whether they deliver to the forces of law and order the men for whom warrants of arrest have been issued? If Libyan protestations of non-involvement in that terrorist act are true, they have nothing to fear from a fair trial. If they do not hand over those men for trial, we shall all know what conclusions to draw. In those circumstances, we shall have to consider what action to take in accordance with international law. For Libya can be received back into the world community only when it is clear beyond doubt that it is no longer involved in instigating, assisting and carrying out acts of terrorism that sicken the civilised world.

Mr. Hurd: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. Certainly, as he says, the investigation continues, and one cannot be certain that other evidence may not come to light. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and his predecessor have kept the House informed of developments in aviation security since the disaster. The right hon. Gentleman referred to professions which have been repeated over and over again by Ministers and others of the Libyan Government, that they have turned their backs on terrorism and are now opposed to it. I have warned my colleagues in Europe and elsewhere to be very reserved and cautious about such professions. The right hon. Gentleman set a test with which I would agree.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned, but did not press me on, action which might follow. The House will not expect me to go further than I have today. We are following a course of law. There has been an independent investigation and a decision to issue warrants against two individuals. The next step is to require the handing over of those individuals for trial. Other steps may have to follow, but they are not for today.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): May I add my praise of the Dumfries and Galloway constabulary, in particular the chief constable, Gordon Esson, and detective chief superintendent Stewart Henderson and his team who led the investigation, and also the Lord Advocate and his team for their tremendous support for the police in Dumfries and Galloway?

The people of Lockerbie have welcomed among them the relatives of the 270 who lost their lives in the town. They hope that today's announcement will go some way to easing the sorrow and the memory of those who died in the disaster. The feel that the best result is to bring those murderers to justice. I know that my right hon. Friend will do his very best to do that.

Mr. Hurd: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has represented the people of Lockerbie through this period of anxiety and, for some of them, torment with great dignity and perseverance. I am sure that he is right in his conclusion.

Sir David Steel (Tweddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): In addition to the well-deserved tributes that he has paid to

the local people, will the Foreign Secretary also recognise the work that was carried out by Army units and other voluntary organisations, such as the mountain rescue teams, which had the anguished task of collecting the human and material remains of flight 103, which enabled the evidence to be pieced together and thus led to the charges that have been brought today? If need be, will he contemplate the possibility of going to the United Nations Security Council to press for the transfer to justice of the alleged perpetrators of that uniquely terrible international crime?

Mr. Hurd: The right hon. Gentleman is right on his first point, and I add to his words of thanks. For the reason that I have already given, I should rather not be carried further on the consequential steps today. We do not need to use an intermediary to make the demand that has been made by ourselves and the United States. We can do that direct to the Libyans, and that is what we are doing.

Sir John Farr (Harborough): What steps have been taken towards identifying the explosive that was used? Was it Semtex, and if so, what co-operation have we received from Czechoslovakia in terms of giving Semtex and other modern plastic explosives an identifying character, which the previous Czechoslovak Government refused to do?

Mr. Hurd: I should rather not be drawn into describing the evidence in any particulars. As I have said, my hon. Friend can find the Lord Advocate's announcement in the Library. For obvious legal reasons, I should rather not paraphrase it or embroider on it. My hon. Friend asked a perfectly reasonable consequential question. For some time now, we have been in touch with the Czechoslovak authorities about the production and distribution of Semtex and especially about finding a means of identifying particular batches. Those discussions continue.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): What obligations does the Foreign Secretary think that he has towards the British community of about 5,000 engineers and other workers who are working for Brown Root, Sir Alexander Gibb and partners and 36 other British companies which are involved in the great man-made river project? Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that my colleagues and I who went to Libya, led by my hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant), were assured vehemently—I do not want to be naive about this and can only report back that we were assured vehemently—that Libya was not responsible for the terrible thing that happened at Lockerbie? Will the right hon. Gentleman therefore proceed with the greatest caution, remembering that it is far from clear that the Libyans were responsible for the tragedy of the 1986 bombings and that that responsibility might lie elsewhere, perhaps in Syria?

Mr. Hurd: We are proceeding with care. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will look at what is available in the Library and that he will study it with care in the light of what he heard in Libya to the contrary effect. The hon. Gentleman referred perfectly reasonably to the fact that we have about 5,500 British nationals in Libya. The hon. Gentleman gave the figure correctly. There is no immediate threat, but we shall obviously need to watch the position in that country very carefully. All the British nationals there know that, in the absence of direct diplomatic relations, the scope for consular protection is, in practice, limited, but they should—and no doubt will—keep in close touch with the British interests section of the Italian embassy there.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): In fairness to the Governments of Iran and Syria, with whom we have diplomatic relations, and in view of his comment about there being no involvement from other countries, will my right hon. Friend make it clear that the widespread and detailed reports that the job was commissioned by the Government of Iran from Syrian nationals, who were seized, and was then subcontracted to individuals in Libya, are wholly untrue? In view of the publication of those widespread and detailed reports, and in fairness to our friends in Iran and Syria, does my right hon. Friend feel that he has a duty to make it abundantly clear that, following detailed research, he has discovered that those reports are simply untrue?

Mr. Hurd: The police investigation deals with evidence, not rumours. But it has taken a long time because several lines of inquiry had to be followed not by the Government but by the Scottish police—my hon. Friend will accept that. I deliberately put in that sentence that there was no evidence about the involvement of other Governments because of the consideration which my hon. Friend mentions. He mentioned one part of a line of inquiry. Members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine general command cell in Germany arrested in 1988 clearly had bomb-making equipment, some of which was superficially similar to the Lockerbie bomb. They may well have had plans to attack civil aviation which were derailed when the arrests were made. But the thorough inquiries along that line failed to reveal any direct link between that group and Lockerbie. There were notable differences—especially the timer—between the bombs in which they were involved in making and the Lockerbie bomb.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is great pressure on business today. We have business questions after this and an important debate. I shall allow questions on this matter to continue for a further five minutes, after which we must move on.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): May I also send congratulations to the constabulary of Dumfries and Galloway? I understand the Secretary of State's reluctance to discuss the consequential steps that Her Majesty's Government may have to take if the Libyans are not forthcoming, but will he give an assurance that he is taking suitable precautions against the consequential measures which the Libyans might themselves adopt? I have no doubt that he recalls the last time that the Government assisted the United States Government in actions against state-sponsored terrorism from Libya. The Libyans retaliated by making substantial supplies of munitions for arms available to the IRA. Shipments came into Northern Ireland during the period when the Foreign Secretary was Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, undoubtedly much to his embarrassment.

I hope that the Foreign Secretary will advise the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if he has not already done so, that the co-operation that he is supposed to get from the Irish Republic in this matter is a broken reed.

Mr. Hurd: I do not want to be drawn on co-operation with the Irish Government. I informed the Irish Foreign Minister yesterday of the broad scope of the announcement that I intended to make today. The hon. Gentleman is right to this extent: in any steps decided on in consultation and concert with other friendly Governments we shall have to weigh carefully the consequences and precautions that need to follow.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): What is my right hon. Friend's estimate of the chances of the Libyan authorities responding favourably to the extradition request? If, as one must suspect, the chances are pretty low, does my right hon. Friend understand that the House will press him on what course of action the British Government intend to take? Can he at least say today that our Government have a firm and strong plan in mind, especially as we were somewhat weak in dealing with some of the Syrian terrorist episodes from official sources.

Mr. Hurd: I would rather not speculate in answer to my hon. Friend's point, but I note what he says. I am sure that the pressure of which he speaks will reflect strong public opinion.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): Does the Foreign Secretary accept that if the perpetrators of this atrocity are eventually caught, no one will be happier than me? Does he agree that it is unwise to use words such as "success" at this stage and to hand out applause to the various parties involved before a fair trial in front of all the evidence has taken place?

Mr. Hurd: I think that, whatever happens hereafter, anyone who studies the documents in the Library or anyone who has followed the investigation will realise that it was a remarkable and complex investigation. That is what I have said.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): Under what legal authority were the warrants issued? Was it the domestic application of a multilateral convention? If so, is not that an excellent precedent for dealing with war crimes committed in Iraq and Yugoslavia?

Mr. Hurd: That is not really a question for me, but the warrants were clearly issued under Scottish law. It was a straightforward matter and the crimes committed were committed under Scottish law.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): I, too, congratulate the Scottish police force and its international colleagues on the excellent work that they have done. Does the Foreign Secretary agree that the greatest tribute that we can pay to the innocent victims is to ensure that the perpetrators of the crime are brought to justice? Will the right hon. Gentleman explain exactly how that will be done? Will it be done through an international organisation such as the United Nations or will there be individual state action? Given the obvious Libyan involvement, will the right hon. Gentleman guarantee that there will be no diplomatic recognition of Libya while Gadaffi remains in power?

Mr. Hurd: I do not want to range wider than I have. A crime of mass murder has been committed. There has been an independent investigation, and as a result warrants have been issued against two individuals who are officials of the Libyan Government. We and the United States Government have asked that the two individuals be handed over. We have done that directly and there is no ambiguity about it. We await the response.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Later, after business questions.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: My point of order is on this matter.

Mr. Speaker: That does not matter. I will take the point of order later. That is the usual procedure.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: No, Mr. Speaker. My point of order is on this matter.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall take the hon. and learned Gentleman's point of order at the usual time.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: As a former Law Officer, why was I not called to ask a question about a prosecution in Scotland?

Mr. Speaker: I think that we shall have the business statement from the Leader of the House first.

Business of the House

3.51 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): May I ask the Leader of the House to tell us the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 18 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Competition and Service (Utilities) Bill

TUESDAY 19 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Education (Schools) Bill

WEDNESDAY 20 NOVEMBER AND THURSDAY 21 NOVEMBER—Debate on the European Community on a Government motion

FRIDAY 22 NOVEMBER—Debate on nuclear defence on a motion for the Adjournment of the House

MONDAY 25 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill

Motion on the Library Charges (England and Wales) Regulations

The Chairman of Ways and Means is expected to name opposed private business for consideration at seven o'clock

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committee B will meet at 10.30 am on Wednesday 20 November, to consider documents Nos. 4173/91, 4174/91 and 4175/91 relating to copyright and neighbouring rights.

[Wednesday 20 November
European Standing Committee B
Relevant European Community Documents
4173/91
4174/91 } *Copyright*
4175/91
Relevant Reports of European Legislation Committee
HC 29-xii (1990-91) and HC 29-xviii (1990-91)].

Dr. Cunningham: When we debate the Education (Schools) Bill next week, will the Leader of the House ensure that the Secretary of State for Education and Science publishes the report that he commissioned on the future of Her Majesty's inspectors of schools, which seems to have been suppressed by the Secretary of State? Is not this a clear example of the double standards of the Secretary of State for Education and Science? He introduces a Bill requiring schools to publish more information about their activities while he is suppressing information about the activities of his own Department. There could be no greater deception of the public and parents.

When can we expect to see the terms of the motion that is to be debated next week on developments in the European Community? I hope that the Leader of the House recognises that it would be of interest and, no doubt, of benefit to all his right hon. and hon. Friends, as well as to the Opposition, to see the terms of the motion as soon as possible. In addition, it would be helpful if we could also know, and quickly, who will be speaking from the Government Front Bench during the two-day debate. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will quickly be able to help us with that information.

May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 136?

[That this House notes with deep concern the state of health care within the Parkside and Riverside health authorities which has prompted five consultants and 10 general practitioners to call for an inquiry into allegations that both authorities are failing to meet legal requirements on patient care; and further urges the Government to conduct such an inquiry as a matter of great urgency.]

As the right hon. Gentleman will see, the motion, which concerns the Parkside and Riverside health authorities, was tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe). Is the Leader of the House aware that doctors and consultants have alleged that those authorities are failing to meet their statutory duties in patient care because of a lack of resources? Is not this a serious state of affairs? Does not it cast great doubts on the efficacy of the Government's policies towards the health service? Will we have a statement from the Secretary of State for Health next week about the two authorities?

Will it be possible to have a debate next week on electoral reform in the Conservative party? Has the Leader of the House seen the quotes in newspapers today about his colleagues behaving as if they were "rooms full of imbeciles", to quote the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens)? What about the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit), who had to climb on to the table to get his ballot paper? After all that the Government have had to say about the conduct of elections and ballots in trade unions, is not it shameful that they cannot even guarantee one person one vote in their own party?

Mr. MacGregor: On the hon. Gentleman's question about the Education (Schools) Bill, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science made it clear in the House on 6 June that the review of HMI, to which reference was made in a newspaper this morning, was internal advice to Ministers, and that he did not intend to publish it. It is for Ministers to make up their minds on any internal advice from Departments, and there is often a great deal of it from different areas within Departments.

My right hon. and learned Friend has made his decisions clear. He has informed the House about a number of relevant facts and about other matters that follow from those decisions, and I have no doubt that he will do so again in the debate next week. The Government will be making the position absolutely clear.

Dr. Cunningham: But not publishing the report.

Mr. MacGregor: My right hon. and learned Friend will make his position on the decisions that he made absolutely clear, and he will fully report to Parliament on them.

On the question about the European debate next week, I confirm that, because of the great importance of the matter and, as the hon. Gentleman said, the extensive interest in it not only in the House but elsewhere, we are arranging for the motion to be published tomorrow. The House will be able to consider the terms of the motion well in advance of the debate.

Dr. Cunningham: What about the Government's speakers?

Mr. MacGregor: As the hon. Gentleman knows, we have to consider such matters. I shall, in the usual way, inform the Opposition and others about who those speakers will be.

[Mr. MacGregor]

The hon. Gentleman requested a statement on the Parkside and Riverside health authorities. I do not think that that is necessary, because the facts are clear. Indeed, those facts dispute a great number of the allegations. More money is spent in Riverside and Parkside districts than anywhere else in the North West Thames region. This year, patient care activity at Parkside is likely to be up 30 per cent. on last year. Riverside is carrying out routine elective surgery and waiting lists are falling. No less than £206 million is being invested in the new Westminster and Chelsea hospital, which will be the most modern teaching hospital in the country. In view of those facts and that statement, I do not think that a further statement is necessary.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman referred to a certain election, in which there was a great deal of interest. Under our rules it is for the outgoing chairman and his committee to decide how the election is conducted.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): Following the statement of our right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, will my right hon. Friend arrange for a debate on the relative benefits of the investigative and prosecuting services in England and Scotland? As the investigation has resulted in an announcement—although our right hon. Friend was shady in saying so—[HON. MEMBERS: "Shady?"] Our right hon. Friend was cautious in saying that the investigation has resulted in charges of the murder of 260 people, conspiracy to murder, and various statutory contraventions of aviation legislation. As that is due alone to the particular characteristics of the investigative, prosecuting, criminal and corroborative services in Scotland, will my right hon. Friend arrange a debate, just as a reminder that when those who are accused are convicted, if found guilty, they will not thereafter get away with it as they do in England, thanks to the rottenness of English law?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. and learned Friend paid tribute to the work of the investigating authorities in this case and he has made his point about the Scottish authorities. I do not think that it is necessary to have a debate and I do not want to enter into the issue now.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Following the clear precedent set by the Secretary of State for Health with regard to expenses for the Cleveland inquiry, can we expect the Secretary of State for Scotland to make an announcement next week that he will give funding to the Orkney islands council to assist with the expenses being incurred there with regard to the judicial inquiry into events in South Ronaldsay rather than the whole burden falling on some 15,000 poll tax payers in Orkney?

Before we debate the Education (Schools) Bill next week, can we be told whether the Government intend to withdraw the current Bill and issue a new one, because, as things stand at the moment, the section requiring information from schools in England and Wales applies to Scotland only and the section requiring information from schools in Scotland applies to England and Wales only? Will there be a league table of Cabinet Ministers on their attention to detail?

Mr. MacGregor: We have no intention of withdrawing the Bill, but I shall consider the hon. Gentleman's point. I shall draw his first point to the attention of my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): My right hon. Friend has given the good news that we are to have a two-day debate on Europe next week, but will the announcement that we are to learn the terms of the motion tomorrow cause embarrassment on the Opposition Benches? Given that they have changed their minds seven times on the principle of the EC, that may not give them enough time to change it again, or it might encourage them to incorporate in their amendment the views of the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) as expressed in *The Daily Telegraph* earlier this week.

Mr. MacGregor: As I understand it, it is many more on the Opposition Benches than the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney. I have no doubt that those points will be made in the debate. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the large number of times that the Labour party has changed its policy on the issue. Ours has been clear for many years.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Is the Leader of the House aware that, on average, one member of the armed forces dies on duty every week, some of them while training, but the Ministry of Defence refuses to disclose full details of the boards of inquiry, causing deep distress to the relatives who are entitled to the facts? May we have a debate on that next week please?

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot promise a debate, but I should like to say something about it, because I know that the right hon. Gentleman has an early-day motion on the subject. We well understand and greatly sympathise with the grief and distress of the relatives of service men and women killed in the course of their duties. It is never the Ministry of Defence's intention to exacerbate that by withholding information on the circumstances surrounding the death. However, there are legitimate reasons why some documents, including boards of inquiry reports, must remain confidential to the Department. To assist bereaved relatives the MOD will always provide, on request, a statement summarising the board of inquiry report and will be as helpful as possible in answering any subsequent questions.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): I endorse the point made by the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley). My right hon. Friend will know that a constituent of mine, Simeon Ferrante, died on parachute training and during the two years since that date his father has been trying most energetically to get to the facts, not just to find out what happened to his son, but to ensure that a similar accident does not happen again. The problem with the board of inquiry is that there is no alternative way of testing the evidence and making clear whether the MOD has some faults to put right. It is essential that we have a debate so that the MOD understands that its policy of secrecy puts it always in the wrong.

Mr. MacGregor: I have given a fairly full answer to the question and I would simply say to my hon. Friend that, as he will know, there are ways in which he can pursue the

matter in the House. I will just repeat that the MOD endeavours to be as helpful as possible in answering any questions on individual cases.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): In view of the remarks made by the Leader of the House to the Committee studying the question of changing parliamentary hours, when he suggested that Members of Parliament should have only a four-day week, will the right hon. Gentleman have a few words within the next few minutes with the Secretary of State for Energy, and tell him to withdraw that section of the Coal Industry Bill that seeks to allocate a larger number of working hours—up to 48 hours a week—to miners? That shows the Government's hypocrisy, for they are prepared to recommend four-day weeks for Members of Parliament and Cabinet Ministers, but longer hours for miners working underground.

Mr. MacGregor: I am very surprised with the hon. Gentleman, who obviously has not read my comments to the Committee. I said that Members of Parliament also have substantial constituency functions to undertake, and Fridays and weekends are often the only times when right hon. and hon. Members representing constituencies outside London can perform them. I was looking for ways in which, included within the very lengthy period that we spend in the House during the week—which is well beyond 48 hours—Members of Parliament could more easily attend in their constituencies during weekdays. I am sure that I speak for nearly every right hon. and hon. Member when I say that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) is misleading the public if he is suggesting that Members of Parliament would work only a four-day week if sometimes the House did not sit on Fridays.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is increasing support in the country for a national lottery? Will he arrange a debate on that subject—if not next week, then before Christmas—so that the views of the House may be heard?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not want to discourage my hon. Friend, but such a debate certainly cannot be arranged for next week and, as we have a great deal of business to complete before Christmas, I do not see much opportunity for a debate in Government time before then.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Will the Leader of the House make a statement next week on early-day motion 137, which concerns the proposed closure of Westwood hospital?

[That this House notes that, shortly after this Government rubber stamped approval for the second hospital trust in Bradford, the trust announced closure proposals for Westwood Hospital for mentally handicapped people which will involve dumping patients into varying degrees of community care in order to sell off the land for residential development from this tranquil sheltered site which should be the basis for a village community for the mentally handicapped; and recognises that instead patients will be treated like pawns by a group of trust managers who put profit and puffed up salaries before patients whilst riding roughshod over the wishes of relatives and patients alike in an act of betrayal towards the mentally handicapped, one of the most vulnerable sections of our community.]

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that that second Bradford trust hospital was based on a false prospectus, because during the period of the application—which was so eagerly rubber-stamped by the Government—no mention was made of the fact that the trusts would close a hospital for mentally handicapped people against the policy of the Department of Health, which encourages village communities for such people? Instead of the site in question being used to benefit the mentally handicapped, it will be sold off for residential development and the hospital will be closed—which will be a serious blow against the provisions for mentally handicapped people.

Mr. MacGregor: I looked into that matter, because the hon. Gentleman has raised it before. The Bradford project to which he refers long predates the establishment of the local NHS trust and is all about providing more homely community facilities for the people concerned. All the revenue from the sale will be reinvested in community services. The hon. Gentleman should support that project, rather than denigrate local efforts and mix them up with NHS trusts—which are, across the country, already demonstrating that they are a successful method of reforming the NHS—as is the case at Guy's.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): In view of the considerable constitutional implications of the outcome of the Maastricht summit, will my right hon. Friend consider devoting more time to debating developments in the European Community, so that all the views of Back Benchers can be expressed? If my right hon. Friend cannot devote more time to hearing the views of Back Benchers, how are the wishes of the British public to be adequately expressed?

Mr. MacGregor: We are allowing substantial time to enable the House to debate those matters, including a two-day debate next week. My hon. Friend will realise that I must bear in mind the very important business that the Government have to get through in the current Session, which will require many Second Reading debates before Christmas.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): In view of widespread concern about the workings of opted-out hospitals, and of the implications for an area such as my own if an application is approved, will the Leader of the House arrange a debate both on what was in and what was out of the Select Committee on Health's report on that topic? Must we wait for such a debate until the Privileges Committee has succeeded in swatting the Tory sneak?

Mr. MacGregor: I am making arrangements with the Clerk for the Committee to meet as soon as is practicable, but I certainly do not think that we shall be able to have a general debate on the matter in the forthcoming weeks. As I have said, we have a great deal of other business to handle.

Mr. James Cran (Beverley): It is indeed welcome news that we are to debate the future of the European Community next week. In the light of what has been said by my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill), however, will my right hon. Friend think again about the amount of time that is to be allowed? I know perfectly well what my right hon. Friend has done to secure a two-day debate, but the fact remains that most Back Benchers will be crowded out. Essentially, the debate will be reserved for Privy Councillors, former Ministers and the like, and we shall not get a look-in.

[Mr. James Cran]

If my right hon. Friend is unable to do anything about that problem, will he at least ensure that no statements are taken on those two days? Statements would further curtail Back Benchers' time.

Mr. MacGregor: I have nothing to add to what I said earlier. Given all the business that is ahead of us, I feel that two days constitute a large amount of time. I shall, of course, endeavour to avoid the scheduling of statements on those days, but sometimes—today, for instance—a statement is needed urgently, and can be made only on a specific day.

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): I understand that a new Director of Catering has been appointed, and I wish the lady well. May I ask her to examine, as one of her first duties, the continued abuse of our catering facilities by outside organisations? An organisation known as the Tobacco Alliance, for instance, is currently writing to newsagents throughout the country telling them that they are invited to tea at the House of Commons, provided that they bring along their Members of Parliament. That, surely, is a breach of privilege.

Mr. MacGregor: I seem to recollect that the way in which catering facilities are made available for activities in which outsiders can participate was examined recently. I did not know of the specific case referred to by the hon. Gentleman, but I am sure that those concerned will take note of what he has said.

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): Further to what was said by the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, East (Mr. Sayeed), may I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to early-day motion 776?

[That this House, conscious of the fact that real care for the men and women of our armed forces has enabled our country to rely, even to the point of ultimate sacrifice, upon their loyalty, steadfastness and efficiency in times of grave national threat, is astounded to note that, when digging a trench during an official Army exercise in Canada in July 1989, three men of the Grenadier Guards (Adrian Hicks, John Ray and Sean Povey) detonated a six year old unexploed shell which was not only rendered them limbless but caused them such grieivous wounds that Mr. Ray and Mr. Povey are still, after almost two years, in receipt of hospital treatment; notes that the Ministry of Defence find themselves unable, on the grounds of unattributable negligence, to pay compensation; and calls upon the Prime Minister to review this case personally and to ensure that, regardless of the possible legal responsibility of some unknown nation who failed to 'clear' the shell some six years previously, Her Majesty's Government is seen to follow truly a policy that shows an appreciation of human understanding, human dignity and the value of a human life on earth by awarding generous compensation and a return of the accumulated legal costs to these youthful British Grenadiers.]

Despite the successful conclusion of the case, the tabling of that motion indicated that something is very wrong with the present legislation relating to compensation for those who are injured in the course of their duties in the armed forces. The problem, essentially, is that currently the onus is on an injured soldier, sailor or airman to prove negligence by the Government. Surely the onus should be on the Ministry of Defence, as a good employer, to prove negligence by its personnel. In the meantime, the Government merely suggest that service men take out personal accident insurance. Surely the Ministry of Defence should take out blanket insurance cover for all its personnel.

Mr. MacGregor: As my hon. Friend knows, the matter has been discussed before. As I recall, the early-day motion concerned a specific case. I hope that my hon. Friend will agree that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence and my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces spent a great deal of time in reaching a conclusion that proved satisfactory for all concerned.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Will the Leader of the House reconsider the suggestion by my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) that a debate on internal matters be held next week to avoid a repetition of yesterday's unseemly and undignified scene? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that, in the event of any such debate, the parliamentary Labour party would be entirely willing to supply scrutineers for internal Tory elections to ensure the fairness that, apparently, did not operate yesterday?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not agree; I think that the process was perfectly fair. What yesterday's events demonstrated was the great enthusiasm within the Conservative party to discuss and vote on European matters.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): Since, in practice, most of next week's two-day debate on Europe will be dominated by the thunder and lightning of the twilight of the gods and godesses in the Privy Council, will my right hon. Friend consider extending Wednesday's debate, when there will be no vote, to midnight to give the ordinary squaddie a chance to take part?

Mr. MacGregor: I am not sure that that is an appropriate description. I have to take into account the need to give adequate time for debate and also the wish, expressed in most of the responses to the Committee chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling), that the House should not rise too late at night on these occasions. I shall give thought to my hon. Friend's request, but without commitment.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): May I draw the Minister's attention to clause 17 of the Education (Schools) Bill which relates to an exclusively Scottish matter in what is otherwise an English Bill? It is yet another example of Scottish matters being shoehorned into English legislation. It means also that decisions will be taken by Members of Parliament with no knowledge and experience of or participation in the Scottish education system; the Conservatives have no electoral mandate in Scotland. Will the Minister consider transferring this particularly Scottish clause to the Scottish Grand Committee or to a Scottish Standing Committee for consideration, or drafting a separate Scottish Bill in order to allow informed comment and decision making on it?

Mr. MacGregor: But I would point out to the hon. Gentleman that Scottish Members are entitled to participate and frequently do so in many debates and votes

on many English matters, including the whole of the region of East Anglia. I have not heard them complain about their ability to do that.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): Further to the points that have been raised by my hon. Friends about the European debate and in the interests of fairness to those who sit on the Opposition Benches, I wonder whether my right hon. Friend has done his mathematics to ensure that there will be time for at least a 10-minute speech to be made by each of the 42 Labour party Members who have distanced themselves today from the position of the leader of their party, including the hon. Members for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) and for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett)?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend makes a fair point, but I suspect that quite a number of those 42 will, for one reason or another, not wish to participate in the debate.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): Is the Leader of the House aware of the 22,000-signature petition, handed in to No. 10 Downing street on Tuesday, which calls for urgent action by the Government to stem the badly misnamed practice of joyriding? Why are the Government not giving the matter urgent priority? People's lives are being disrupted daily by that practice, and every day that the Government delay further lives are in danger of being lost.

Mr. MacGregor: I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman's description of joyriding. That is absolutely the wrong word to describe the dreadful practice that takes place. I agree also with him about the need to have legislation as quickly as possible. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman agrees with me that it is important that it should be drafted correctly. The Government intend to bring forward legislation as soon as they possibly can. As I hope and believe that such legislation has support on both sides of the House, I hope that we can pass it speedily.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Will my right hon. Friend arrange for an early debate on the work of the national health service trusts? Is he aware that Guy's hospital, the flagship trust, has been able to report that there has been an 8 per cent. increase in the number of patients treated and a substantial reduction in waiting lists and that it will be giving NUPE employees a Christmas bonus and a salary increase in January? Is not that the sort of progress that anyone who cares for the national health service will welcome?

Mr. MacGregor: I have seen the excellent progress report from the Guy's NHS trust. I am sure that it will be followed by others. I hope that a great deal of publicity will be given to that progress. It illustrates how well the reform is moving after a very short time. I cannot, however, promise a debate next week.

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): During next week's debate on nuclear defence, will the House have an opportunity to debate the case of the British nuclear test veterans? Is the Leader of the House aware that the Government's continued refusal to pay just and adequate compensation to these victims of Britain's nuclear tests is becoming less and less credible as more and more evidence accumulates?

Mr. MacGregor: That will be a matter for the Chair, but the debate will be fairly wide, as it is to be on the Adjournment of the House.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Will the Leader of the House guarantee that in next Friday's debate full account is given to the supremely important issues raised in early-day motion 157?

[That this House recalls that five months before the start of the Gulf War, on 19th April 1990 (Official Report, column 1013-4) the honourable Member for Newport West requested the Government to initiate investigations at the International Atomic Energy Agency into the Iraqi nuclear weapons programme, and that the then Minister of State at the Foreign Office, the Right honourable Member for Bristol West, replied that Iraq was a party to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, "and as such has undertaken not to develop nuclear weapons. We expect Iraq to abide by her international obligations. We do not envisage taking the specific action outlined by the honourable Member."; notes that in a parliamentary answer on 11th November 1991 the Minister of State at the Foreign Office the honourable Member for Grantham, replied to the honourable Member for Newport West "We now know that Iraq circumvented IAEA safeguards in seeking to develop a nuclear weapons capability. This is a cause for concern. The IAEA is considering how to strengthen the system.".]

It recalls that five months before the start of the Gulf war the Government had refused a request to increase the international surveillance of Iraq's nuclear weapons programme on the extraordinary grounds that Iraq had signed the international non-proliferation treaty and the Government believed that Iraq would abide by its obligations and would not build nuclear weapons. As those conditions still exist and 30 other countries might be deceiving the international community, is not it crucial that we now have proper international surveillance of all those unstable countries that might be building nuclear weapons as Iraq would have done? If the war had not started, Iraq would have continued to deceive the world and would have nuclear weapons by now. Is not the most important issue to create world peace by reducing the proliferation of nuclear weapons?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman knows well the Government's position on the proliferation of nuclear weapons. It seems that he has already made his speech for next Friday. It is likely that that could be covered in the debate, but I shall draw to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence the fact that the hon. Gentleman has raised it.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): May I press the Leader of the House further on the proposed closure of Westwood hospital? Is the Secretary of State for Health required to approve the closure and the disposal of the grounds—estimated to be worth at least £11 million—for residential development? Is he aware that, in the bogus consultation exercise before the establishment of the second trust in Bradford, there was no word about the closure of the hospital or the flogging off of the grounds? Is he aware that earlier this year——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We cannot have a debate on this. Will the hon. Gentleman ask a question about next week's business please?

Mr. Madden: The chairman of the health authority told me earlier this year that there was to be a 50 bed——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will the hon. Gentleman ask a question?

Mr. MacGregor: That is a bogus question for the business statement because it is not asking for a debate on a particular point. However, I shall draw the matter to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): With regard to the request made to the Leader of the House to extend next Wednesday's debate to midnight, may I point out that I have the Adjournment debate that night and I would rather be called at 10 o'clock than at midnight?

With regard to next Wednesday's meeting of European Standing Committee B, will the Leader of the House impress upon his ministerial colleagues the need to dispatch the relevant documents to the members of that Committee in plenty of time? The Department of Energy has set a fine benchmark in that regard and other Departments should attempt to achieve that record.

Mr. MacGregor: On the hon. Gentleman's first point, I have noted with interest the view that he expressed. It shows the different considerations that I have to take into account when reaching decisions on questions of business. I shall bear it in mind.

On the second point, the hon. Gentleman knows that I am anxious that, wherever possible, Departments should get the documents to the members of the European Standing Committees as early as they can. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy will have noted the tribute paid to the good lead given by his Department. I am keen that as many Departments as possible should send out the documents quickly. Of course, as the hon. Gentleman knows, the matter is not always in our hands, because some of the documents come rather late from the European Community to the Departments.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): In light of a dramatic increase in crime nationally and, in particular, in my constituency, can we have a statement next week on police numbers and police authority budgets? Will the Leader of the House ask the Home Secretary whether he would be prepared to meet Labour Back Benchers individually to discuss policing problems in their constituencies?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman's second point is not for the business statement. On the first point, with the business that we have next week, it is unlikely that we shall be able to have a specific statement on the question of police numbers.

Points of Order

4.23 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have given notice of my point of order to you and to the Secretary of State for Education and Science, who is in his place. It relates to the Education (Schools) Bill which is due for its Second Reading next Tuesday. Page 382 of "Erskine May" concerns the citing of documents not before the House and makes it clear that a Minister may not

"read or quote from a despatch or other state paper not before the House, unless he is prepared to lay it upon the Table."

It is well known that the Education (Schools) Bill, which seeks to privatise the schools' inspectorate, is a matter of great controversy. The Bill is based partly on an internal review of Her Majesty's inspectorate which the Secretary of State has refused to publish. I disagree with his refusal, although I realise that he is entitled to take that position. He says that it is a confidential document.

That document was today leaked in part in *The Independent* and the newspaper also contained my allegation that the Secretary of State may have misled the House in relation to figures that he quoted last week in the House. Normally, when Ministers face the problem of leaked documents, they refuse to make any comment on the content of the document or, sometimes, on its existence. In doing so, they maintain clear security from the contents of page 382 of "Erskine May". In this case, the Secretary of State has today issued a public statement disputing various parts of the report in *The Independent* and he has sought to quote from other aspects of the internal review which he has said is so far confidential. If I may——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is not a point of order. It would be more correct to raise the matter in debate. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was here earlier, but a question on the matter was raised with the Leader of the House during business questions and he answered it. It is not a point of order for me.

Mr. Straw: With great respect, Mr. Speaker, you may wish to take time to consider the point of order and it is, indeed, a point of order. By his statement today, the Secretary of State has shown his readiness selectively to quote from the review outside the House. Hon. Members of all parties may wish to quote inside the House next Tuesday what the Secretary of State has said. The right hon. and learned Gentleman will no doubt wish to quote from the report. In those circumstances, and given the readiness of the Secretary of State to quote from the report outside the House, surely it is incumbent on him now to lay the report on the Table. It is a point of order for you, Mr. Speaker—although you may wish to take time to consider it—because page 382 of "Erskine May" makes the position absolutely clear. If a Minister wishes to quote from a report or state paper, he must lay it on the Table.

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I will explain briefly to you, to the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) and to the House why the hon. Gentleman is mistaken in what he has just said. I announced to the House in reply to a parliamentary question that we were carrying out the review of Her

Majesty's inspectorate. I made it clear that it would be an internal review carried out by my officials and that it would remain confidential on the usual basis that advice to Ministers remains confidential.

As the hon. Member for Blackburn correctly said, there appears to have been an unauthorised leak to *The Independent*——

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): As opposed to an authorised leak?

Mr. Clarke: Not an authorised leak, but a very unauthorised one.

Not surprisingly, I have commented on the newspaper article. My comments address the article and point out that the proud possessor of the leaked document has drawn some fairly ridiculous conclusions from what he had in front of him.

The question whether I misled the House has been raised. The hon. Member for Blackburn has previously bandied about the numbers. He refers to numbers that were put forward for the size of the inspectorate, which *The Independent* says come from the review carried out by officials on the basis of their proposition. I have given the House the figure of 175 members of Her Majesty's inspectorate, based on the opinion of the senior chief inspector and myself about the number of people required to carry out my policies. The independent, all-powerful HMI needs 175 people to carry out its duties. That figure remains accurate and perfectly straightforward. I have not misled the House in any way and the hon. Member for Blackburn should not make such ridiculous statements.

Mr. Speaker: I think that this is all part of the debate that will take place next week. It is not a matter of order for me. [HON. MEMBERS: "It is."] I repeat that it is not a matter of order for me. It has absolutely nothing at all to do with me. I did not issue the document.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): We are entitled to seek your advice, Mr. Speaker. The Secretary of State has been quoting from the report and the rules in "Erskine May" are clear—if Ministers refer in the Chamber to documents or to reports, they should table them. Is not the best way to clear up the matter in the interests of the Secretary of State and of parents whose children will be affected—of whom I am one—for us all to see the report?

Mr. Clarke: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wish that the Opposition would at least listen to what I say. The hon. Gentleman will find that I did not quote the report, and I advise the Opposition to concentrate not on nonsense in *The Independent* but on the policy of the Bill which will be debated next Tuesday. It will create a stronger and more powerful inspectorate and will introduce regular reports to parents on the results of its inspections. The Opposition should stick to the issue rather than to silly legalistic nonsense.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As a simple fellow, I seek your ruling on a simple question. If it is in order for a male member of the House for the most honourable reasons to take his dog into the Division Lobby—the dog looking after him—why is not it in order for a female hon. Member to take her baby into the Division Lobby? After all, hitherto at any rate, women are the only things that bear babies.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am not responsible for such matters. I think that I shall leave it at that.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek your advice on early-day motion 142 which has been tabled by 17 Opposition Members and which criticises my conduct in an issue in my constituency. Are we to allow a situation to arise in which two local councillors, one of whom will be my opponent in the general election, can instigate on the Order Paper without any investigation an early-day motion that criticises me and which is signed by 17 Opposition Members, none of whom has taken the trouble to talk to me about the rent rises—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will allow the hon. Gentleman to finish.

Mr. Hind: If that is to be allowed, it will mean that, with his colleagues, every Conservative candidate for a Labour-held seat could initiate early-day motions that could equally be signed in ignorance by Conservative Members and we shall have 650 early-day motions every day. They would blight the Order Paper and abuse the system. Is not it time that the matter was sorted out and that members of the Opposition talked to other hon. Members instead of stabbing them in the back for political purposes?

Mr. Speaker: I deprecate the use of the Order Paper for personal attacks on hon. Members, but the early-day motion involved was in order. If it had not been in order, that would have been brought to my attention by the Table Office but that was not the case. We had better proceed.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek your advice on this morning's *Hansard*. I refer to columns 1061-78 and to oral questions. Some Scottish Back Benchers have every sympathy with your earlier strictures on the need for Front-Bench spokesmen and Ministers to offer concise answers to questions. If one reads the exchanges between the Front Benches, one sees that that is where most of the time was taken up. I ask you, Mr. Speaker, at the beginning of Scottish Questions next month, to remind Front-Bench spokesmen and Ministers of your earlier strictures.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has done that himself. In the interests of Back Benchers, I must stress that lengthy questions and answers from the two Front Benches take time from the Back Benchers, and I hope that that will be borne in mind.

Orders of the Day

Coal Industry Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Speaker: There is considerable pressure to speak in the debate, and I propose to put a cautionary 10-minute limit on speeches between 7 and 9 o'clock. However, if Members called before that time bear the limit in mind I hope that it may be possible to relax it later in the evening.

4.35 pm

The Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. John Wakeham): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

This Bill is of great importance to British Coal, enabling the corporation to continue the restructuring of the industry which is essential for its future.

Clause 1 extends the availability of restructuring grant by three years from March 1993 to March 1996 and raises the ceiling on the payment of grant from £1,500 million to £2,500 million. That ceiling will be increasable by order to £3,000 million. Restructuring grant was introduced by section 3 of the Coal Industry Act 1987. It provides support for British Coal's expenditure on redundancy, early retirement, transfers and retraining. It also assists the finances of British Coal Enterprise.

The existing ceiling on the grant is likely to be reached during the next financial year. Without restructuring grant British Coal would face heavy losses and a financial crisis. It is clearly necessary to raise the limit, but the increase is only an increase in the limit. It is not based on a specific view of what any future manpower rundown may be.

The actual requirement for restructuring grant payments will be determined primarily by the degree to which British Coal succeeds in cutting costs further and winning business.

Clause 2 concerns the repeal of the Coal Mines Regulation Act 1908.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): The 1908 Act is most important. Has the Secretary of State arranged for it to be available for us to read? The Act concerns more than just the number of hours to be worked. It has wider implications.

Mr. Wakeham: The Act is available in the Library. I do not have a copy of it here, but I shall explain what the Government have in mind.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) *rose*——

Mr. Wakeham: I had better make a little progress first, then I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Clause 2 concerns the repeal of the Coal Mines Regulation Act 1908. That Act, which regulates hours of work, has long been recognised as out of date by most of those working in the industry—mineworkers and management alike.

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley) *rose*——

Mr. Wakeham: The 1908 Act restricts hours of work to a prescribed period of no more than 7·5 hours. Everyone working in the industry knows that to be too rigid a constraint. The limit reflects neither the latest mining methods nor good mining management.

Mr. John Cummings (Easington): How does the right hon. Gentleman know?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman will not know anything if he shouts instead of listening.

Mr. Cummings: I was 29 years underground.

Mr. Wakeham: Absolutely. If the hon. Gentleman listens to the arguments he may learn something to his benefit.

The 1908 Act does not take account of the technology that has been the backbone of the industry's modernisation and increasing competitiveness. Mechanisation has been under way in the coal industry since the 1950s.

Over a period of 40 years or so the 1908 Act has been becoming increasingly impractical and constraining. It is by adopting greater flexibility in working practices, by developing improved modern management and by investment in modern mining technology that the industry has achieved the improvements in productivity that are so vital to its future.

The safety of mine workers is of paramount importance. The Government's policy is that the much-improved standards that have been achieved must be maintained. The Government will not bring forward any measure that will prejudice safety. Unnecessary fears have been raised by the Opposition.

Mr. Redmond: Does the right hon. Gentleman believe that there should be special legislation for those working underground?

Mr. Wakeham: That question arises in relation to the European directive——

Mr. Redmond: Not just that.

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman has asked me a question; perhaps he will do me the courtesy of listening to the answer.

What replaces the Act depends entirely on whether it is possible to meet the conditions of a European directive that covers these matters. The hon. Gentleman has rightly referred to safety. Before we presented this legislation we consulted the Health and Safety Executive, which advised us that no questions of safety arise under these proposals.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Does the Secretary of State agree that the Health and Safety Executive consists of paid public officials whose responsibility is to the Health and Safety Commission, which has not been consulted?

Mr. Wakeham: As I understand it, the Health and Safety Executive is presenting its views to the Health and Safety Commission. The latter will then know what the position is.

The commencement order for this Act becomes operable after Royal Assent. I give an undertaking that I have no intention of signing the necessary papers to operate the commencement order until a European directive is in place—or at least until I have come to the House to explain what is happening. I have no other intentions at the moment. Opposition Members would be a little wiser if they allowed me to explain the Govenment's

intentions before being so free with their criticism. I shall explain what I intend to do and then allow hon. Members to intervene.

The safety of mine workers is of paramount importance. Government policy is to maintain the much-improved standards that have been achieved. The Government will not introduce any measure that will prejudice safety—the fears that have been raised are ill-founded.

The repeal of the 1908 Act will not prejudice safety. The improving record of mine safety is due primarily to technology. Last year there were 11 fatalities at British Coal workplaces and I am sure that we all agree that that was 11 too many. But at the beginning of the century, when the 1908 Act was introduced, there were more than 1,000 fatalities a year.

The harsh labouring conditions of that era led to the legislation which prescribed a limit of 7·5 hours per shift. But, like so many industries, coal mining has seen major improvements in working conditions over the past 80 years. The industry has long left behind the days of hewing coal by pick and shovel. No one who has a genuine interest in the future of the industry wants to see its efforts being hampered by the antiquated legislation of a bygone era. Conditions in the coal industry have been transformed by mechanisation and by the application of modern technology. Outdated constraints clearly need to be removed if the coal industry is to be able to compete.

The proposed European directive on working time would present the British coal mining industry with a difficult challenge. The directive is still under debate and the outcome is uncertain, but it is clear that a combination of the 1908 Act and the directive could increase the industry's unit costs. It could also reduce the earnings of its employees.

If the directive comes into force, it will apply immediately to British Coal as a public sector body, while private sector companies will not have to comply until the United Kingdom implementing legislation came into force. To ensure that British Coal would have time to negotiate new working agreements, we are including a provision in the Bill to enable the 1908 Act to be repealed by order at the appropriate moment.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): The Minister said that the Government regard safety in the mines as important, so would not it have been reasonable if the Government had entered into a modicum of consultation with the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers, whose statutory responsibilities involve safety? Does not he understand that one reason for the advances in safety in the mines has been the existence of legislation such as that which he proposes to dismantle?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman's second point is far from realistic, but the first part of his question was perfectly reasonable. To conclude the negotiations in time we have to repeal the Act in steps because the European directive, if agreed, will come into force immediately. I do not intend to sign the order repealing the 1908 Act until the European directive comes into force, but by the time that happens we must have held the negotiations because the directive comes into force immediately.

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): I concur with the Secretary of State's remarks about British Coal's excellent safety record, but does he agree that all the advances in safety in mining took place during the period of nationalisation when there was a mines inspectorate, an independent body under the jurisdiction of the Department of Energy? Even now, under the Health and Safety Executive, it can make independent judgments.

Mr. Wakeham: I have considerable doubt whether the hon. Gentleman is right that all the improvements in safety have taken place since nationalisation. I certainly agree with him that we should pay tribute to the significant improvements in safety since 1946 when the mines were nationalised. They have largely been a result of enormous improvements in technology and investment.

Mr. Skinner: The Government say that they will oppose the bureaucrats in Brussels in respect of the advances in the social charter, so why must they take orders from the Common Market on increasing the hours of underground workers? The right hon. Gentleman should have a word with the Leader of the House, who last week suggested to the Select Committee on Sittings of the House that Members of Parliament and Cabinet Ministers should work a four-day week. This hypocritical Government are introducing a measure to increase the hours of miners. If it is all right for Members to work a four-day week, why is it not right for the miners?

Mr. Wakeham: I do not think that my hon. right hon. Friend's proposals for a shorter working week necessarily applied to Cabinet Ministers, or even to hon. Members, who perform many duties outside the Chamber.

The European directive's impact on the private and the public sectors will vary significantly. The public sector must implement it immediately, but it cannot do so while the 1908 Act is in place. I shall not sign the order repealing that Act until we have an alternative because I fully recognise that a proper regime must be in place.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton) *rose*——

Mr. Wakeham: I shall give way for the last time.

Mr. O'Brien: Coalmining has certainly moved away from the hewing of coal at the coal face and has introduced mechanisation. The right hon. Gentleman assured the House that before signing any document he will wish to ensure that safety is the paramount consideration.

Will the Secretary of State consider the conditions that prevail underground? As a result of mechanisation, there are conditions which must be reckoned with. Before he signs away the 1908 Act, will he consult the people working in the industry about the current conditions underground, including dust and other hazards? Instead of agreeing to longer hours per shift for people working in those conditions, will he consider the demand for shorter working hours? That is how we should be making progress in the mining industry. There should be shorter days underground, not longer days.

Mr. Wakeham: It is not for me to negotiate the hours of work or anything of that kind. The 1908 Act will not cease to operate in the British mining industry until it is replaced by an alternative which will be arrived at either through a European directive or as a result of proposals in the House. I have no intention of producing such proposals at the moment.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): The implication of the proposal to repeal, not to revise, the

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

legislation is that there will be no statutory control from this Parliament over the minimum and maximum number of hours that people work underground. However, the Secretary of State has not mentioned another option whereby the British Government, in negotiations in the European Community, try to ensure that the same requirement in the 1908 Act is part of the directive. The Secretary of State has not addressed that. He has not told us why it cannot be perfectly permissible and legitimate for a similar provision to be contained in European Community legislation.

Mr. Wakeham: The European directive will cover the same issues about hours of work as those covered in the 1908 Act, although not necessarily in the same way. However, that matter has not yet been negotiated. I will not repeal the 1908 Act or stop it operating until we have an alternative which can be discussed. We cannot move into a period when there are no regulations. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) is right. The European directive could be as restrictive and restraining as the 1908 Act. As I have said, we believe that there are shortcomings in that proposal.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Wakeham: No, I have been most generous in giving way and I must now make progress.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Wakeham: I will give way to my hon. Friend in a minute, but I must first make progress or we will be here rather longer than we should.

The coal industry's performance over the last five years has been remarkable by any standards. British Coal has raised productivity by over 100 per cent. since the 1984-85 strike. It has cut colliery unit costs in real terms by over 40 per cent. during the same period and last year British Coal achieved a bottom-line profit for the first time in 13 years.

Those achievements, which I am sure are welcomed on both sides of the House, would not have been possible without massive support from the Government. That support includes the £6 billion provided under the Coal Industry Act 1990. That £6 billion provision enabled the corporation to carry out a major financial reconstruction. The debt burden of the corporation was reduced by over £4 billion and it was relieved of annual interest payments of some £400 million. As a result, British Coal's financial results now more accurately reflect the performance of the current ongoing business. I have been informed by the chairman that British Coal is once again on course this year to make a bottom-line profit.

That excellent improvement in British Coal's performance has not been achieved without difficulty and sacrifice. The market for British Coal has been in decline for decades and in recent years British Coal has also needed to deliver coal prices falling in real terms. In the past five years over 70 collieries have closed and the number of employees has been reduced by over 100,000.

This problem is not new. The coal industry has faced difficult periods of adjustment and reconstruction in the past, including during the term of office of the Labour party from 1964 to 1970. In April 1964, there were 576 pits. By the time Labour left office in 1970, the number had fallen to around 300—a reduction of nearly half, down by 280 collieries and about 170,000 men. It is a tribute to the work force and management that the recent contraction in the industry has been achieved without disruption.

British Coal has been able to offer alternative jobs to any man who has chosen to remain in the industry. Those who have decided to leave have received substantial sums in redundancy payments. They can also obtain retraining and counselling through schemes run by British Coal Enterprise.

The Government's commitment to the industry goes far beyond providing the finance needed to ease the problems of redundancy. I want to reaffirm the Government's commitment to an ongoing economic coal industry and its long-term future. Since 1979 we have approved investment expenditure of over £7·5 billion in the coal industry. That is more than all other Governments since the war taken together. We have also provided grants totalling over £11 billion in addition to the £6 billion provided last year. We expect to provide nearly £700 million in grant this year.

Our commitment to the coal industry is not only demonstrated through financial assistance. Last Session, for instance, we tackled the long-standing problem of subsidence. The provisions of the Coal Mining Subsidence Act 1991 should greatly improve the coal industry's relationship with those under whom it mines.

What of the future for British Coal? Our main aim is to ensure that we achieve the largest coal industry that is economically sustainable. The main challenge for the industry is to try to win the best possible outcome from the contract negotiations with the generators. The measures that I have described are essential to the future of the industry and would be necessary whether the industry's future lay in the public or the private sector.

Of course coal, not just in this country but worldwide, faces challenges over the next five to 10 years. Here in Britain the power generators, the market for the bulk of the corporation's coal, are turning increasingly to environmentally friendly gas. Our policy and the policy of all Administrations over the past two decades has been to support diversity of fuel supply. Nuclear, renewable energy and gas all now have key roles to play as well as coal. Increased use of gas in generation brings enormous benefits to the electricity consumer and to the environment.

The consumer benefits from the lower electricity prices that will result. The environment benefits from lower levels of carbon dioxide and sulphur dioxide emissions. The threat of global warming and the problems of acid rain are reduced. The Government are not going to hinder the development of the competitive market that we have created with the privatisation of power generation by interfering with the use of cost-effective gas. We are not convinced by doomsters who say that all coal not extracted now will never be accessible in future. It is foolish to subsidise coal extraction now when improvements in mining technology are likely to make much of that coal exploitable on an economic basis in later decades.

I turn for one moment to the Labour party's plan for the coal industry. On the surface that plan is straightforward. It is, according to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), to maintain the coal industry at its present size—by protecting it at all costs from the rigours of competition that everyone else has to face. How would the Opposition do that? They

would stop coal imports and restrict the mining of opencast—or so they say. They would "deter" the use of gas for power generation and phase out nuclear power—or so they say. They would renationalise the national grid, at huge cost to the taxpayer, and attempt to force the generators to burn high-cost coal—or so they say.

The coal industry recognises that it has to live in the real world—not in the twilight zone that some Opposition Members seem to inhabit. For the truth, as most people now know, is that Labour could not fulfil any single one of the pledges that I have just outlined.

Restrictions on imports would be contrary to the European internal market—less than 14 months away—and to our obligations under GATT. They could not restrict opencast coal mining without putting at risk 10,000 deep-mined jobs. They could not "deter" the use of gas because gas stations are already being built and the gas has already been contracted for.

The hon. Gentleman's pledge

"to maintain the coal industry around the size it is now"

is not worth the paper it is written on. He could not fulfil his pledge—nobody could. I challenge him to say specifically what he would do to fulfil his pledge and to say what the costs to the consumer, the environment and the taxpayer would be.

I make just one other point on Labour's plans, although I am sorry that the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) is not here to take note. That concerns the inherent contradiction between Labour's environmental commitments and its energy policies. There is no way in the world that the Labour party could ever meet its commitments on carbon dioxide and sulphur dioxide emissions at the same time as meeting its commitments to the National Union of Mineworkers. If Labour is determined to phase out nuclear power and to deter the use of gas, at the same time as meeting the environmental obligations that it has set itself, it would have no option but to destroy the coal industry. Opposition Members can seek to protect the environment or they can seek to preserve the coal industry at its present size—but their policies will not do both.

The Government believe that the best protection for the coal industry is to become economic and we have demonstrated our commitment to that objective, with finance, support and action. I believe that it is time for the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras to give the House a proper explanation of his party's policies and what it would do—and perhaps with a little more precision than is usual for him.

I do not normally comment on what the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras says before breakfast, but I have received a message from the management of British Coal that they are incensed at his suggestion this morning that there would be any reduction in safety standards in the British coal industry. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will take this opportunity to withdraw any such suggestion.

Finally, British Coal must face the challenges to its market head on. No one can deny that much has been accomplished in the years since the miners' strike. Much still needs to be done. British Coal must fight for every tonne of commercially viable business. It must build on the increases in productivity already achieved. Further productivity gains are essential if the growing competition from other fuels and imported coal is to be met.

The Government have provided strong backing and very large sums of taxpayers' money to enable the industry to restructure and increase productivity further. The Government will continue to give strong support to this important industry. I commend the Bill to the House.

5.3 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): As the House will recall, on Thursday 31 October, in the debate on the Queen's Speech the Government said that they would

"continue to prepare for the privatisation of the . . . British Coal Corporation."—[*Official Report*, 31 October 1991; Vol. 198. c. 6.]

On Friday 1 November, they published this Bill. Nothing could be clearer—the Bill is intended as the next step on the road to coal privatisation. It does two things. First, it doubles the money available for redundancy payments from £1,500 million to £3,000 million, and extends the date that that will be available beyond the existing deadline of 1993. That is necessary, because, if privatisation occurs, there could be as many as 30,000 redundancies in 1993-94 alone.

Secondly, the Bill would reduce the cost of mining by reducing safety standards, by repealing the Coal Mines Regulation Act 1908. Before the Secretary of State quotes British Coal in support of his contention that lengthening mining hours will not affect safety, I remind him that Mr. Moses of British Coal once gave his opinion that a 10-hour shift would not be objectionable.

We will vote against the Bill because it tampers with the safety of mines and miners. It is a disgrace that the Government have brought it forward.

Let us look first at the doubling of the restructuring grant to pay for redundancies. The previous Coal Industry Bill was before the House almost exactly two years ago, in November 1989. It doubled the redundancy fund from £750 million to the present £1,500 million, and extended its period of availability to the present limit, 1993. We said then that that was to finance as many as 30 pit closures with the loss of 30,000 jobs in the three and a half years until 1993. The Secretary of State accused me of scaremongering. British Coal called us Jeremiahs.

I invite the House to consider what has happened. In November 1989, there were 77 collieries in operation. Since then, British Coal has closed 21 collieries and announced the proposed closure of another five. Against our estimate of 30 closures in three and a half years, we have seen 26 closures in the first two years. That is worse—far worse—than anything we predicted. When the Tories challenge our predictions now, people should remember what they said about our predictions two years ago.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): I understand the passion that one sometimes hears from hon. Members who have been down the mines, but then I look at the record and see 295 pit closures under Labour Governments, and I am not surprised to find that Labour mining Members are to test the loyalty of their leader at a meeting. If Labour Members do not trust the Labour party to look after the mines, why should the miners?

Mr. Dobson: If the hon. Gentleman from that well-known mining area of Battersea has been sent in by

[Mr. Dobson]

the Tory Whips to ask a question based on a totally misleading article in today's *Evening Standard*, the best that he can do is to keep quiet.

Mr. O'Brien: I have worked down the pit for more than 30 years, so I know exactly what the conditions are. The figures that were given and the suggestions that were made two and a half years ago were on target. Notices have been issued to collieries in west Yorkshire that, within the next six months, there will be a further rundown of manpower. In my own colliery, Sharlston, there is an indication that there will be a rundown of manpower. The figures that we gave the previous time we discussed mining legislation were correct.

Included in the Bill is the intention to take away the concessionary fuel allowance for miners' widows and retired miners that has been available ever since the industry began. Why should that happen in this legislation? May we have an assurance that retired miners and miners' widows will not lose that fuel allowance?

Mr. Dobson: I regret to say that I cannot offer any assurances about what the Government or British Coal might do. In the light of the assurances that have been given by successive Secretaries of State for Energy and chairmen of British Coal, it is clear that nobody in their right mind would accept any assurance from any of them because they scarcely ever deliver.

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dobson: I shall give way in a moment.

I do not have the up-to-date figures for the number of job losses since November 1989, but when 18 pits closed, 20,000 jobs went too. Those closures not only harm miners, their families and the coalfield communities, but the whole country.

Mr. Gerald Howarth *rose*——

Mr. Dobson: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will let me get on a bit.

Taxpayers will have to pay out a fortune if pits are closed. Enormous sums will be required in benefits, and there will be not only a massive loss of income tax, but also of other taxes, including VAT. Those are the consequences for the taxpayer of this scale of closure.

Another consequence of pit closures for the rest of the country is the effect on the balance of payments. In the first nine months of this year, 15 million tonnes of coal were imported. I remind the Secretary of State that foreign coal also produces sulphur dioxide and carbon dioxide and cannot be said to make a big contribution to the environment. That 15 million tonnes in the first nine months of this year compares with the 15 million tonnes that were imported for the whole of last year and grotesquely exceeds the 4 million tonnes that were imported in 1982. We all know that PowerGen are investing in more and more coal handling facilities at ports around the country and that they intend to import more and more coal and to put more and more British miners out of work by closing more and more British pits.

During the summer the Government appointed Rothschild merchant bank to advise them on coal privatisation. Lest anyone should think that an objective, professional and expert approach will necessarily be adopted, I remind the House that the privatisation unit at Rothschild is run by an exceedingly neutral and objective person—the Tory candidate for Hampstead and Highgate. At great expense to the taxpayer, Tory merchant bankers have produced secret reports that can be considered in secret by Tory Ministers. The Secretary of State has refused to publish any of the Rothschild reports. Some of them have been leaked—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] When I published the information that Rothschild considered that only 28 of the then 60 collieries would remain after privatisation, I faced the usual charge of scaremongering. The hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) went on the radio in the east midlands to say that I did not know what I was talking about—*[Interruption.]* Well, the next thing that happened was that the *Financial Times* produced another document that proved that Rothschild had whittled down its figure of 28 to just 14 collieries that might survive the privatisation process.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): Will the hon. Gentleman specifically deny that it was he who leaked the Rothschild report to the power generators and that the Labour party was entirely responsible? In doing that, does he accept that he has jeopardised British Coal's commercial position and sold down the river the prospects of every single person who works for British Coal?

Mr. Dobson: If the hon. Gentleman had taken the trouble——

Mr. Hughes: Answer the question.

Mr. Dobson: Yes, I will answer that question in a minute, but I shall make my own speech in my own way —*[Interruption.]* Let me make it clear that if the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) had read the Rothschild report, which I made public—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] Yes. If he had read it, he would have found that Rothschild recommends that the Secretary of State should get involved in the discussions between British Coal, National Power and PowerGen to ensure that, for a start, it got a good contract. I sold no one down the river—[HON. MEMBERS: "You did."] Well, I shall tell the hon. Member for Harrow, West and his hon Friends that I have not received any complaints from any miners in this country about releasing information about the Tory bankers who advise Tory Ministers behind the backs of the miners and their families and who seek to treat them like chattels to be bought and sold.

Anyone reading that report from Rothschild will understand why the Secretary of State kept it secret. It envisages a deep-mined output of just 20 million tonnes in this country, and imports of 30 million tonnes; reducing the number of deep mines by 1993-94 to 20, which will then fall to 14 or even 12. It also envisages 33,000 redundancies in 1993-94 and that most of the British coal industry will end up in foreign ownership. In other words, there will be more pit closures and more redundancies. The Government need this legislation so that they can find the money for the redundancy bill that will prepare the industry for privatisation.

Mr. Péter Rost (Erewash): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the Rothschild report also recommends a miners' buy-out as one of the privatised options? As the Rothschild investigation considered that to be a reasonable prospect, does the hon. Gentleman support it?

Mr. Dobson: Either the hon. Gentleman has another version of the Rothschild report or he has not read the one that I have. The report specifically warns miners to be wary of investing and buying shares in their own pits. Creswell and Gedling collieries in the Nottinghamshire coalfield have closed in the past three weeks. If the miners there had owned shares in their own pits, they would have lost their savings as well as their jobs. That is what Rothschild warned. It does not recommend the course of action to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

The Secretary of State and his right hon. and hon. Friends still deny our assertion that the coal industry will be virtually destroyed. On Monday, the Secretary of State once again described me as a Jeremiah. I assume that that was intended as an insult, but modern Tories are an ignorant lot. I went to a grammar school in York that was founded during the reign of Henry VIII by an archbishop of York. It was wise to learn a little bit about the Old Testament. I learnt that Jeremiah prophesied dire consequences if the people in charge did not mend their ways. He was denounced by the powers that be, who ignored him. They did not mend their ways. The destruction that Jeremiah predicted then happened. I do not take it as an insult if I am called a Jeremiah. He was certainly a better forecaster than any Tory Minister. In deference to one of my newest hon. Friends, the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright), I should add that that Tudor archbishop of York would probably have been on our side in this debate because his potted history relates that he was born a poor scholar in the parish of Hemsworth near Pontefract. Let us have no more Tory talk about Jeremiahs.

We do not need a prophet's crystal ball because we have the Rothschild report. We know what the hard-faced Tories think should happen to the coal industry. They want to run it down, close it down and sell it off. They would be closing the cheapest and most efficient coal industry in Europe. It costs three times as much to mine a tonne of coal in Germany as in Britain. The dearest coal in Britain is cheaper than the cheapest coal that is mined in Germany.

As the Secretary of State referred to Radio 4, I shall do so. This morning on Radio 4's "Today" programme he said that we needed to import cheap coal to stop the rise in the price of electricity. As he is not a physician, I cannot say, "Physician, heal thyself." But as he is an accountant, I can say, "Accountant, read thine own figures." Over the past five years coal has not increased in price whereas electricity has increased in price by 30 per cent.

It is not the fault of British miners that electricity prices have risen. The coal industry and the coalfield communities look set to be sacrificed on the altar of the Tory privatisation dogma. They have already been severely damaged by electricity privatisation and now they are being damaged by preparations for coal privatisation. The impact of coal closures on not only miners but on entire communities is truly awful. As that impact is felt we get crocodile tears from Tories around the country who feel that their seats might be at stake.

Speaking about the closure of the Coventry colliery, the hon. Member for Warwickshire, North (Mr. Maude) is reported as saying that he wanted to

"make sure that everything is being done to protect the interests of my constituents who work there."

I wonder whether this is what he meant. It is taken from the *Coventry Evening Telegraph* of 9 November this year:

"Humiliated miners have been forced to play bingo for the chance to work. Hundreds of miners were given raffle tickets and were told to wait in the pit canteen for their numbers to be called out.

The 'winners' received an interview with private contractor Thyssen which is recruiting salvage teams at the colliery. The losers were simply ordered into the redundancy line. On Tuesday there was a queue of men three deep and 50 yards long desperate for work with the contractors. The following day, they were giving out tickets to the men who were told to wait in the canteen where a man with a microphone called their numbers out."

I assume that that is what a Treasury Minister sees as protecting the interests of his constituents. That is the humiliation which is heaped on miners, their families and their communities. We do not oppose generous redundancy terms for the miners. We do not want them to be made redundant in the first place.

On safety, we start off with some clear facts. British coal mines are the safest in the world. They are twice as safe as those in Germany, five times as safe as those in the United States and 50 times as safe as those in South Africa, Colombia or the Soviet Union. Any Government should take pride in that record, seek to keep it up and, if possible, improve it. Any Government who had pride in this country would seek to promote the raising of standards around the world to match our standards. Any Government with any real pride in our people would get on to our European partners and say, "Bring up the standards in your coal mines to our standards." God knows, not many British industries are three times as efficient and twice as safe as their German counterpart. But that is true of the coal industry.

However, the Government are not thumping the table and telling other countries to bring their standards up to our level. Quite the reverse. They are repealing the Coal Mines Regulation Act 1908—the only legal limit on the hours worked underground—and applying the European directive on working time.

Mr. Lofthouse: I agree with my hon. Friend that British mines are the safest in Europe and probably in the world. However, they are not as safe as they used to be. British Coal is not using the safest method of supporting the roof. I have here a death certificate of a miner killed at Allerton Bywater colliery only a few weeks ago. Under cause of death it says:

"following and due to a fall of roof associated with the application of tension to roof bolts in the course of his employment at Allerton Bywater Colliery".

The chief inspector of mines has told the Energy Select Committee on two occasions that that is not the safest method. The safest method of supporting roadways is by arch girders. British Coal is no longer using that method.

Mr. Dobson: Indeed. I was going on to refer to the way in which the Government, including, I regret to say, the mines inspectorate of the Health and Safety Executive, have gone along with proposals from the management of British Coal which damages safety. This morning British Coal was apparently so incensed by what I said that an official rang the Secretary of State to complain. I have to say that no one rang me.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: I wonder why.

Mr. Dobson: The hon. Gentleman might be surprised to know how often British Coal rings me on other matters.

The European directive sets minimum standards for all workers in all workplaces. It does not even pretend to

[Mr. Dobson]

cover especially hazardous work in especially hazardous workplaces. The directive makes it clear that Britain can still apply laws and regulations which provide greater protection for health and safety.

It is a bit rich for the Secretary of State for Energy to say that in future he will rely on the European working times directive at the self same time as the Secretary of State for Employment is foaming at the mouth, denouncing it as a gross interference in British affairs and seeking to persuade his fellow Ministers in Europe not to adopt it.

The Government's proposals affect the safety of miners. Setting aside issues such as decent industrial relations and promises that other people have made, one would have thought it common courtesy for the Secretary of State at least to ask the miners whether they thought that the change was reasonable. Has the Secretary of State consulted the miners? No. Has he consulted the underground supervisory staff? No. Has he consulted the colliery managers? No. He has included the provision in the Bill without even consulting the Health and Safety Commission. It is no good him saying that he consulted the officials of the executive. The commission is responsible and it has not received a paper. Its secretariat told me that it might not even be able to consider it before Christmas. However, the provision was put in the Bill on 1 November.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dobson: No.

This is the legislative approach of Tombstone: legislate first, ask questions afterwards. The proposal epitomises everything that the Government are about. They are a Government of know-alls. They think they know better than the people whose lives are at risk in the mining industry what is good for safety in that industry.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo *rose*——

Mr. Dobson: No.

In their comfortable offices in Whitehall they think that they know what is best for the safety of men working a mile or more below ground. The industrial accident that Ministers are most likely to suffer is to trip on a carpet or cut their finger on the sharp edge of a piece of paper. Yet they think they know more about safety than a man working a coal cutter three miles under the North sea off the Durham coast.

However, I have to say that that has not been a common characteristic all along.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dobson: In a moment. Let me finish that point.

When the right hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker) was Secretary of State for Energy he appeared before the Energy Select Committee and said that no steps to repeal the 1908 Act would be taken without consultation with the miners. He said:

"I think if the industry were agreed that this"—

getting rid of the 1908 Act—

"was beneficial to the industry and the talks I have mentioned could take place successfully"—

that is with the representatives of the miners—

"I would presume any Government . . . would be very happy to change the legislation . . . The reason why the legislation was originally put in was very much on safety grounds, the importance of the protection of safety. Judgement on that would have to be taken by the Health and Safety Commission and, if it were judged to be totally safe," —

after all the consultations and if the industry agreed,

"and no deterioration in safety resulted,"

he said that perhaps changes could be made. Why has this Secretary of State not kept the promise of that Secretary of State? In legal terms, they are both the same person. The Monopolies and Mergers Commission produced a preposterous report which, although all the witnesses mentioned safety in their evidence, did not mention safety in its part of the report. Even the MMC stated that if there were to be changes in working practices they should take place after consultation.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Throughout the hon. Gentleman's speech there are references to the 1908 enactment as a great piece of safety legislation. I have read the Act. Has the hon. Gentleman bothered to go to the Library to read it? There is nothing in the Act that is remotely connected with safety. It deals solely with hours worked below ground. If the Act has been amended to introduce safety provisions, perhaps the hon. Gentleman will tell us. Has it been amended to include safety considerations rather than simply hours worked?

Mr. Dobson: Dearie me. If the hon. Gentleman believes that the length of working hours has no connection with safety——

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): —he should not be in the House.

Mr. Dobson: My hon. Friend is right. If that is what the hon. Gentleman thinks, he should not be in this place.

Miners believe that a coal mine is an especially hazardous place in which to work. The deputies believe that and so do the colliery managers. Surely they are right to take that view. If they are right, surely miners are entitled to special laws, including legislation on working hours, which have a clear bearing on safety. Surely miners are entitled to expect special laws to cover the time that is worked underground.

When the Secretary of State responded to an intervention on this issue, he seemed to suggest that he did not believe that there was a need for special legislation for miners. It seems that he does not believe that they need any special protection.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dobson: I shall not give way for the moment.

The Secretary of State suggests that as practices down the mines have changed since 1908 there is no need now to have such short working hours. I remind Conservative Members that in 1908 the bulk of miners lived in terraced houses within five or 10 minutes walk from the pit. Nowadays, some miners, especially because of successive mine closures, have to drive 20 or 30 miles to work. They have to change and then they go down the pit. They get on a manrider and travel perhaps two or three miles before they reach the face. The hours that pass between leaving their own front door and returning to it are longer now than they have ever been in history.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dobson: No, I shall not give way.

I recognise that the Secretary of State is not likely to be convinced by anything that I say to him. However, I have referred to the 1908 Act and I have read the debates that took place on that measure. If the Secretary of State is not convinced by what I have to say, I recommend him to read *Hansard* of 6 July 1908. On that day, 120 Tory Members voted against the measure passing through the House. For good measure, they then voted against the introduciton of old age pensions. Those Divisions took place on the same day.

Mr. Wakeham: I was reluctant to interrupt the hon. Gentleman when he was telling us that he went to the Old Testament to learn how to run a modern coal industry, and when he went on to tell us about the debates that took place in 1908. I want, however, to make the position clear.

I am proposing that the 1908 Act be replaced by the European directive. If the directive is not satisfactory and is not agreed, the 1908 Act will stay and we shall then consider what to do. We have no proposals yet. Secondly, during the process of preparing the Bill the Department has, of course, kept the Health and Safety Executive informed of proposals to amend the 1908 Act. The executive will be recommending to the Health and Safety Commission later this month that this repeal would not diminish safety in mines.

Mr. Dobson: The HSE is not sacrosanct. The executive is heavily involved in general measures relating to mine safety and in proposing changes that everyone in the industry, with the exception of the top brass of British Coal, think will make mining more dangerous. I am not surprised when I hear what the executive's officials may have done. If the Secretary of State is not convinced when we say that miners deserve special treatment, I recommend him to read the closing speech that was made on behalf of the Government on 6 July 1908. The then Minister read an extract from a book that spelt out the advantages of shorter working hours for employees and for employers, and for society as a whole. He then said:

"But it may be said that these arguments are general, and that special circumstances existed to differentiate the case of coal-miners from that of many other industries in this country. Others have spoken of the heat of the mine, the danger of firedamp, of the cramped position, of the muscular exertions of the miner, at work in galleries perhaps a mile under the ground. I select the single fact of deprivation of light. That alone is enough to justify Parliament in directing upon the industry of coal-mining a specially severe scrutiny and introducing regulations of a different character from those elsewhere."—[*Official Report*, 6 July 1908: Vol. 19, c. 1331.]

That is a quotation from the speech of the then President of the Board of Trade, Winston Churchill. I agree with what he said that day. Today, 83 years later, the new Tories, under the man they tried to portray as "Nice Mr. Major", say that there are no special dangers down the mine. I do not think that they can believe that. So why are they proposing to introduce change? They are doing so because it is the first step along the road to privatisation. It is intended to attract foreign buyers for British Coal. It is intended to cut costs by cutting safety. It is intended to make our mines more attractive to companies such as Peabody Coal in the United States, which has recently been prosecuted and fined about £500,000 for deliberately, regularly and comprehensively fixing test filters in its mines. In effect, the Government are saying, "Come to Britain. We are levelling down our safety standards to yours."

That is why we shall vote against the Bill. That is why we shall oppose privatisation. That is why, after the general election, the incoming Labour Government will abandon privatisation and bring new hope to the coalfields and the coalfield communities.

5.39 pm

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): This Coal Industry Bill must be one of the shortest of its sort ever to come before Parliament. It is, however, consequential to the future of our coal industry. It implies a great degree of uncertainty, but equally it presents a challenge to the management of British Coal to fight for every ounce of viable business that it can obtain. That will mean continuing to reduce unit costs, while increasing productivity.

Clause 1 complements that process and shows the Government's continuing commitment to the industry. It allows, where necessary, generous redundancy terms for men who wish voluntarily to leave the industry. It is worth saying that this Bill has nothing to do with privatisation or the Rothschild report; it will give the tools to British Coal so that it can compete successfully for the coal contract post-April 1993.

We already know what is possible—over five years, the miners have increased productivity by 108 per cent., while prices have reduced in real terms by 40 per cent., representing an annual cash reduction to the generators of £150. What the people of Sherwood and many others want to know is why National Power and PowerGen have not reflected those bargain purchases from British Coal in lower electricity prices.

The current price paid to British Coal is 180p per unit of energy, with 24 units to the tonne. When processed into electricity, it arrives at our domestic power points costing £20. Therefore, for the generating companies to say that by importing coal at the present world price of 145p per unit would benefit the consumers is a gross misrepresentation of the facts. What it would do is close our collieries, place this country at the mercy of international coal traders, and give Britain an added trade deficit of about £900 million per annum, for a hypothetical saving of just over £1·25 per week for the average household.

Any industry, whether public or private, depends for its success on markets. What British Coal needs to know now, to enable its investment programme to proceed to meet the threat from coal imports, is the size of the United Kingdom coal market post-1993. Will it be 40 million, 50 million or 60 million tonnes? What we do know is that pre-emption means that no fewer than half the power stations' fuel markets in England and Wales are entirely removed from the danger of competition. Nuclear power survives on the back of the coal industry, subsidised by the fossil fuel levy. If the reverse were true, coal would be delivered free to the generators with a cash bonus of £10 a tonne.

Gas has also been given favoured status, supposedly to help Britain to meet its modest sulphur reduction targets. So far, the contracts signed for plants coming on stream up to 1995 are equivalent to 25 million tonnes of coal. To help the process along the way, the Labour party acolytes on Humberside county council fell over themselves to be the first to grant planning permission for gas generators at

[Mr. Andy Stewart]

Killingholme, replacing coal requirements by 3 million tonnes and with a loss of 3,000 mining jobs. The synthetic anguish and wringing of hands by Labour Members fools nobody. However, what stings the coal industry is that all but a few of the new gas plants will produce power at a total cost about 15 to 30 per cent. above that of British Coal.

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): Is the hon. Gentleman seriously trying to say that the Labour council in Humberside is responsible for the Killingholme port? That was forced through this House by Government policy and their votes. Will he reflect on the fact that, if the Bill is passed, redundancy arrangements will be forced on the coalfields, and especially the pits in Nottinghamshire? Those pits already have 40 per cent. of places that they cannot fill because miners have already been moved there from other pits. If the Bill is passed, there will be a mass pit closure programme in Nottinghamshire, and mainly in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. Is the hon. Gentleman really trying to be serious, or will he come through the Lobby with us tonight?

Mr. Stewart: There were two parts to the hon. Gentleman's intervention. The first referred to his colleagues on Humberside county council. There is no question but that they granted planning permission for Killingholme. Planning permission was not required from the Department in London. I shall deal with the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question later in my speech.

What is worse, the part of the fuel market to which I have referred will be closed to competition for no less than 15 years, because the only way to obtain the gas is to sign a binding 15-year contract. That means that, with the pre-emptions, all coal plants—even the biggest and the cheapest—will be pushed off base loads, forcing 12GW of modern coal plants to close prematurely. We must not sanction the contracts lying on my right hon. Friend's desk—and by that I mean that there should be no more contracts for gas generation.

Accepting that half the coal market will have gone to privileged fuels by 1993, what are the real business prospects for British Coal, the miners and the coalfield communities? They will be doubtful if the little Englander view prevails both here and in the boardrooms of the generating companies. I use the metaphor in the knowledge that Scottish Power has recently signed a five-year contract with British Coal. It is ironic that Scotland, with an over-production of electricity, is already contracting its surplus to industry south of the border. Talk about playing golf while Rome burns; just leave the canny Scots to pick up the bargains.

Forget the doubters: British Coal knows that it has only one way to go, and that is forward. Nevertheless, its greatest threat comes not only from coal imports but from the Labour party. First, there were the financial consequences of Labour's blind support for a dictatorial trade union leader, who is now as popular in Walworth road as a fox cub in front of the Quorn hunt.

When Labour's support was needed in the House to block the building of the Humber port, which will be capable of handling 10 million tonnes of imported coal, Labour Members showed their true colours and left the Commons at 8 pm. Only 49 of the 229 Labour Members felt any sympathy for British miners and voted against the Bill. At that time, their motives were questioned but the questions remained unanswered. Now, all is revealed through Labour's policy decision to ban opencast mining.

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): Will my hon. Friend remind the House how many Conservative Nottinghamshire Members of Parliament attended that unfortunate debate, compared with the attendance of Labour Nottinghamshire Members? If all Labour Members, who were supposedly so opposed to the Bill, had turned up, the Bill would not have become an Act.

Mr. Stewart: My hon. Friend is correct. All Nottinghamshire Conservative Members were present at that debate, and they voted against the Bill. If the Labour party had put its money where its mouth was and voted with us, the problem facing us today would not have arisen. As I said, at that time the motives of Labour Members were questioned, and the questions remained unanswered. Now all is revealed through Labour's policy decision to ban opencast mines. The implication of that for Nottinghamshire's deep mines is catastrophic. Thousands of jobs will be lost.

Thirteen of the 14 Nottinghamshire collieries require low-chlorine coal from opencast sites to sweeten their product, on a ratio of 6 tonnes deep mined to 1 tonne open cast, before it is accepted by the power generating companies. The loss of that low-chlorine coal by itself is disastrous, but the loss of the £200 million annual profit from British Coal's opencast division, which is used to subsidise deep-mined coal, would increase prices by almost £5 a tonne, leaving British Coal with no market or jobs for its miners. That bombshell, coming from the Labour party at a time when Nottinghamshire miners are continually breaking production records, shows Labour's lack of faith in and support for the coal industry, and why Nottinghamshire miners abandoned socialism in 1985.

Notwithstanding that threat, I am confident in backing our miners, because only they can offer the generators long-term contracts which guarantee falling prices, paid for in sterling and free from exchange rate fluctuations. It is an offer that no other coal supplier at home or abroad can make.

One may well ask why, with such a generous offer, the chief executives of our generating companies are not queuing up at British Coal's door. For a start, they are inexperienced in the commercial world, having spent their earlier years in the cosy surrounds of a nationalised concern. Since privatisation, they have yet to make a major decision. Remember, the present coal contracts were fixed for them by my right hon. Friend.

With such complacency, it would be an abrogation of our duty to allow two commercial companies to ruin a major industry and its jobs and to wipe out a multi-billion pound investment made on behalf of taxpayers. Therefore, the time has come for my right hon. Friend to exercise our 40 per cent. shareholding in National Power and PowerGen and instruct the chief executives to sit down with British Coal and negotiate a mutually beneficial contract from 1993.

What I have advocated is possible and not just a dream, but it would be remiss of me not to consider the nightmare scenario of colliery closures at a time when we are increasing restructuring grants by £1,000 million. The death of a pit is the end of an era, in some cases lasting

more than 100 years. Gedling colliery in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) closed a week ago after a four-year battle by the miners to make it successful. Nobody, not even the Labour party, could change the geological conditions. On behalf of the 400 men from Sherwood who work at Gedling, I thank my hon. Friend for his endless time and effort, not only during the past few weeks but over years, to keep that colliery open. He was such a regular visitor that he was given his own pit boots and locker.

However, we must ensure that there is life after death by creating new workplaces on the former colliery sites. The target number of jobs should equal those lost from the indigenous mining communities. A prime example of that can be seen at Blidworth in my constituency. Within hours of the colliery closing, Newark and Sherwood district council started work, in conjunction with other agencies, on a rebuilding programme. Two years later, the new developments are on stream, bringing the target of 400 job opportunities even closer.

The only criticism is the time taken to put the financial package together before work could begin. Grant applications have to be made to the EC, the Rural Development Commission and the Department of the Environment, with approvals taking months at a time when speed is of the essence. A simple change of policy, making British Coal Enterprise Ltd. responsible, would be a first step. It has a proven track record, creating 71,000 new job opportunities since it was formed seven years ago.

A closure dowry based on a ratio of £X million for every 100 jobs lost would enable BCE to take control on day one, working in partnership with local authorities and matching pound for pound any EC contribution. By doing that, we would eliminate the 12-month delay. Time wasted cannot be recovered, so it is crucial that we have a system designed and ready to implement the moment that any colliery closes.

Britain has commercial coal reserves at today's extraction rates to last more than 200 years, whether in clean coal power generation, gasification, liquefaction or chemical derivatives. It is one of our most valuable assets, like the land that produces our food. No one in his right mind would ever suggest that our farmers become nothing but park keepers as a result of surplus food in the world. Agriculture is part of the common agricultural policy and I urge my right hon. Friend to see the British coal industry as part of an integrated European energy regime. It would keep our industry competitive and offer a future to our miners. They deserve no less.

5.55 pm

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): I shall be better able to reply to the speech of the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) when the usual conventions no longer apply in three weeks' time.

In the meantime, I pay tribute to my predecessor George Buckley. No one could but admire the fortitude with which he bore his last painful illness and the way in which at the same time he stuck to his constituency work which he performed with great conscientiousness. He had been equally conscientious as a councillor when I worked with him and he was a fine and scrupulous justice of the peace.

I recall, and perhaps you recall, too, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that during one election period George Buckley was accused of being an extremist. He was extremely hurt by that and announced that he was a moderate and a patriot. I declare here and now that I intend to follow that same path.

Above all, I should say that George was a family man. He looked after his family; he cared for them. I am sure that the House will join me in sending our condolences to his widow and children.

Because Hemsworth has always had a large Labour majority, it sounds like a great monolith, but it is very far from that. It is a series of villages in the south-east of Wakefield metropolitan district which were essentially rural in character. But over the years, because of coal mining and their transformation into pit villages, they have become rural areas with urban problems, with poor communications. But each village has a fierce patriotism. The patriotism is not to Hemsworth unless one lives in Hemsworth. To someone who lives in Upton, Upton is the centre of the universe. Perhaps Upton people are right to say that because they have a tremendous history. I am sure that they will have a tremendous future. They populate the world. It is said that one cannot go anywhere—I know that this was true in west Africa—without meeting someone from Upton who will give good and wise advice.

There is also the village of Ackworth, where Geoff Boycott took his first faltering steps at the crease to become the greatest cricketer that the world has ever seen and a great Yorkshireman. Ultimately, because we pray for him every night, he will change his politics.

The constituency has been destroyed because of the destruction of its industry, mining; a destruction that was completely unnecessary. We are left with real problems of unemployment and all that goes with that with the drifting away of hospital care so that everything is centered outside the constituency; with the drifting away of real jobs so that people have to move outside. One reason for that drifting away is that, as a result of the Government's failure to obey European Community rules, we are not getting the money that we should under RECHAR.

Cato used to end all his speeches with the words, "Delenda est Carthago". I will conclude all my speeches with a plea for money from RECHAR. We have already sown the seeds of what needs to be done to bring about job regeneration in my area. The small extra amount of money for that purpose already approved by the Commission would make a tremendous difference.

The mining part of the community that I represent is extremely important, even though only one working pit is left. Our history and our traditions are in mining, and those traditions remain even when people move into other kinds of industry.

I want to consider for a moment the true price of coal. A very good friend of mine, George Gough, died last Saturday from emphysema. I pay tribute to the work done by my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) in the area and promise that I will assist him in his fight. The true price of coal centres on the lack of safety that is to be found in the mines, which reflects the lack of concern that is often shown.

The fear the Frickley colliers have now is that when their mine is privatised—and they are convinced that will happen soon, unless there is a change of Government—safety standards will fall. They look forward to other assistance from Europe in respect of the social charter. The Minister said that the Government are waiting for certain European directives, but failed to mention that the

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Government are blocking several directives that would assist workers in my constituency. I think particularly of consultation on change, which must take place under the social charter but which has not been observed. The miners of Frickley have in no way been consulted over their futures. I warn again that I will be fighting for that, too.

Featherstone is another area that once relied on coal and it is also where I taught for 12 years as deputy head of a comprehensive school which I established. I am extremely proud of the comprehensive education system. My school vied with eight grammar schools and produced results better than any of them—and for many more children. That is why I am proud of the comprehensive system and why I will support my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) in all his splendid work to make education once more a human thing with human values.

Also in Featherstone we have a rugby team which will win the cup this year. I look forward to the Prime Minister being present that day—but, of course, by then it will be a Labour Prime Minister.

I will co-operate with and fight alongside my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) for the interests of coal and do all that I can to assist my party's energy team in that fight.

I want to make sure that Hemsworth can continue to be proud of its history. I will rail against its present problems and I will certainly fight for its future.

6.4 pm

Mr. Martin Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): It is truly a privilege to follow a maiden speech, and I am sure that I express the view of right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House in extending a warm welcome to the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) and complimenting him on his words. Given the hon. Gentleman's background, he will clearly represent the constituents who elected him last week. I thank the hon. Gentleman also on behalf of us all for his glowing and deserved tribute to his predecessor.

The hon. Member for Hemsworth stuck, within reasonable bounds, to the conventions of the House in not making an over-contentious maiden speech, but he came very near to being contentious—[HON. MEMBERS: "Rubbish."]—when he suggested to a Nottingham Member of Parliament that Boycott was one of the best cricketers in the world. Given that I was born and brought up in Middlesex and spent my childhood idolising Compton and Edrich—[HON. MEMBERS: "More rubbish"] —the hon. Member for Hemsworth ought to be more careful in his support for Boycott, or he will fall out with many of his own right hon. and hon. Friends. As to his reference to rugby league, I plead ignorance and will not interfere with private griefs.

I declare a small and indirect formal interest in the affairs of the coal industry and in British Coal. If ever there was a clear indication of the Government's understanding of the changing needs of industry, the effect of change on a particular industry, and the Government's willingness to take on board the social consequences of change, the last five years and the Coal Industry Bill clearly demonstrate the Government's balanced commitment to honouring their duty to consider the wider public interest.

I am committed to the coal industry, but not blindly so, as are some Labour Members. I am committed to Nottinghamshire miners, which is hardly surprising—but that is not the case, or has not been, with Labour. I am committed also to the wider public that we must all represent. That requires an understanding of the environmental impact of energy production and usage, and of the price of that energy to commercial, industrial and domestic users. It is the Government's role to understand and to respond to the need for balance.

Labour is clearly unwilling to address that issue, and tailors its words to suit its audience. If one considers the commitments of various members of Labour's Front Bench whose portfolios touch directly or indirectly on energy, one finds total conflict, one with the other. In that regard as in others, we wonder what the policy of Labour Members would be if, heaven forbid, they ever sat on the Government Benches.

There is no way that we can be sure, from the statements of members of Labour's Front Bench, what the Opposition's policies would be in the context of the Bill and of the industry that we are trying to preserve and strengthen. If coal was just another industry or a medium-sized company in the private sector whose product was not as much in demand as previously, or had been superseded by another product that it could not make or compete with it, that industry or company would slim down or might even close altogether—with the same tragic effect on families and communities as has been seen in the coal industry. Given the social changes that have been necessary, and the consequences of those changes, I doubt whether any incoming Government would have looked after the coal industry as the present Government have.

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): We are discussing not a medium-sized company like any other, but a company that is concerned with one of our great energy assets. Energy, by any definition, is out of the ordinary: it is very close to the cockpit of politics. The need of a nation for energy —for the consistent supply of electricity, for instance—is vital, unlike the need for the products of many medium-sized companies.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I do not disagree with that. I apologise if I did not make myself clear. I meant that, in the case of any other industry, we probably would have let nature take its course. Firms slim down; firms close. There would have been no more than the statutory redundancies. Over the past five years, however, the Government have taken account of the very point that the hon. Gentleman has just made. All that has happened proves that they have taken on board the social consequences of change, while also recognising the future needs of a very special industry —the energy industry.

Yes, the coal industry has slimmed down; yes, it may even have to slim down further. But no, it will not disappear—because, as the hon. Gentleman rightly implied, it is a vital resource. It therefore has a long-term future. By producing this Bill, and by everything that they have done, are doing and will do, the Government are endeavouring to give British Coal the time and the means to meet what we perceive as longer-term needs.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already given a thorough airing to the detail of the Bill—as, perhaps to a lesser extent, has the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson)—let me address one or two other points. The Government have given British Coal Enterprise Ltd. some £60 million of public money, which has generated some £500 million of private-sector finance. Labour always scorns and derides the role of the private sector, but, as a result of that investment, an estimated 70,000 job opportunities have been created.

Mr. Illsley: But how many actual jobs have been created?

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I used the phrase "job opportunities" deliberately. I know how difficult it is to establish exactly how many jobs are involved in such cases. I mentioned the figure of 70,000; my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) referred to 71,000. Let us not argue about a couple of thousand in either direction. An awful lot of jobs have been created by the £60 million of public investment and the £500 million of private investment. We can be certain of one thing: the private sector does not put £500 million into an enterprise that has no end product—in this instance, jobs.

Mr. Illsley: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman used the phrase "job opportunities". There is considerable dispute about exactly how many jobs have been created by British Coal Enterprise. Opposition Members would take issue with the 70,000 figure; the number of actual jobs is very much smaller.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: The hon. Gentleman is playing with words. I thought that I had met him halfway: even I did not say, "Oh yes, I am right, it is 70,000." The figure concerned is fairly large, and it is represented by efforts, to the tune of over £560 million, to recognise the special needs of mining communities. The Bill extends the possibility of doing that.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras is no longer present. I listened with anger to what he said this morning on Radio 4. I felt that it amounted to criminial misrepresentation to suggest that the Government—or, more particularly, the management and staff of British Coal—would consciously risk the lives of men working below ground by cutting safety provision.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: I would not trust them further than I could throw them.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: That is a gross remark to make about the management of British Coal. It is unworthy of the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Cummings: At least he is a miner.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras is not much of a miner in my book. Perhaps the hon. Member for Easington (Mr. Cummings) will tell us just how many mines his hon. Friend has gone down to find out what he rabbits on about from the Front Bench week after week.

The remarks that were made this morning on Radio 4 were not only unworthy of a Member of Parliament—they lowered party politics to the level of the gutter—but were certainly unworthy of someone who seeks to become Secretary of State in, heaven forbid, an incoming Labour Government.

Mr. Lofthouse: I entirely agree with what the hon. Gentleman said about safety. I do not know of any colliery manager, deputy or workman who would deliberately plan to send people to work in unsafe conditions. As I have said, however, because of the recent drive to increase productivity and thus lower the prices of coal—in order to maintain the market—roadways in mines are being protected by roofbolts rather than arched girders. The chief inspector of mines has told the Select Committee on Energy twice that arched girders are safest. The use of roofbolts has led to men being injured and even killed. I am not saying that the managers want to create unsafe conditions; they are being forced to do so by the economics of the coal industry.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I accept that the hon. Gentleman's experience is much greater than mine, but I find it hard to believe that the Health and Safety Executive would allow the use of a technique that had not been tried and proven, at least in another country. I cannot believe that an untried system that was considered dubious would be permitted.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is not an ex-miner, but I know that he will spend an enormous amount of time in following up what the hon. Gentleman has said. If it turns out that the new technique is indeed unsafe, I am sure that my right hon. Friend will be the first to say that he wants to hear more about it.

Mr. Lofthouse: The system that I described is American. The safety there is four times worse than ours, and that statistic is based on recorded accidents in only 40 per cent. of unionised mines.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I am in no position to challenge what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Constituents of mine have been using the roofbolting technique at Littleton colliery, just outside Cannock. I have discussed it with those responsible, as I did not understand how the system worked. If it had not been safe, it would not have been introduced into the United Kingdom—from Australia, incidentally, rather than the United States—and the men would not be using it. None of my constituents have made any representations to me about its safety.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He has drawn attention to the fact that it might have been Australia rather than the United States. It is a great shame, on a matter so important, that, when my hon. Friend tried to place information before the House, the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse), who raised the matter, started gasbagging to his neighbours as though it did not really matter. That was outrageous.

We have to acknowledge the role that gas can play, is playing and certainly must play, as well as the environmental benefits that flow from it. Gas must have a reasonable share of the future energy market. The Labour party cannot talk about coal to one audience and about environmentally safe energy to another.

Renewables must also have a share of the energy market. If my mailbag is anything to go by, people are

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complaining that the Government are not forcing the pace fast enough on renewables so that there can be an even quicker rundown in the use of fossil fuels.

The Labour party is inconsistent. None of us can avoid recognising the adverse effect that the burning of fossil fuels has on the environment. Although all these alternatives are coming on to the market, I am certain that British Coal understands and can meet all the challenges. All it is asking for is that it should be given the time and the resources to fulfil its essential role in the future mix of energy generation and to ease the social consequences of the changes that will take place over the coming decades.

British Coal has shown that it can be competitive. Its productivity post-Scargill has proved that. Contrary to Opposition claims, no generator in his right mind would want to rely over-heavily on imported coal. Security of supply, at a known contracted price, is absolutely essential if the generators are to fulfil their contracts with their distributors. British Coal would be even more viable and would have an even more secure future if United Kingdom coal, the lowest-cost coal in Europe, were competing on an equal level with Germany and Belgium, which still heavily subsidise their coal industries. The European Commissioners either turn a blind eye or are unable to enforce their rules and regulations.

The Bill deals with the possible funds that will be needed up to 1996 to handle all these complexities and changes, but let us not forget that there is more to British Coal than just taking the stuff out of the ground—although I acknowledge that that is its prime purpose.

Looking ahead, let us not forget some of the current research that is being undertaken by British Coal. It should be on the record. We have had many debates about the industry in the past few years, but rarely have we talked about the research work undertaken by British Coal into advance clean coal technology, small and advanced power generating systems, heating development, waste utilisation, atmospheric pollution, low CO_2 power generation and options for its abatement, the coal science of nox formation and mineral behaviour, and liquid fuels. All these research projects are in the long-term interests of the nation. It would be mad to ignore all these potential gains for the long-term future of what is an almost inexhaustible home-based fuel.

Most of the heat and anger generated today relates to whether or not the 1908 Act should or should not be repealed, but let us understand what that Act was all about. The 1908 Act set a limit on the amount of time that a mineworker could be underground. Those of us who never were mineworkers may not be aware that a different limit was set for deputies. No limit was set for management. I assume that management go underground and spend a fair amount of time there, but, I repeat, no limit was set for them.

When I intervened during the speech of the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, I said that no reference to safety is to be found in the 1908 Act, or in any subsequent amendment to that Act. I admit that I have not read all the *Hansard* reports of the debates, so it is perfectly true that there may be a reference to safety in *Hansard*. However, safety was not the purpose of that Act. Opposition Members know that it is what is contained in an Act that counts, not the speeches that were made in support of it.

The present limit for mineworkers is 7·5 hours. That is made up of a seven-hour period that can be extended at the manager's discretion by half an hour. Opposition Members must tell us whether that is the absolute maximum that they are looking for. Is that what they say is provided for in the 1908 Act? Is that what is fussing the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras?

The 1908 Act sets a strict limit not on hours of work but on the hours that may be spent underground, whether or not the mineworker can properly be judged to be working. It has already been acknowledged that travelling time is included as part of working time. Someone pointed out to me today that miners can travel in an underground train in conditions that are somewhat better than those enjoyed by the average south-east commuter. It was also pointed out that at least miners have a reserved seat.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): The 1908 Act dealt with health and safety. The hon. Gentleman, however, referred to miners travelling on a train. If he had ever worked underground, he would know that, when miners leave their paddy train, they have to walk a mile or a mile and a half to reach the coal seam. The hon. Gentleman should also remember that he has never smelt the stale air underground after seven hours there, and should take into account the fact that the stale air that miners breathe after seven hours underground, even though it is safe from the point of view of the regulations, makes them feel tired.

It is at that point that the safety factor is essential. One can have all the safety regulations in the world, but if a person in middle management is also tired after that time, the problem is made even worse. That is why the hours worked are seven and a quarter, plus winding time.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I very much respect the hon. Gentleman's views, and I do not dispute what he says. He believes that the 1908 Act was a health and safety measure, but his hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) said, from a sedentary position, that it was not—that it was the other way round. There is total confusion on the Opposition Benches.

Mr. Cummings: It is the hon. Gentleman who is confused.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: It is vital to set out how long a person should work underground. I do not wish the safety risks to be increased. All I am saying is that none of the papers that I have read, or the Act that I have perused, remotely addresses the safety factor. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras may believe that the 1908 Act was a health and safety measure, but most people acknowledge that the Act that addresses health and safety is the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974. Section 2(1) says:

> "It shall be the duty of every employer to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all his employees."

That is the position now, and even if the 1908 Act is repealed, that will continue. We will not have diminished that statement one iota.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras stands accused of introducing safety as a smokescreen. He is trying to play on emotions that should not be played upon

in the House. If the hon. Gentleman's real objections are founded on a desire in some way to prevent or frustrate privatisation, he should have said so. Productivity is just as vital in a nationalised industry as in a private-sector industry. Nothing will have changed.

If the British miner cannot get his industry in a condition to compete four square with the rest of the world, we are in trouble, and the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras should make up his mind about what he wants. If he is saying that he would rather have no deep-mining industry than one that is thriving in the private sector, let him say so. That seems to be the message from the Opposition Front Bench. I do not believe that the knee-jerk reactions of Opposition Members remotely address the real purpose of the Bill, which is to ensure that British Coal has a future. Conservative Members will ensure its future this year, next year and for a long time to come.

6.31 pm

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): I join in the tributes paid to my hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) on his maiden speech. It was agreeable, amusing and knowledgeable and his politics are rooted strongly in the locality that he represents. He will be able to see, as was everyone else, how warmly his speech was received. He brings one other quality to bear and that is the role of education in politics and the need to tell people what is happening and why it is happening. That is one thing that we can do in the House tonight.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth, I represent a mining constituency. When I came to Chesterfield in 1984 a quarter of all the jobs in that great centre of the north Derbyshire coalfield were dependent on coal. If the Rothschild report is carried through, the entire north Derbyshire coalfield will close. There will be only four pits in Nottinghamshire and those who defended the Union of Democratic Mineworkers throughout the strike will learn how foolish it was for any miners to put their confidence in the Government.

I speak with some interest in the matter, apart from the fact that, for five years in all, I had the privilege of being Minister of Power and Secretary of State for Energy. Although we shall be defeated in the Lobby tonight, I can try to explain to people who listen to the debate or read *Hansard* what the Government are really doing. They are deliberately financing a further rundown in the mining industry at the expense of the safety of miners and their working conditions in the hope that profit can be made for private owners by a small number of pits with the rest of the coal being imported or coming from opencast mining.

I was astounded at the suggestion that the 1908 Act had nothing to do with safety. Does anyone honestly believe that if we abandoned all controls on pilots flying jet aircraft and said that they could fly for 24 hours a day, it would have no effect on safety? Does anyone honestly believe that if an industry becomes more technological, we need fewer safety requirements? After all, a man who is tired and carrying a pick and shovel cannot do much to affect the safety of others. However, with the high investment underground today, a tired miner can do enormous damage to the pit and to other workers. If the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) does not understand that exhaustion is a danger in a high-tech industry, he does not understand very much at all.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Benn: I am not giving way because many miners want to speak. I shall use my brief speech to explain to people who read the debate what the Government are doing. The hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth) will have plenty of opportunity to speak because very few Conservative Members are interested in the industry and many are not here to listen to the debate.

One reason why privatisation is advocated now is that the pits were re-equipped with public money and now that they are available for privatisation a lot of profit will be made from them for somebody. As my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson)—shortly to be my right hon. Friend—said, the money is not for investment but to finance redundancies. Another hon. Member intervened to say that some of the money is probably to be used to end the concessionary coal. That is widely suspected. To repeal the 1908 Act is to return to Victorian conditions. It is no good mentioning the European directive, because even if it is introduced—other Ministers do not want it—it provides a lower level of safety than the 1908 Act and would be no substitute.

I want to look at this policy in the light of the policy that has been pursued by the Conservative party since 1979 and before. The first policy for the mining industry was prepared by the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) in preparation for the great miners' strike of 1984-85. Coal was stocked, police were recruited, the riot squads were trained and the Association of Chief Police Officers was prepared for the task given to it. I shall come to the question of Orgreave in a moment. I was on the platform with Arthur Scargill at the Durham miners gala in 1983 when he warned that 70 pits were on the hit list. It was dismissed completely. In June 1984 Mr. Ian MacGregor wrote a letter to every miner, a copy of which I have. It said:

"I have been accused of planning to butcher the industry . . . I have no such intention or desire . . . This is a strike which should never have happened. It is based on very serious misrepresentation and distortion of the facts . . . Your leaders have told you that the Coal Board is out to butcher the coal industry; that we plan to do away with 70,000 jobs; that we plan to close down around 86 pits, leaving only 100 working collieries. If these things were true, I would not blame miners for getting angry or for being deeply worried, but these things are absolutely untrue. I state that categorically and solemnly. You have been deliberately misled."

That was the chairman of the Coal Board who had been appointed by the then Prime Minister to butcher the industry. A total of 109 pits were closed, 70,000 jobs were lost and many of the people on the dole who we hear about now in the monthly figures are unemployed miners. Communities have been destroyed. In one ward in Chesterfield which is in a mining area, unemployment is above 25 per cent. Coal imports have been deliberately encouraged to undermine the strength of the British mining industry. When I became Secretary of State for Industry in 1974, I discovered that the previous Conservative Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), had instructed the generating board to import Australian coal. When it

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arrived it was so costly that it was more expensive than British coal. The generating board sold the Australian coal at a loss to Electricité de France. My hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) remembers the story well.

People talk about the Coal Board not wanting to endanger the health and safety of miners. However, if we import coal from South Africa and Colombia, where conditions are appalling, and tell our own miners to meet the price, we are telling them to lower their working conditions to the level of conditions and wages in South Africa and Colombia. There is no fair competition in the import of coal.

Opencast mining is the final insult to mining areas. They lose their pits and then their environment is destroyed. It is disgraceful to talk about being environmentally conscious and dealing with the sulphur in coal while allowing the present level of opencast mining. Desulphurisation techniques have been known for years and with scrubbing plants it would be possible to use coal with no risk.

The Government speak as though they have just discovered that gas is cheaper. We always knew that it was and there has never been any dispute about it. The question was whether it was sensible to burn gas. The Rothschild report says that there is no prospect of exporting coal, but we could export the gas and then burn our coal. It is a deliberate strategy.

The argument is that the Government are only following market forces. What a lie! Nuclear power is three times the cost of coal. Market forces? When shall we hear Conservative Ministers say that the nuclear industry will survive if it can compete with the cost of South African coal? No market forces are involved here. It has been emerging for some time that the cost of nuclear power is three times the cost of the pits that are being closed on economic grounds. There is a statutory requirement that the generators should use a certain amount of nuclear power, but there is no statutory requirement that they should use coal.

Let us consider agriculture. Do Tory Ministers ever say to farmers that if they cannot compete with the foreign price of food, the Government will close the farms? Of course they do not say that. They tax foreign food up to the level at which British and Community farmers can produce food.

One should not leave out of the account the cost of closures because it would have taken 15 years of running a so-called uneconomic pit to have lost as much as is lost by closing the pit. One still has to pay for subsidence and pensions. The cost of the strike was £5 billion or more. One might add to the calculation the fact that the Yorkshire police had to pay £400,000 to people whom they had wrongly charged with riot at Orgreave. That was the proof of the policy of the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley).

This has been a political strategy from the beginning. I have never believed a word that Conservative Ministers have said about their regretful adoption of market forces and about how they would love to help the industry. That has never been the case. After 1926, 1972, and 1974, this Government decided to break the power of the National Union of Mineworkers. It gives me some satisfaction that the Prime Minister who took on Arthur Scargill was slung out by her own party, whereas Arthur Scargill is still the president of the National Union of Mineworkers. Why is that? The reason is that he told the miners the truth. He said from the beginning that the industry would be butchered. The Government are butchering the industry and they did butcher the industry, so it is somewhat pleasing to me that Arthur Scargill still enjoys the confidence of the miners.

We know what will happen with privatisation. Enormous profits will be made. The East Midlands electricity board—I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras for furnishing the figures—paid £7 million to the City to be sold off. Its shares have gone up by 88 per cent. and its directors have had a 225 per cent. wage increase. The chairman now gets £3,500 a week. That is what privatisation is about. It is about lowering the wages and the health and safety standards of the people who do the work and about boosting the profits of the speculators. If the Conservative party had the honesty to say that that is why they are doing it, we could at least believe them, but they tell us all the time that everything is due to market forces.

If we are to make sense of the difficult decisions of energy policy, we must have a national energy policy. We shall have to phase out nuclear power because it is not cheap, it is not safe and it is not peaceful. We shall have to stop the coal imports and no one should tell me that we cannot stop them. We could stop them by saying that imported coal had to be produced under the same conditions under which coal in Britain is produced. We could keep coal imports out by saying that miners in the exporting countries should have the same wages and the same conditions. We shall have to stop or limit opencast. We shall have to put money into flue gas desulphurisation. We shall have to try to export coal. Our coal is far cheaper than European coal, so why do not the Government, who talk about the level playing field, do something about it? Why do they hire Rothschilds to say that there is no prospect for the profitable export of coal? We should also go for energy conservation and alternative energy.

The wealth of this country was built on coal. The prosperity of our industrial society was built on coal and on the products derived from coal, such as chemicals. This country's future depends on coal because, when the oil runs out, there is 1,000 years of coal under our territory —if one includes coal under the North sea. A policy that was designed, politically, to butcher the coal industry and to punish the National Union of Mineworkers is not just a betrayal of the industry, but a betrayal of the national interest. That issue will remove one or two Conservative Members when the election comes and will bring to power a Government who will put coal back in its proper place as the heart of our energy policy.

6.44 pm

Mr. John Hannam (Exeter): I offer my congratulations to the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) on his excellent maiden speech.

I am sorely tempted to pick up some of the points made by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), but I will refer only to one. He implied that concessionary coal would be in danger after any future privatisation. His hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) could

correct him, because he received an answer in the past few days which confirmed that the same amount of concessionary coal finance will continue to be paid.

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian): I have not intervened because I hope to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker. I hope that, when the hon. Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) refers to my question, he will inform the House about my second question. The Secretary of State replied that it was for British Coal to decide whether it wanted to buy out concessionary coal. That was an important answer.

Mr. Hannam: It was made clear that the concession would continue. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made it clear that whoever controlled British coal —whether British Coal or a privatised company—would still have that obligation. That point should be made clear.

I recall attending many Coal Industry Bill debates over the years and being a member of many Coal Industry Bill Committees. I do not recall one Coal Industry Bill that did not present a large increase in funding for the coal industry during the 20-odd years during which I have been involved. Throughout those two decades, the industry has experienced two contrasting scenarios. In the 1970s, money was provided to fight the battle of trying to maintain an artificially high level of production of coal, which resulted in artificially high levels of electricity generation from coal. Coal Industry Bills reflected the huge subsidies that were needed for that policy.

In the 1980s, a different scenario evolved. The coal industry slipped down quite dramatically to its present size, and at the same time it improved its productivity threefold over the average of the 1960s and the 1970s. The 1970s and the 1980s were contrasting decades for the coal industry. No Government in history have been as committed to Britain's coal industry as the present Government. Since 1979, they have invested more in British Coal than all the Governments since 1945 put together. There has been more than £7 billion of investment in the industry, and a further £17 billion in grant aid has been made available. That is the equivalent of £2 million in British Coal every working day since the Conservatives came to office.

The response from the miners has been superb. In 1985, the average miner produced 571 tonnes of coal each year. The figure has now soared to 1,187 tonnes per miner per year. It is right that we all pay tribute to the determination of the miners to keep their industry afloat in ever more difficult times.

We all know that the peak of pit closures occurred not during Conservative periods in office, but during Labour periods in office—from 1964 to 1970 and from 1974 to 1979—when 295 pits were closed down. Since 1979, there have been just 140 closures—less than half Labour's level over the same time span.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Is my hon. Friend aware that more pits were closed when the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) was Minister than were closed under almost any other Minister? The redundancy arrangements offered to miners under his pit closure programme were far less generous than those offered by this Conservative Government over the past 12 years.

Mr. Hannam: My hon. Friend's point is relevant to the Bill. We have heard of the prospect of the coal industry contracting but becoming more competitive all the time. The Government have not only provided massive investment for the industry—more than all other Governments since the war put together—but written off debts and put British Coal on a solid financial footing. They have also tackled the long-standing problem of mining subsidence.

The Bill will continue the commitment to provide generous grant support for the process of restructuring. That continued support has enabled British Coal to achieve its vital restructuring without a single compulsory redundancy. I find it hard to believe that anyone could vote against the Bill on the grounds of the increased resources and the amount made available for redundancy payments and retraining costs.

Having said that, I agree that the debate offers the House a chance to consider the future of the industry. Regardless of any future privatisation plans, which I do not believe bear on the Bill, the tough challenges facing coal production throughout the world mean that difficult decisions and changes still have to be made. We are still in that process.

We have read the Rothschild report, or at least a leaked copy which has been circulating. It projects a dramatic fall in demand for coal in the United Kingdom from 90 million tonnes in 1990-91 to about 65 million tonnes in 1994-95 and to about 60 million tonnes by 2000. The report forecasts a reduction in deep-mined coal of about 65 million tonnes from about 58 collieries at present, to 25 million to 30 million tonnes from about 20 collieries in 1993-94. The report also predicted a rather dramatic further fall to about 14 collieries thereafter.

I have spoken to some energy experts about the report. Their general view is that, if the expansion of gas generation of electricity continues at its present level and if the generators import up to a third of their reduced coal demand, the Rothschild report's forecasts could come true. However, I am not so sure. I feel strongly—I have talked to a number of energy experts—that, after the initial burst of increased use of gas and oil and after the stepping up of coal imports, there will be a medium-term levelling out as prices of gas from the new gas technologies become less competitive.

I also believe that, as imports of coal on the world market increase, that will influence the world price of coal. I do not believe that the scenario projected by the Rothschild report as the ultimate and most serious scenario is necessarily the one that will happen.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): I appreciate what the hon. Gentleman says about the Rothschild report, but in view of its status, is not it strange that the Secretary of State did not even mention it in his speech?

Mr. Hannam: I am not responsible for what my right hon. Friend said, but he painted a clear picture of the coal industry as it will be affected by the Bill. The Rothschild report has not been published. It is a leaked document, and it would be wrong to expect my right hon. Friend to comment on it. I am talking about the future of the coal industry, and I hope that the Minister will be able to enlighten us on how he sees the coal industry developing, because that is an important issue.

Traditionally, coal has always been a main source of fuel for our power generators, but during the past 20 years

[Mr. Hannam]

—under Governments of both parties—much diversification has taken place. Renewables, nuclear energy and gas now play a key role. I believe that we shall always have a substantial market for coal in this country. I take seriously the point about the potential for the exports of coal. That will increasingly come into focus in the coming years.

However, our aim should be to ensure that, when we talk about a market for coal, we mean a market for British coal, competitively and efficiently mined. A privatised coal industry will have the best chance of achieving such a target, but in the meantime I am concerned that morale and confidence are being sapped by the uncertainty.

Unfortunately, at the moment, as contracts are being negotiated and likely to be completed by 1993-94, and with world prices of coal not yet affected by any major jump in imports, I understand that it is very difficult for the Minister or for the Secretary of State to make any projection about the future level of coal demand except in the most general terms. However, I hope that the Minister will be able to agree to some extent with my premise that, in view of factors such as those I have mentioned—an increase in the costs of gas generation after a flush of stations are completed, an increase in coal import costs and improvements in environmental protection technology—there must be a strong chance of our coal industry achieving even greater productivity under privatisation, thereby attaining a median level—not the Rothschild bottom level—of deep-mined production much closer to 40 million or 50 million tonnes. That is what I believe could happen, rather than the frightening lower level forecast by Rothschild.

Mr. Meale: The hon. Member talked about morale in the industry and the importance of maintaining it, but there is another aspect. Does he not believe that the introduction of the Bill, which would increase the hours worked underground, would involve offering bigger redundancy packages, and therefore more job losses in mining areas, and would therefore seriously undermine the morale of mining communities?

Mr. Hannam: The hon. Gentleman's interpretation of the Bill's intention is wrong. It has no such aims, but takes account of the changes likely to occur because of the European Community, and it prepares the ground for any legislative changes.

I return to the point that I was making about a healthier future for the coal industry than that which is generally supposed. The Rothschild report states that a 10 per cent. across-the-board cut in costs for deep-mined coal would create 10 million tonnes more than the central reference case that it set out. Last year, British coal's productivity rose by 9 per cent., and this year it stands 12 per cent. higher. Therefore, a 10 per cent. rise during the two to three years when the contracts come into place is eminently feasible.

According to the National Association of Colliery Managers, with which I had a meeting last week, the present contracts with the electricity generators which are due to expire in March 1993—one of the crucial dates—give a price for British Coal of £1·80 per standard unit of gigajoule. At current world prices and exchange rates, imported coal delivered at the coast would cost about £1·30 per standard unit.

The 50p gap is undoubtedly too wide to close immediately in 1993-94. Unless a European carbon tax is imposed which would blow all our calculations sky high, a staged reduction in price—possibly in two tranches of 10 per cent.—could be achieved by the industry. Colliery managers believe that that could be done in the next few years. How that is achieved will depend on the view taken by generators, the Government and the industry about the long-term security of supply and the balance of payments needs, but it must be considered carefully as we approach another era of restructuring in the coal industry.

Where do the Opposition stand? We have read reports in the *Evening Standard* of meetings that have taken place or that are proposed between coal-mining Back-Bench Members of Parliament and the Leader of the Opposition. Clearly they get no satisfaction from the fact that their party has a cohesive policy for the coal sector. The Labour party talks about maintaining the present size of the industry. Everyone knows that, in view of the new gas generators being built, that will be impossible—that is the reality of the market.

We hear of restrictions on coal imports, but such a protectionist policy would be unacceptable to GATT and to the European Community. The Labour party talks of forcing generators to burn coal irrespective of cost and to phase out nuclear power. That must run counter to their green party image, as it would create more carbon dioxide and sulphur dioxide, therefore making it impossible to reach their target of stabilising carbon dioxide emissions at the 1990 level by 2000. It would also mean a return to heavy subsidies which, as Germany is learning to its cost, are unacceptable to the European Community. The German coal industry is having belatedly to follow the restructuring path that we have been painfully following. The Germans plan to axe 30,000 jobs and to reduce national output from 70,000 tonnes to 55,000 tonnes over the next few years.

The policies proposed by the Labour party add up to a sham attempt to fool miners and electricity customers that they can have their cake and eat it. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has put the arguments fairly and squarely to the Opposition spokesman, who, as usual, replied with a lot of wind power but no facts.

I support the Bill because I see it as a further sign of the Government's support for a competitive coal industry. I do not pretend that the path ahead over the next few years will be easy for our miners, but there is a good future for coal as an integral part of our energy scene. I hope that, as the present period of uncertainty over contracts comes to an end, our miners will be given the chance to rise to the challenges ahead, as they have done during the past few years.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): I have to remind the House that speeches between now and 8.50 should be limited to 10 minutes.

6.59 pm

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): Perhaps we should say that we are really discussing the coal industry (privatisation) Bill, phase two. The Bill is getting the industry ready for privatisation.

I pay tribute to the first-class speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright). He replaces a

first-class lad. I might mention that George left owing me a bottle of wine, so I hope my hon. Friend will remember that.

The Bill refers to restructuring, redundancies, and the repeal of the Coal Mines Regulation Act 1908. Indirectly, the Government are giving away taxpayers' money. By giving it to the Coal Board, they intend to send it back to their friends in the City. One needs only to look back through the great privatisation sales to realise who has made the profits from them—not the little shareholders dabbling in a few hundred shares but the big City finance chiefs. Of course, one expects that from the Government.

Let me get the record straight. The hon. Members for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) and for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) referred to coal imports. We played a small role in fighting the importation Bill, and there were no crocodile tears then. When I asked those two hon. Members to try to cajole their hon. Friends into our Lobby, they disappeared. I would not want Nottinghamshire miners to be misled by their crocodile tears now.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), because the Rothschild report reveals the Government's true intentions. The tragedy is that the Government will not for once stand up and tell people exactly what they intend for the industry and the country. They have faithfully followed the market forces philosophy since 1979, and the Bill goes the same way. It does nothing for the industry and nothing for the long-term interests of the country. It demonstrates the economics of the cat house. The Government had better go back to the cat house and find out what economics should be about.

Like King Canute, the chairman of British Coal seems to stand on the beach and allow all the privatisation and all the coal imports that the old Central Electricity Generating Board wanted and the two new generating bodies appear to want, while he does nothing. Yet he has a large salary. I do not understand why. The industry for which he is supposed to fight is declining each week, let alone each year. But does the chairman's salary decline? It does not. Does Hobart house decline? No.

Restructuring is taking place in coalfields throughout the country, bringing savings from the vast reductions in manpower, yet we still have Hobart house, that ivory tower. When will that be subject to restructuring? Why has British Coal not moved to Doncaster—to Coal house St. George's, in Thorne road? The concept of nationalisation has gone. King Canute and the rest of his cohorts on the board do not wish to get involved in trying to save the industry.

The closure of pits and the annihilation of coalfields means the dereliction of pit villages. Regrettably, the Government are not providing the alternative jobs that are so vital to mining communities. It is time that they reconsidered their market forces philosophy.

The sums mentioned in the Bill do not represent the true cost that the country will have to pay. We must realise that the taxpayer will have to pay at least £200 million more each year because of the rundowns and job losses in the coal industry, and the resulting state benefits. My estimate is a little conservative. The cost will probably be a lot higher. Jobs connected with the mining industry will also be lost if the Bill is passed, and that will increase the £200 million tremendously. The Government have no long-term employment policies, only a policy of continued unemployment.

The Government also fail to take into account the Bill's likely impact on our overseas balance of payments. Because of the reduction of mined coal in this country, there will be a need to import coal and that will affect our balance of payments—apparently we have not solved the export problem. The Government do not seem to have considered the import-export problem or our balance of payments at all. The market forces philosophy works only from day to day.

When the cartels have total control—as the Government appear to want—the country will start to pay the price that the cartels expect. The poor old taxpayer and consumer will have to pick up the bill for the Government's bad industrial policies. No wonder we are in such a mess.

Why are we repealing the 1908 Act? I listened intently to the Secretary of State, but I did not hear him say the word that would answer that question. The word is "privatisation". I wish that the Government would stop trying to kid people.

The former Prime Minister wanted us to go back to Victorian values. I do not want a return to those Victorian values—women worked down the mines then, and they would still be doing so under Conservative legislation. Perhaps children will be next. Before anyone starts laughing he should consider the social policies that the Conservative party has adopted since 1979. This legislation is designed to increase the number of hours worked underground, but the Government cannot have their cake and eat it. They screamed their refusal to implement the social charter, and they are wholly opposed to the minimum wage. The Government should stick this Bill somewhere I cannot mention, and we should vote it down this evening.

7.10 pm

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): In an indifferent speech the Secretary of State aroused suspicions about the 1908 Act. He has only himself to blame. He did not tell us much about the directive; he merely gave us some Euro-gobbledegook about the directive applying immediately to British Coal but not to the private sections of the industry. It would have been more sensible to bring the directive to the Floor of the House, once it is agreed, in legislation that would, if necessary, repeal the 1908 Act. That will have to be done anyway. Perhaps the Secretary of State did not brief himself properly. He certainly did not quell our suspicions; on the contrary, he further aroused them by the manner in which he handled the repeal of the 1908 legislation.

The right hon. Gentleman gave us the impression—indeed, he said—that gas was cheaper than coal. Perhaps it is, but the revenue costs of running a gas-fired power station and a coal-fired power station are roughly similar. Even in terms of running costs, coal is competitive with gas at today's prices. The difference lies in the capital costs of constructing power stations. This Bill will subsidise redundancies and the creation of new jobs at the expense of mining jobs. Often those new jobs are created by British Coal Enterprise in the service sector. Many of them are part-time. But why not subsidise new clean coal-fired power stations to preserve jobs in the coal industry which

[Mr. Denzil Davies]

create wealth and maintain a decent standard of living for those in it? It is not a question of subsidy or no subsidy; it is a question of where subsidies are most sensibly deployed.

Dr. Kim Howells: My right hon. Friend is highlighting one of the central hypocrisies of the claim that gas will solve all our environmental problems. Gas-fired stations are being bolted together because that is cheaper than retrofitting the desulphurisation systems of the coal-fired power stations which might use this great fuel.

Mr. Davies: My hon. Friend is right. Coal stands up well in any like-with-like comparison.

I am one of a dwindling band of Members who represent constituencies that still have at least one publicly owned deep mine. My constituency, together with Carmarthen, covers the entire anthracite coalfield in Britain and one of my purposes in speaking tonight is to speak up for that coalfield, which tends to get ignored.

I recently wrote a letter to the new chairman—I also wrote one to the former chairman—of British Coal. I suggested that British Coal set up a small mines company to develop and mine the anthracite in west Wales.

Dr. Kim Howells: A good idea.

Mr. Davies: It certainly is. Anthracite is still in demand even for domestic purposes. People cannot get enough of it, particularly if it is anthracite of the best quality. It is also a clean coal. We have heard a great deal about the environment; everything that is burned creates carbon dioxide, but anthracite has a low sulphur content. The dust from it can be used in the new-technology clean-coal power stations.

The Welsh anthracite field is the only one west of Poland, so I thought that there would be a tremendous market for it from here all the way to Poland, the more so since 1992 is on the way. The east Germans have had problems with brown coal pollution, so in my naivety I thought that there would be a splendid market for this splendid product. As for imports, the Chinese tried and failed, the Vietnamese have occasionally tried but have not got far and perhaps the South Africans will try. But we can compete with the imports if and when they come. The problems that arise in respect of soft coal and bituminous coal do not arise with anthracite.

In my constituency there is some activity among the small private mine operators. Planning applications are being sent in to the county council asking for permission to extend or construct small mines. So the market seems to think that there is profit to be made—hence my belief that my idea for a British coal operation was in tune with market forces.

Such a venture would not cost much. The mechanisation does not need much money spent on it. Our two main assets are the coal itself and the skills of the miners. I was not asking for enormous investment in the new venture. Unsurprisingly, however, the answer was no. It was not a reasoned no or an analytical no: it was a British Coal no. I have been in the House for 20 years, so I and other long-serving Members know what a British Coal no is. It is a no pregnant with the inflexibility and lack of imagination that have characterised the senior management of British Coal for so long—factors that have contributed to the sad state of the coal industry today.

I was told that demand for anthracite was falling. The next paragraph of the letter directed me to the headquarters of the opencast executive in south Wales. After 20 years here I know about that executive, too. I was told that its members might talk to me. That executive wants to gouge out more parts of my constituency. Eighty per cent. of the anthracite produced in Britain, and hence in my constituency, is produced by the opencast executive; only 20 per cent. by small mines.

We are told that opencast coal is cheaper to produce. I do not know if that is true. It is certainly not cheaper for the environment or in terms of noise, or dust in the atmosphere, or even the gases that come up from opencast mining. New research suggests that methane and other gases are released by opencast mining. They are not released by deep mines, slant mines or drift mines. Opencast mines are not cheaper, either, in respect of the sterilisation of the coal. The sterilised coal is below the coal that the opencast machinery can reach. Why not impose on opencast companies the condition that they must construct concrete tunnels so as to reduce the costs of getting at the coal which cannot be reached by machines? Overall, I do not believe that opencast mining is any cheaper.

In the past we have tolerated opencast mining in west Wales because we have accepted the argument—perhaps we should not have—that profits from it are used to maintain the deep mines. That loyalty is disappearing and it will disappear even further if British Coal and the opencast executive are privatised. There is no more loyalty. In future, we will fight every planning application in west Wales to extend opencast mining. We believe that the balance of 80 per cent. to 20 per cent. is wrong. That balance must be redeemed, reduced in favour of deep mining, slant mining and the proper mining of anthracite. I cannot believe that British Coal or the Government will achieve that. However, I am confident that my right hon. and hon. Friends will do it.

7.19 pm

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): I want first to apologise for the fact that I have not been here for all the debate and for that reason, if for no other, I will try to be relatively brief because other hon. Members wish to speak.

My constituency is about as far away from the coal mining areas as it is possible to get. It shares a border with the English channel and its immediate acquaintance with mining relates to clay mining. People from my part of the world who know their ancestry will be aware that the clay miners reckon that they are as hard a bunch of men as there could ever be. They would not in any sense take second place to coal miners. It would be a bad mistake for me to carry that particular idea forward in the Chamber tonight, so I will not do it.

In the relatively few years that I have spent in this place, I have noticed the increasing tendency of people who write to me to be concerned about the environment. Twenty years ago the words "ecology" and "environment" were probably not used in the normal course of conversation. These days they are the main topic of conversation.

Ever since 1983 I have noticed that when people write to me about environmental matters, their contributions

have become relatively better informed and more subtle. It is clear from my postbag that, while at one time it was thought the debate was that nuclear fuel was dirty and therefore by implication everything else was clean, people are beginning to realise that, inevitably in life, sometimes things are not that easy.

One cannot simply say that nuclear fuel will always be dangerous. Increasingly people now understand the polluting effects of fossil fuels. One needs only consider the horror stories from eastern Europe to understand how dangerous and devastating fossil fuel pollution can be. It would be impossible to calculate the damage that this country has suffered from the burning of fossil fuels since the industrial revolution. However, I believe that that damage is incalculable, vast and grave.

When we consider what is in this country's long-term interests, when we consider the advantages of fuel resources available to us and when we consider how fortunate we are to have such stocks of fossil fuels, even if we consider the damage to communities when traditional industries can no longer manage, the one ingredient that we cannot ignore is the environmental bill which must be paid.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): Is the hon. Gentleman saying that his postbag is full of letters from people lobbying him to support nuclear power? That is not my experience nor, I would imagine, the experience of the majority of hon. Members. The opposite is usually the case. The environmentalists lobby against nuclear power. The hon. Gentleman appears to be lobbying for it.

Mr. Nicholls: I partly agree with the hon. Gentleman. However, when I consider my postbag in 1983, the environmental views were straightforward. Nuclear power was bad and, by implication, any other form of power was good.

Nowadays, when people write to hon. Members, they do not write to say that they are pleased about something; they write in to complain. They write in to complain about the nuclear power industry. However, it is my experience —one that the hon. Gentleman may not share in his part of the world—that there is a growing realisation that life is not quite that simple. Even those who believe that nuclear power is ultimately a polluting industry now realise that the argument is not quite so straightforward. In a sense, one gets ought for nought. People realise that there is a price to be paid for fossil fuels as well. That is a welcome development because, although it makes the argument more difficult, it shows that people are beginning to realise that there is a subtlety in the argument which perhaps did not exist before.

I hope that when my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Energy replies to the debate, he will consider the implications for the environment. So often our debates in this place polarise and Conservative Members defend their communities while Opposition Members defend theirs. I come from an agricultural community and I can understand how the care for one's community sometimes overrides all economic logic. One need not apologise for that as it is a simple fact of life. At times I have to tell farmers that, like it or not, an economic price must be paid which may be too great for the preservation of a lifestyle which they and their forefathers enjoyed. Opposition Members must be aware that a balance must be struck and a price must be paid. That price may be too great from an environmental point of view. I do not say that flippantly or lightheartedly, nor do I take any comfort from saying it.

There seem to be contradictions in Labour's position on pollution and what it means in terms of fossil fuel which simply cannot be resolved. We have heard that coal is good and clean and that point was emphasised by the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies). However, it is not clean or cheap. As I understand it, Labour wants to discourage the use of gas in power generation. That can be achieved only by burning more fossil fuels and by increasing the amount of coal that is used. An environmental price must be paid for that.

Unusually these days we are all communautaire——

Mr. Skinner *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Nicholls: Well, apart from those who are completely prehistoric. These days we try to be more communautaire than thou. No doubt the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) would say, "En passant".

As I understand our responsibilities and obligations in Europe, we no longer have the freedom of movement that we might want in terms of banning imports. The days when we could defend good old British bulldog industry by slamming on trade tariffs and erecting a barrier against the rest of the world have gone. Will it be possible in the context of our presence in the European Economic Community for us to restrict coal imports? I doubt whether that will be the case. As I understand our obligations in Europe and in GATT, even if restriction was a good idea—and we could debate that if we had to—that will not happen again. I cannot see how that aspect of Labour party policy can be squared.

If it were possible to diminish the use of gas, to increase British coal production and to erect trade and tariff barriers to ensure that we cannot import foreign coal, what would the consequences be for those who want to use the power that is generated? Understandably we hear a great deal about how increases in the very staples of life bite on those who can very often least afford those increases. The consequences of erecting barriers—even if we could do that—to produce and use fuel at a price that we could achieve only if we erected those barriers would have a direct effect on the cost of power.

It is easy to debate in this House and reveal inherent contradictions between one side and the other and to make simplistic points about how one side must be right and the other wrong. I do not do that in this debate.

The Labour party is utterly impaled on the horns of a dilemma from which it cannot escape. On the one hand, Labour Members know where their roots are and they know how much they matter to them desperately. On the other hand, they know that the price of preserving their communities in the way that they want will be too high for their own country to have to pay.

The words of the Green party are not usually cited by Conservative Members to justify their own position. I cannot think of many times when I have been able to say that the Green party is very much on our side in this matter. The Green party has said that the Labour party's position is

"wobbly, ineffectual and dictated by the unions."

That view was quoted in the *Daily Mail* in September last year. At the end of the day, those who pay the piper must call the tune.

[Mr. Nicholls]

There is a price to be paid for not realising that the days of production of coal at the expense of all other power fuels are over. We need to know more about that price. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to help us on that point tonight.

7.30 pm

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian): In his maiden speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) demonstrated great knowledge and ability. Hon. Members will be glad to hear him speak again. The most significant aspect of my hon. Friend's speech was the reference to his predecessor, George Buckley. His comments will certainly endear him to his hon. Friends.

As the debate rages on, the Government will surely not attempt to deny that the moneys provided in the Bill will be regarded by thousands of miners as the prelude to the Government's plan to privatise the coal industry. My hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) referred to the speed with which the Government introduced the Bill and his comments add credence to my view. It would be weak for the Government to deny it, because the ink of the Queen's Speech is hardly dry, and it stated that the Government will

"continue to prepare for the privatisation of the . . . British Coal Corporation."

All hon. Members are guilty of using flowery language. I am certainly as guilty as everyone else. However, certain language to which I take exception is used when the Tory party tries to defend the privatisation of the coal industry. I read—I do not know whether it came from the Department of Energy or from Conservative central office; I suspect that it was the latter—that privatisation of the coal industry will drive a stake through the heart of Dracula, the leader of the NUM. What a way for a party to defend its proposals. Yes, a "stake" is involved—the jobs of 30,000 to 50,000 miners.

The Government must be reminded that the average age of the labour force in the coal mining industry is about 30 years. The prospect of being flung on to the scrap heap in a period of rising unemployment is daunting for young men with wives, children and mortgages. The dangled prospect of £30,000 is not much if one is trapped in the dole queue in an area where employment prospects are practically nil.

That point enables me to raise with the Minister the matter of aid to mining areas, which was also referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth. Hedley Salt, chairman of the Coalfield Communities Council, wrote to me on the subject of RECHAR and additionality. Much-needed economic generation is taking place in Germany, Belgium, Spain and France because RECHAR money has been made available to them. However, the United Kingdom Government will not honour the regulations that they agreed. The RECHAR programme is covered by the same European Commission regulations as the structure funds in general. I repeat that the Government agreed those regulations. We hear talk nowadays about being good Europeans. The Commissioner will not release the funds unless the United Kingdom agrees, as Germany, Belgium, Spain and France have done. It is stated that the moneys have to be additional to any funding by a member country which qualifies for assistance—hence the word "additionality", which is associated with funding.

I am advised by the Coalfield Communities Campaign that RECHAR moneys—£100 million—allocated to United Kingdom coalfields in December 1989 have still to reach the United Kingdom. Therefore, it is urgent that the Minister's Department and the Government honour what they agreed, or that money and many other benefits will be lost to the United Kingdom.

I now refer to the proposals regarding the repeal of the Coal Mines Regulation Act 1908. The Secretary of State did not provide a good defence of the Government's proposition. I wish that I had time to go into the matter in more detail, because the proposals in the Bill are seriously flawed. It is no use any hon. Member saying that the length of miners' hours has nothing to do with safety. That argument was demolished in speech after speech by my hon. Friends. The 1908 Act currently limits the shift length for underground miners to seven and a half hours.

The 1908 Act was introduced and subsequently amended because of the realisation of the dangers caused by excessive working hours in the mining industry. As well as providing legislative protection, it underpins the collective agreement which provides for a basic shift of seven and a quarter hours plus winding time for underground workers and eight hours for surface workers. It is a disgrace that the Government's proposition was incorporated in the Bill without any consultation with the unions. The only consultation that the Government had was with civil servants. Some of my best friends are civil servants, but what the hell do civil servants know about working in the mining industry?

The clear view of both miners and my hon. Friends is that the proposed abolition of the 1908 Act is to pave the way for privatisation by deregulating vital safety provisions and allowing the employer to introduce an extended normal working day in the guise of a flexible shift. What upsets and angers my hon. Friends is that the Department of Energy is praying in aid the proposed European Community directive on working time as a justification for that change. I wish that I could go into the matter in more detail. The Government's attitude is two-faced—they are also devoting all their energies to preventing the directive from coming into force. The directive is based on minimum standards—but I am caught out by the time, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am much obliged to the hon. Gentleman.

7.40 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I begin by welcoming the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) to the House. I say that on behalf of the party he beat as opposed to the one that he put into third place—the Conservative party, which was marginalised in that by-election. I cannot agree with the hon. Gentleman's choice of best cricketer in the world, because I am a Glamorgan supporter, or with his preference for league rather than union rugby, because I am a Welshman by background. However, I am sure that, if he can add support for those sports to his campaigning on behalf of his electorate in west Yorkshire, he will serve his people well. I wish him well in that job.

It is obvious from the speeches of the hon. Members for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) and for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) and from that of the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) that underlying today's debate is a debate on Britain's energy policy. We would not have needed much of today's debate if we had a proper energy policy. One of the frustrations of being in opposition for so long to what is, in effect, a minority Government is having to watch this country go on for such a long time without any energy policy.

If we had a rational energy policy, we could ensure not only that coal had a role to play now, but that it could continue to play an important role in the future. The hon. Member for Teignbridge cannot argue simply that nuclear power is cleaner and environmentally more safe and that it should therefore always take precedence over coal, because we can do things to coal that would make it environmentally far more acceptable. In addition, nuclear power is potentially far more dangerous to the world than any activity in a colliery.

I should like to make a couple of points about the Bill's two substantive provisions before turning to its hidden agenda. My hon. Friends and I will vote against the Bill on Second Reading because——

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Only the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Hughes: No, it will not only be me. My colleagues and I will vote against the Bill, and not for any obscure reason. We do not believe that its two main provisions have a necessary part in this year's legislative programme unless they are intended to enable the privatisation of British Coal next year if the Tories are still in power. That argument is self-evident from the words and figures.

The Bill's first provision is to extend the power of the Secretary of State to make grants to the British Coal Corporation beyond the 1987 legislation. The figures are clear, and the Library note confirms them. The Secretary of State's capacity to make grants is at present limited to £1,500 million. The table provided in the Library note projects that we shall not come up against the upper ceiling of the present capacity in either this or the next financial year. It is true that we have had to continue to increase the amount of money that is paid by the Government—by the taxpayer—for restructuring the industry, but we will not reach the ceiling either this year or next year. We could address the issue of whether we need to raise capacity just as well next year as this year.

I have not heard a single argument—there was not a sentence in the Secretary of State's speech—to suggest that the upper limit will be reached in the coming year. It will not be reached as a result of any programmed present redundancies, or by any new contracts with the generating industries, because they will not be renewed until early 1993. Therefore, I can see no immediate obvious or even superficial justification for the provisions.

The same argument applies to the repeal of the Coal Mines Regulation Act 1908. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) had some difficulty about attributing this and therefore did not say that that eminent legislation was passed by a Liberal Government. At that time, Winston Churchill was a Liberal Minister. I am glad that he finds such favour with the Opposition.

Apart from the fact that the 1908 legislation was commendable and is still valid, it is unnecessary to repeal it, because the European Community directive is intended to establish minimum standards. Let us assume that the directive is fully supported by the Government, who do not wish to amend one jot or comma of it and who are willing to sign up to its immediate implementation. The directive does not impose any stricter standards than the 1908 Act.

That legislation is a tougher regulatory measure governing hours of work than the current European Community directive. The last draft of the directive that was considered by the European Parliament refers to a normal minimum of eight hours' work. That is made clear in the Library note and is generally known. For historical reasons, to which many hon. Members have referred, the 1908 Act has a lower minimum. If one wished to do so, one could sign up for the directive while keeping the 1908 legislation in force.

There must therefore be another reason for the Government's proposals, and it was not honest or honourable of the Secretary of State to pretend otherwise. He said that he would not introduce his power to repeal the 1908 Act until the directive was in force, but it is not necessary entirely to repeal the legislation when the directive comes into force, because they are compatible. Under the European Community legislation, one could have tougher standards in national law without any difficulty. One could not have more standards, but there is no argument on that.

The hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) tried to get himself out of a large hole——

Mr. Dobson: Out of a pit.

Mr. Hughes: Indeed, out of a pit.

I was amazed that the hon. Member for Nottingham, South could believe that the provisions have nothing to do with safety. One need only read the 1908 debate—as I have done—to see clearly that the Liberal Government addressed that question. To complement the quotation from Winston Churchill's reply to the debate on the then Coal Mines (Eight Hours) Bill that was given by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, I should like to draw the House's attention to other words of Winston Churchill in the same speech, which are as self-evidently true today as they were then.

"We have reminded the hon. Gentleman of it often; but why should cheapness of production always be achieved at the expense of the human factor? The hon. Gentleman spoke with anxiety of the possibility of a rise in miners' wages as a consequence of this Bill. Has he considered the relation of miners' wages to the selling prices of coal?"

At that time, miners' wages were only 60 per cent. of the selling price of coal. It is very often possible to have better wages and cheaper production costs. It does not necessarily follow that decent wages and working conditions with fewer hours mean a higher cost to the consumer.

The peroration was typically Churchillian. He said that, in 1847, Parliament

"trusted the broad generous instincts of common sense; they drew a good, bold line; and we to-day enjoy a more gentle, more humane, more skilful, more sober, and more civilised population the blessings of which have followed their acts." —[*Official Report*, 6 July 1908; Vol. 191, c. 1332-34.]

Winston Churchill's argument was based on health, welfare and scientific considerations, and aimed to support the work force. Although I have never worked as a miner,

[Mr. Hughes]

I was brought up in south Wales and have been down pits there and in the east midlands coalfield. I am aware of the conditions in which miners work. The air, the cramped conditions, the sometimes incredible heat in the pits and the importance of the job require that those working there be given special protection by legislation. I challenge any hon. Member to say that those who provide one of the most fundamental sources of Britain's ability to earn its way in the world by supplying our energy needs should not be afforded proper legislation by this House. The Secretary of State's argument was no defence.

Like the debate, the Rothschild report conceals the hidden agenda, or does so until it is leaked. The agenda is hidden in both senses of the word. The Rothschild report was hidden because it was a secret and we could not see it, and the legislative agenda is hidden because the Government in fact have a clear view about privatisation. I and my colleagues who have had this portfolio have argued consistently over the years that our national coal assets should belong to the Crown, that these rights such as those for oil and gas should belong to the Crown, and that the Government should give licences rather than that there should be a private monopoly, which is what the Government presently propose.

Only in that way will we continue to sustain a competitive coal industry. Only in that way will we avoid the outcome of which the right hon. Member for Llanelli warned us—more and more opencast mining, to the detriment of our environment and the industry which has served us well.

7.50 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): I declare an interest as a consultant to the Confederation of United Kingdom Coal Producers. As is customary in these regular debates on the increase in funds for British Coal, I shall also take the opportunity to expand on the problems facing the coal industry. It is always a feature of these debates that we listen to the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) who rewrites history to a certain extent. For sheer brass-neck gall, it is usually a virtuoso performance.

The Bill is certainly short but it involves a substantial amount of money. It is the latest example of the Government's massive commitment to the British coal industry since 1979. Since that year about £24,000 million has been invested in coal by the Government. That investment has produced modern equipment which, as we have heard, has led to a much safer record in pits. It has led to a massive programme of alternative jobs through British Coal Enterprise Ltd. and to the most generous redundancy terms. I submit that that is an unparalleled record of commitment.

As both Conservative and Opposition Members have said, the industry has responded to that investment. Since the end of the strike productivity has increased by 100 per cent. and is continuing to climb. That compares favourably with the 2·5 per cent. increase in productivity achieved under the Labour Governments from 1961 to 1979, although I recognise that in that period there was a Conservative Government.

We have also seen the industry cut its unit costs by 40 per cent. The 1990-91 results show that it has made the first profit for 13 years. That is no mean achievement. My hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) referred to the enormous increase in the amount of coal produced per man. I am proud that my constituents who work at Littleton colliery in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) continue to produce record amounts of coal. They are currently ahead of their target of 27,000 tonnes a week. I salute the contribution that my constituents have made at a difficult time.

The figures that I have given show that the industry has enjoyed favoured status. There have been great demands on Government spending and everyone in the coal industry and the coal communities should recognise and acknowledge the priority that the Government have given it. That is a real priority, not the phoney type of priority that we get from Labour Front Bench spokesmen. It is no wonder that the miners of Britain know that the Conservative party is the miners' friend.

British Coal has made advances and a new attitude is permeating its management. At long last the nationalised industry is recognising that the United Kingdom private sector, which is extremely active abroad, has something to offer us here. The private sector already employs some 40,000 people and has capital equipment valued at about £2,500 million tied up in the winning and processing of coal in the United Kingdom.

Of course, the private sector has always been responsible for the winning of opencast coal, but in recent years a refreshing new approach has begun to appear elsewhere. In the past three years or so British Coal has invited the private sector to tender for a variety of work such as surface plant hire, road haulage, some development and maintenance work and the washing and processing of coal at the pithead. That growing partnership between the public and private sectors must be in the interests of the modern British coal industry. But much more can continue to be done.

I welcome the opportunity that my right hon. and hon. Friends are taking to repeal the Coal Mines Regulation Act 1908. It has been instructive to listen to the debate today. As I understand it, the regulations have been broken for years on end. If the matter is of such importance to safety—none of us puts safety other than first—and miners are so at risk, why did not any Labour Government prosecute? Why are not the trade unions beating a path to the door not of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State but of the Opposition Front Bench spokesman, based in his coal mine of Holborn and St. Pancras, asking him to demand that the Government enforce the Act?

I suspect that Labour Members' opposition to repealing the Act is an example of the Labour party being rooted in not 1948 but 1908. Today's management and unions want to get on with producing an effective and efficient coal industry. If their safety was being impaired, the unions at least would be demanding that the Act be enforced.

Other things could be done and I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Minister is not taking the opportunity to do them in the Bill. I should like to see the limit on the number of men allowed to work underground lifted altogether. When my hon. Friend the Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer) was Under-Secretary of State for Energy, I was his parliamentary private secretary. I was delighted that we lifted the limit of 30 men to 150. It seems

that that limit could be dispensed with altogether. That would offer the realistic prospect of the private sector working mines which British Coal considers unworkable.

Our overriding concern must be not for the producer but for the consumer. We need to ensure that industry and the householder have the cheapest possible supply of energy. Competition in power generation, so derided by socialists as Conservative party dogma, is making that a reality. That competition has brought pressure on British Coal to keep its costs under control and it is doing so. My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) highlighted the need for power generators to secure long-term contracts for coal in the same way as gas contracts have been made. I understand his point. Concern for the consumer must be paramount but if the generators believe that they can screw down British Coal with the threat of imports, they would do well to consider the consequences of refusing indigenous British Coal.

First, the world market in coal is small and a large uptake by the United Kingdom could result in a sudden large increase in price. Secondly, long lines of supply could be disrupted in times of crisis. Thirdly, coal mines which have been closed would be expensive if not impossible to reopen. The generators would be at the mercy of overseas suppliers who have alternative forms of supply.

Mr. Dobson: Market forces.

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman says, from a sedentary position, that that is market forces. I am pointing out to the generators what market forces could do to them if they were not cognisant of the need to take advantage of long-term contracts with British Coal.

The Labour party has offered nothing constructive at any point in the debate. Indeed, it knows that since it was in government the industry has been contracting and a continuing degree of contraction is inevitable. We have had contradiction after contradiction from Labour Members. They profess anxiety about unemployment. I do not doubt that that anxiety is genuine. But everyone knows how difficult conditions are in the coal mines, although with modern equipment they are far less difficult than before.

What does the Labour party want? Does it want 200,000 to work in those difficult conditions or does it want a modern, efficient industry in which the minimum number of people are subjected to work in those intolerable conditions? My constituents in Staffordshire would much prefer to work in a clean environment than to have to work with all the risks which exist even today in the coal industry.

There was a contradiction of attitudes when we debated the Coal Mining Subsidence Bill, as it then was. The measure was enacted in 1990. The Opposition spent all the time that was available to them seeking to impose yet more intolerable burdens on British Coal. When doing that they said that they were supporting the interests of the coal industry.

What is the Opposition's view on the size of the industry? If they want to maintain it at about its present size, how will they ensure that that happens? Would they restrict coal imports and break EC rules? Would they ban the use of gas, when stations are being built and the gas is already contracted for? Will they phase out nuclear power and increase CO_2 emissions? The Labour party seems to want to have it both ways. It wants to portray itself as green as the Benches upon which Labour Members sit, yet it wants to protect and cosset an industry that is perhaps not the greenest in the world.

8.1 pm

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): The hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth) will forgive me, I hope, if I do not take up his remarks. He may be among those Conservative Members who think that we should not perceive clause 1 as controversial. As it extends the period of finance beyond the date on which the contracts with the generators cease, we can perceive that there is likely to be an act of folly. As my right hon. and hon. Friends have said, it is clear that clause 1 has been designed with a view to shedding many jobs and closing many pits.

The Minister will say that clause 1 is designed to provide for redundant miners. He will argue that they should be treated decently, and so they should. However, in providing funds for redundant miners, there is far too little regard for the economic and social consequences that befall the coalfield areas. There is the effect upon the community, the cost of physical restoration and the scale of employment need. I read in my local newspaper today that in the past few years 4,500 jobs have been lost in heavy industry. There is a buoyant note from the Department of Employment to the effect that 3,200 jobs have been created for ladies working part-time. There is no conception of the effect of the reduction of income and the weakening of economic capacity. There is little conception of the effect on young people who have seen the reality of employment starvation.

Happily, the Government will not be in power for very long now. They will not be allowed to see the coal industry diminish to a level at which enormous imports are unavoidable, imports that show that they have no thought for the morrow and the effect of their actions on the balance of payments.

It would not be so bad if we saw a real drive for increases in export achievements. I suggest to Conservative Members that they read the early-day motion that I tabled yesterday, which shows the effect of the rather short-sighted policy of the electricity supply industry. It has introduced enormous additional pricing. The Minister is aware of this, because he has received representations from the trade union movement. Powerful and logical arguments were advanced to him not long ago. The Government appear not to appreciate, know of or care about the effect of enormous price increases on the hitherto successful and exporting engineering steel industry, which has had to curb production. Apparently the Government would rather see people watching imported television soap operas than see Britain create the wealth that it needs, or the overseas earnings that will be required to pay for the coal that the Government wish to import.

I represent the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers. It is an organisation with a long title but it is a most necessary body whose members are fulfilling a necessary and statutory role. It is regrettable—indeed, deplorable—that the Secretary of State should have embarked upon the preparation of clause 2 without consulting those with experience. He should have consulted those in the mining industry who have a duty to care, and not only the Health and Safety Commission. He should have gone beyond the leaders of

[Mr. Peter Hardy]

British Coal, who have been queueing up to see changes in regulations and who have been bitterly critical of those who have said that people in the Department of Energy and at Hobart house want to dismantle the coal mine safety regulations.

The Department has had to have drawn to its attention the rock on which its privateering vessel would have wrecked itself—the rock of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. After spending four or five years pressing behind the scenes and arguing behind closed doors for the dismantling of the safety structure, the removal of the colliery deputy and the scrapping of the statutory priority for safety, it found that it would not be able to take that approach because of the provisions that are set out in the 1974 Act.

The 1974 Act requires the improvement or maintenance of existing standards, so the Government, in a rather furtive and deceitful way, have sought to make use of a draft directive. They have sought to allow it—I misquote Kipling—to be twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools.

Labour Members, however, are not fools, and nor are the members of NACODS. We and they know why the Bill has been introduced. It is designed to assist privatisation. That is the Government's intention. They have no other purpose. Despite the claims of Conservative Members, the Government do not wish to save miners. They have no love for them. Conservative candidates like miners if they have them in the constituencies that they are contesting during elections. Conservative Governments do not like miners because they continue to support the Labour party.

Think of what we have seen. The Government's claimed affection for the mining industry over the past few years has known no bounds. I can see from my home the Dearne valley, where pits have vanished—Corton Wood, Wath, Manvers and Kilnhurst, for example. We have seen all the evidence of Conservative care—the destruction of the economy and the loss of jobs—in the name of profit. Some of those who wanted to see the privatisation of the coal industry will not take a long view. Like those who run some of the public utilities, their salaries are so inordinate that they need hold a job for only two or three years. They are not obliged to look ahead, but the House must do so.

Safety is important. The 1908 legislation is important, because conditions underground may be worse now than they were 83 years ago. There is more machinery, more isolation, a great deal more noise and much more tension. Conservative Members should not seek to create conditions in which men can be compelled to work underground for more than eight hours, and that would be the consequence of clause 2.

The Government must act consistently. I gave notice to the right hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Parkinson), a former Secretary of State for Energy, that I proposed to make the following point this evening. On 7 November 1988, I asked the then Secretary of State whether he would give an assurance to the House that, as the Government had no mandate to privatise the mining industry, they would not do so, and would take no significant steps to prepare that course. The then Secretary of State said:

"I can give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that he seeks. There will be no attempt at partial or back-door privatisation in the Parliament."

My hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) then intervened to talk about safety. He asked for an assurance that there would be no deterioration in safety standards, and the then Secretary of State replied:

"I can tell the hon. Gentleman that there will be no lessening of the regulations governing mine safety."—[*Official Report*, 7 November 1988: Vol. 140, c. 3.]

The Bill is a complete betrayal of the pledge or assurance that was given on 7 November 1988, and there has been no explanation or justification for the Government's change of mind. Do they think that we do not remember what Ministers say about important matters such as the future of the coal industry? We have had deceit and betrayal and now we have the insult of the Government's introduction of the Bill. By all means let us have money for redundant miners, but let us have justice for mining communities and a great deal more common sense in the House.

8.10 pm

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): The House must understand what the Bill actually means. So far, those who have spoken have told us what they think it means. Clause 1 increases the grant from £1,500 million to £3,000 million. It is a pay-off for the miners for the closure of 30 pits and the loss of at least 30,000 jobs. That will be the effect for the coalfield communities, about whom many hon. Members have spoken.

The Government talk glibly about how wonderful coal is. Britain has proven reserves for 300 years. Indeed, there is more coal than that, but those reserves are not proven. Nevertheless, I have received tonight, fresh from the Library's research department, figures for imports of coal which show that if they continue at their present rate for the next few months, Britain will have imported 20 million tonnes of foreign coal this year. That is four and a half times the 1983 level.

I ask the Government to be honest. Is it their intention to close down our industry and bring in foreign coal? There is an increasing reliance on foreign coal from countries such as South Africa, Australia and Colombia. We have heard about the sorts of conditions in which the miners of those countries work. Joe Gormley said in the 1960s and the 1970s that the Arabs would not always live in tents. There will be a day when the South African and Colombian miners will not live in tin huts. The Government should remember that when pushing through a Bill to increase coal imports from those countries.

There has been a big increase in opencast mining. We hear a great deal from Conservative Members about the environment. They should come to my county of Northumberland, which is the country's largest producer of opencast coal. It is devastated by coal hills—and if that is not environmentally unsound, I do not know what is.

We should be concerned about miners' jobs. It costs £8,900 a year to keep one miner on the dole. That is an enormous figure when he could have been digging coal. Of course, the Government do not want the miners to dig coal. They want to have only a few pits where they can get their grubby hands on the profits. What about the families of the miners? What about the children? What about the lads in Newcastle and Oxford who we see on television saying that they have no jobs and no hope? Once, we had the pits and the shipyards, but they are gone because the Government have destroyed those industries and jobs and have left the people without hope. The riots during the past few weeks have been laid at the doors of the young

people, but they have been left without hope of a job. They simply have an employment training scheme that gives them the dole plus £10. I do not know how the Government can say that it is a wonderful training scheme.

What about the safety issues and the hours that miners work? I looked up the Second Reading debate of the 1908 Act and I found a wonderful sentiment—that a man should work eight hours, sleep eight hours, and do what he pleases for eight hours—and that is 24 hours in a day. That is a good and genuine sentiment. Ken Moses, the technical director of British Coal—whatever that means—said that he did not think that there was anything very hard about working 10 hours or more underground. He has never worked underground. He has certainly never worked 10 hours underground day after day, week after week.

Many hon. Members have referred to safety in the mines. I have 27 years' experience of working in the mines, 14 of them on the coal face operating a machine. I have worked in a modern industry with new technology and it is very difficult. When the 1908 Act went on to the statute book, miners used shovels and picks. I have worked in conditions where I could not see my hands in front of me because of the dust from the machines, even though they had dust suppressors. I worked in the mines when the water was coming in and I was soaked for hours on end. The Bill will make miners work in wet conditions, with stones coming away from the roof, for 10 hours a day.

Mr. Cummings: Twelve hours.

Mr. Campbell: My hon. Friend is right.

I am appalled that the Government have introduced this Bill without even having a word with the unions, and in particular the deputies union, which is responsible for safety. The Government did not even ask the unions and the miners what they thought about 10-hour shifts without the right safety conditions.

Mr. Christopher Hawkins (High Peak): I accept that there must be some time limit, on safety grounds. What if the men were happy to work four nine-hour shifts rather than five seven and a half hour shifts, and the unions agreed to that? Currently, that is illegal. Is not that nonsense?

Mr. Campbell: If that is what the hon. Gentleman thinks, let us go and meet the miners and talk to them.

Most accidents happen at the end of a shift. The records show that miners are more likely to be hurt at the end of their shift than at the beginning. Currently, they work seven and a half hours. It is a tiring job in an environment which is not comparable with normal working conditions. It is in the bowels of the earth and anything could happen. I have worked in the mines for 27 years and I have seen everything. My hair has stood up on my head with fright at some of the conditions. The Government are now asking the miners to work even longer in those conditions. They have not even tried to think about the consequences. If they were honest and if they were truly trying to do something worth while for the industry, they would ask the miners whether they wanted to work 10 hours, whether they wanted a week off, and so on. The Government have not met the miners or the union representatives to ask them what they want. They have not even asked the mines inspectorate what it thinks about the safety issues.

I hope that the Bill falls tonight, but I regret that it probably will not. I just hope that, when it becomes law, it will not result in a large increase in injury and death in the mines.

8.18 pm

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): I was unable to be in the Chamber for the early part of the debate. I listened with great interest to the speeches and especially that of the hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell). He said that he had spent 27 years in the mining industry. I have no direct experience of the mining industry, but I spent many years in an industry close to it and also in an area close to the hon. Gentleman's constituency. I worked for a company that was then known as C. A. Parsons, and which is now NEI Parsons on Tyneside. I was a design engineer working on steam turbines, with the object of improving their efficiency. We went to great lengths to increase their efficiency by a fraction of a per cent. The benefit of doing that was that lower costs would be incurred in mining coal for the generation of electricity.

That seems to highlight the dilemma facing Labour Members. The hon. Member for Blyth Valley described graphically the difficulties and dangers of the industry. The ideal would be to get coal out of the ground without anyone having to go underground at all. That would be better for all of us. But the dilemma then is what would happen to those who have spent their lives in the industry. I do not accept that they would all have to go on the dole and cost the country £8,900 per annum each.

In the past 10 years, the number of jobs in the industry has declined from about 200,000 to 100,000, but those people are not all on the dole. Many have found other work. The number of people in employment in Britain has risen by 1 million during that period. One must look at the matter in the round and see how the industry can be run with the smallest number of people under the ground. The more efficient the industry is, the more efficient other industries are which depend on coal mining. If we can reduce the cost of electricity, that will increase the number of jobs in manufacturing industry and all other sorts of industry.

Keeping costs down is also important for people who depend on electricity to heat their houses. I have been appalled at the cost of heating a number of homes in my constituency. Many people still rely on the old-fashioned red bar to heat their homes and the cost of electricity is important. Anything that we can do to reduce the cost of electricity is very much to the advantage of people who depend on electricity to heat their homes.

Therefore, we have the dilemma that if we try to protect the industry for the sake of the jobs that exist now, it could be at the cost of other jobs and at the cost of the standard of living of people who cannot afford to pay the high prices which would result. I find Labour's policy confusing. It is one of protectionism. It pretends to be environmentally friendly while not being so at all.

I remember some time ago taking part in a debate with the late Allan Roberts in the Granada television studios in Manchester when we both appeared on the front benches in a mock chamber in the studio. I compared Labour's policies with those of a dirty dinosaur, going round dropping slag heaps and not taking advantage of environmental improvements.

[Mr. Peter Thurnham]

One of the last jobs on which I worked when I was at Parsons was the Drax power station commissioned when the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) was Secretary of State for Energy. He failed to ensure the installation of flue gas desulphurisation equipment at that power station and it is having to be put in now by this Government at considerably greater cost. It is much more expensive to retrofit such equipment. Plenty of evidence was available at the time that that equipment should have been fitted, but if the Labour Government did not want to do something or recogni[illegible]g that was to the disadvantage of the mining industry, they turned their back on it, closed their eyes and pretended that the problem did not exist. *[Interruption.]* That is perfectly true. When the order was placed for the Drax power station, there was no provision for flue gas equipment and it is this Government who are spending the money to put the problem right. That exposes the inadequacies of the Labour party's energy policies.

The mining industry is not now active in my constituency, but there are plenty of signs of it. The old miners' hall in Bolton is a fine building and I am pleased to say that it has now provided a new home for the chamber of commerce, which moved in a month or two ago. I am pleased to see the building being put to such good use. There are still plenty of relics of the old industry about. Gullick Dobson near Bolton is a major employer manufacturing mining equipment.

Some signs of the old industry create problems. Considerable environmental costs in subsidence and weak buildings often do not show up until later. The pump house, just off Tonge Moor road in my constituency, has experienced massive difficulties because an old mine shaft was discovered to be in a different place from where it was thought to be and the new building had to be modified, at massive cost to the owners. That has affected their ability to carry on the business. Another fine new building recently put up, Ashton house, was about to be taken over by a Government Department for offices when it was found that further structural foundation work would have to be done because of the old mining works there. Therefore, the industry has hidden costs and the important thing is to recognise them.

I cannot understand the Labour party's attitude when it highlights the dangers and difficulties of the job and then says that we should distort the economic side so that more people should go underground than would otherwise be the case. We should not be afraid of privatisation because that will show the true economics; what is truly valuable. It can make sense for men to go underground and do a difficult and dangerous job only if it is profitable. Profit is not a dirty word; it shows whether an activity is worth while. If wealth is not created for the country, why send people down into the depths of the earth to do such a difficult and dangerous job? It is most important that all industries should create wealth. Unless they do so, how can we run the health service? How can we find money for the welfare state and for all the benefits that we want? If the mining industry is not profitable, for goodness sake do not let us send men underground working in difficult and dangerous conditions.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the nuclear industry is not profitable, yet the Government prop it up with thousands of millions of pounds in grants a year?

Mr. Thurnham: The nuclear industry should be profitable. It may not be profitable because in many cases the wrong decisions were made about the type of power stations to build. I have no doubt that if one took advantage of the latest designs available, it would be possible to construct a profitable nuclear power station; environmentally, they are much cleaner. It might be sensible to look at gas as the fuel to burn, but it will not be there for ever and we must consider a balance of provision.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to speak. It is right that we should be introducing the Bill, but I am concerned at the massive sums of money that we have written off in the industry. If it is a worth while industry, contributing to the wealth of the country, we should be able to invest in it without having to write off such monumental sums as £5,000 million. Therefore, let us look forward to a profitable industry with as few people working underground in dangerous conditions as possible, while creating wealth for themselves, the industry and Britain.

8.27 pm

Mr. John Cummings (Easington): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) on a magnificent maiden speech. I closely identify with his endearing remarks about his predecessor, a dear friend of us all and a good colleague.

I find no joy in taking part in this debate. The prince of darkness, the new area director in the north east, through deception and duplicity, has today announced the closure of Murton colliery where I used to work, with a loss of 1,000 jobs in an area with 20 per cent. unemployment. That pit has made £5·2 million profit since 1987.

There will be many troubled spirits as a result of the Bill but the Londonderrys and the Joiceys will be dancing a fandango this evening in the knowledge that the Bill is likely to become law and reverse the actions achieved by the sweat and blood of my predecessors who, for several generations, have introduced enlightened legislation since the 1908 Act. For longer shifts there will be a price to pay in human suffering, agony, and great distress.

In my maiden speech, I said that I was a sixth-generation child of the mining industry, and looked back with great tenderness on the hardships and efforts of my predecessors in Murton colliery. I know a man of 80 years of age, who after 51 years working in the industry is wracked with pain and extremely distressed. He is my father. After 51 years, his state of health is distressing to behold. He worked seven days a week, and at times 12 hours a day, out of choice, to provide for his wife and family.

However, at least my father had that choice. He could have used the legislation and told his colliery manager, "No—I am working seven and three quarter hours plus my winding time." If the regulations are changed, miners will not have that choice. Management will determine the length of shift. I foresee a legion of gentlemen such as my father in years to come.

Mr. Hood: If my hon. Friend's father had chosen to work beyond seven and three quarter hours plus his winding time, he would have been paid overtime. The Bill's purpose is not to pay more overtime but to get miners to work longer hours for the same or less pay.

Mr. Cummings: My hon. Friend is correct.

The hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Hawkins) asked whether miners want a nine-hour day or a 40-hour week. We cannot answer that question because there has been neither consultation nor conciliation in respect of the Bill. For a proud industry with a first-class record of consultation and conciliation prior to 1974, it is disgraceful that the Bill has been brought to the House in the way that it has.

As to the closure of Murton colliery that was announced today, I refer to the output of its last five coal faces. E102 was worked with partial extraction and was profitable with 29 weeks of production. E110 was worked with partial extraction, and was profitable for 24 weeks. E112 gave 30 weeks production of partial extraction, and was also profitable. E104 was worked with partial extraction for 16 weeks and was profitable. The cumulative profits of those five coal faces since 1987 totalled £5·2 million.

The deceit arises because coal face E115 was worked with full extraction at the insistence of management, but against the better judgment of unions and of miners who had worked that seam for decades. The consequences were total disaster, losses, and today's announcement of the colliery's closure.

Mr. Skinner: It stinks.

Mr. Cummings: It stinks to high heaven.

Until six months ago, there were four collieries in my constituency—Dowdon, Vane Tempest, Easington and Murton—sharing common pumping costs of £4 million. Dowdon went, and that cost was shared between three collieries. If Murton goes, it will have to be shared between two collieries. As sure as night follows day, we are looking at the imminent closure of Vane Tempest and Easington.

The prince of darkness arrived in July, with a salary in excess of £70,000 a year, but with not one idea or positive suggestion to make the industry viable and contribute to the national economy. He was brought into the area to destroy it. He is destroying not just the area but the community.

Anyone who walks through the village of Murton—where my family has worked since 1842—will see a finely-woven tapestry of social history and commitment. Generations before the state thought about providing homes for the elderly, the people of Murton were doing so out of their own pay packets. There are 26 acres of welfare ground, cricket pitches, tennis courts, bowling greens, and football grounds, paid for out of pay packets and pockets at the pick point. Murton also has a 50 m Olympic-sized swimming pool—the only one of its kind between Leeds and Edinburgh—all provided for by the people of the community themselves.

When the colliery closes, I fear that we will see the death of that community and of its various welfare systems. That closure will affect other businesses in the area. Mineworkers who took redundancy and invested in small firms beholden to business coming from British Coal are finding that their investments are being wiped out.

Many statesmen and Ministers want to make a name for themselves. I suggest that the name of the Secretary of State for Energy in 1991 will be engraved in the hearts and minds of the people of Murton, for it was he who murdered Murton, and that will not be forgotten.

8.36 pm

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) on his maiden speech. I was particularly pleased with the comments on his predecessor, George Buckley, with whom I shared digs in 1987.

I oppose the Bill, because it will further the privatisation and contraction of the coal industry by closing collieries and increasing redundancy among mineworkers. These days, redundancy schemes are not voluntary, simply because there is not a sufficient number of collieries to which mineworkers can transfer.

The Bill will also buy out concessionary coal entitlements and introduce longer working hours by repealing the Coal Mines Regulation Act 1908. The Department of Energy is introducing a measure that relates more to health and safety than energy, but it has no powers of enforcement in respect of health and safety or employment legislation. The Bill seems to have been hijacked as a way of repealing the 1908 Act.

That the Government have no idea of safety measures has been shown tonight by the speeches of Conservative Members. We have seen already measures that will allow women to work underground again. That was done not for the sake of equality, because only certain qualified women will be allowed to work underground. As my hon. Friends have said, it is only a matter of time before children are sent back down the mines.

The extra grant that the Bill provides is for redundancies after 1993. As we know, the new contracts to be negotiated next year will come into force after 1993 and will cover much reduced coal tonnages. Despite all the pleading by British Coal and the Government about commercial confidentiality and the rest, we know that those contracts will involve substantially lower tonnages. Imports will increase by as much as 30 million tonnes.

Mention has been made of the greenhouse effect and environmental implications, but the same amount of CO_2 and greenhouse effect gases are given off by imported coal as from British coal. We should consider also the situation in other countries. America has increased its coal burn to 1 billion tonnes, and China to much the same level. It is no use pointing the finger at British Coal and accusing the industry of being responsible for the greenhouse effect and global warming.

After 1993, there will be another wave of closures. British Coal's chairman has already said that his industry will contract to meet the lower tonnages, rather than fighting to take a larger share of the market. According to the Rothschild report, about 14 collieries will be left by the end of the century.

Some of the money will go towards buying out concessionary fuel entitlements. The Government have said that those entitlements will be safe; yes, they will, because some are protected by statute. That, however, will not stop the Government offering pensioners money in exchange for their entitlement. We have already seen the problems that occurred earlier this year with social security payments. The concessionary coal liabilities do

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not make the industry particularly attractive to the City—and there are also industrial deafness and subsidence liabilities. How will the Government deal with those problems without earmarking funds?

In 1986, the Nottinghamshire area director, Albert Wheeler, introduced what is now known as the Wheeler plan, which brought flexible working to the industry. Since then, the industry has been considering ways of introducing flexible working hours over a seven-day cycle. British Coal and the National Union of Mineworkers have undertaken studies, whose results are now available, to show how a shift system could be introduced. The NUM's proposals provided more machine-available time than those of British Coal.

In a press release that accompanied the Bill, the Government observed:

"In practice the 1908 Act has little relevance to the modern coal industry since it reflects the working conditions, practices and technology of a bygone age."

That is deliberately misleading. The 1908 Act simply underpins the collective agreement that sets mineworkers' hours; it does not mention seven and a quarter hours plus winding time, which appears in the five-day-week agreement. That agreement was signed on 18 April 1947, and revised in December 1960. It was revised again in the Mines and Quarries Act 1954.

The five-day-week agreement is still in force. Even if the 1908 Act were repealed today, the agreement would have to be addressed, because it sets out hours of work. How will the Government amend that provision? In his latest Green Paper, the Secretary of State for Employment suggests that collective agreements should have legislative force. Will the five-day-week agreement retain legislative force? Will the Government allow negotiations to take place between the NUM and British Coal with the aim of amending the agreement, or will its repeal simply be imposed on the industry as wage agreements have been over the past few years?

Morale in the industry is at rock bottom. Not many mineworkers care what happens to it. Recently, a colliery manager called all the men into the canteen and told them that, if productivity did not improve, he would recommend closure. To a man, they stood up and cheered: they could not wait.

Other misleading statements have been made about the 1908 Act. It is not good enough to say that the Act relates only to hours of work. It was originally intended to protect mineworkers from the effects of long hours working underground; as hon. Members have pointed out, nowadays those long hours are compounded by the time that it takes to travel distances of up to 40 to 50 miles a day to get to and from the colliery.

Some hon. Members have referred to what was said in the House when the 1908 Bill was moved. Introducing the Bill, Herbert Gladstone said:

"There is the constant anxiety due to the incessant watchfulness necessary on the part of every responsible man in the pit."

He also referred to

"the darkness, the loneliness, the danger, the discomfort of working continuously in a high temperature."—[*Official Report*, 22 June 1908; Vol. 190, c. 1355-56.]

As my hon. Friend the Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell) has pointed out, there is also the dust and the water.

This year, the Select Committee on Energy produced a report that described roof bolting as not the safest method of providing support underground. Many of the points made in 1908 are still relevant today. There is still darkness, and certainly there is still loneliness. In 1908, 1 million men were employed in the industry, but now there are only about 70,000; the loneliness must be much worse than it was then. There are still high temperatures as well, and, once underground, the men must remain there until they are wound out of the colliery.

The aim of the repeal of the 1908 Act is to increase productivity through a greater use of machinery over a six or seven-day cycle. That has nothing to do with the European directive. Over the past five years, productivity has increased by about 100 per cent., but all that the mineworkers have in return for that are lower wages containing a larger incentive-based element, and agreements that have simply been imposed on them.

Can the Government actually repeal the 1908 Act by this method? Article 16 of the directive allows national legislation to remain, and the Act is relevant to the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974.

8.47 pm

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): I enjoyed the speech of the hon. Member for Easington (Mr. Cummings). While I may not agree with many of his views, none the less I respect the strength and sincerity with which he advanced them. The House is all the better for hearing views that are based on such vast experience. I have served with the hon. Gentleman on the Select Committee on the Environment and I am only sorry that he is not in the Chamber now.

I welcome the Bill. The Conservative party's record of support for the mining industry over the past 10 years is second to none. No one could possibly say that a considerable amount has not been spent on the industry since 1979, with the amount spent between 1948 and 1979. My hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) mentioned that earlier.

Opposition Members should remember that electricity can be generated by other methods. I sometimes think that they overdo the case for coal. I believe in a balanced form of electricity generation and an even-handed environmental and economic approach.

I welcome the developments in the coal industry involving low—nox burners, fluid bed dissolvers and flue gas desulphurisation to cut sulphur dioxide emissions. None the less, in environmental terms there are still problems with CO_2 emissions and there are increasing problems over the disposal of coal ash and gypsum. Those two aspects of generating electricity by coal will become more important and more worrying. We cannot continue to fill landfill sites with substances that are the by-products of generating electricity by coal.

The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) talked about nuclear power, one of the alternatives to coal. One reason for speaking in the debate is that it is important to introduce a sense of balance. There are no coal mines in or near my constituency, but the north-west relies very much on the jobs of those in the nuclear industry to support local prosperity. The right hon. Gentleman said that the nuclear industry is not safe, cheap or peaceful. However, when he was Minister of Technology he had a considerable amount to do with the

nuclear programme. It is a little odd that he should say that now. When he was in office he promoted no end of nuclear power industry projects.

It is also relevant that the right hon. Gentleman did not mention the word "environment" when referring to the nuclear industry. Earlier speakers pointed out that in the past the nuclear industry was considered to have a damaging effect on the environment and that the spotlight was hardly ever directed on the coal industry. During the past few years the nuclear power industry has spent a great deal of money ensuring that nuclear power stations are as safe as possible. Apart from the front-end costs and the capital building programme, there are also the back-end costs of decommissioning. Many of those costs were not in the past—and it is unlikely that this will happen in the future—included in the cost of coal for electricity generation. We hear nothing about the costs of landfill, ash, gypsum and CO_2 emissions.

I ask the Government to ensure that when the different methods of electricity generation are considered they should be assessed on what is often referred to these days as a level playing field. We must take into account the back-end costs of producing electricity by coal in just the same way as we take those same costs into account when we assess the cost of producing electricity by nuclear means.

Mr. Hood: Is the hon. Gentleman giving the same consideration to the ring fencing of nuclear power?

Mr. Mans: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that the costs of nuclear power are higher than coal?

Mr. Hood: Yes.

Mr. Mans: The reason why that appears to be the case is that the back-end costs of generating electricity from coal are not included in the financial calculations. When one looks at the generation of power from coal, where are the costs of subsidence and of the extra devices that have to be fitted to generating stations, as well as the cost of disposing of ash and gypsum and the overall cost of CO_2? Costs are not assessed on the same basis. If they were, I should go further down the road with the hon. Gentleman.

The Opposition's policy on electricity generation appears to be leading in one direction only—towards the increased use of coal to produce electricity. Alongside that policy, however, some members of the shadow Cabinet have an environment policy which is to stabilise CO_2 emissions by the year 2000. Again and again Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen have pilloried this Government for suggesting that that target is impossible and for going instead for the year 2005.

The Opposition's policy is clearly inconsistent. To pacify the coal lobby they insist that more electricity should be generated using coal. To pacify the environment lobby they say that they intend to stabilise CO_2 emissions by the year 2000. The hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) suggested that that is not a problem for this country; it is everybody's problem. He suggested that there was no need to look at CO_2 emissions from power stations in this country. I submit, however, that there is every need to do so and to get the equation right. If the Labour party wants more coal to be burnt in electricity stations, it will have to say that it cannot possibly meet its target, or the Government's target, of stabilising CO_2 emissions by either 2000 or 2005.

The Bill will put the coal industry on a firmer financial footing. I support the help that has been given to the industry in the past. All that I ask is that when the energy needs of our country are examined, the different methods of generating electricity should be assessed in a way that means that we can compare the relative costs in social, economic and environmental terms.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. Three hon. Members have been seeking to catch my eye for some time. I hope, with a little co-operation and good will, that they will all be able to speak before the wind-up starts at 9.20.

8.56 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) on his excellent maiden speech. He has great knowledge of the mining communities where he has lived for most of his life. I feel sure that we shall hear much more from him, especially in debates of this nature.

I do not understand why this two-clause Bill is necessary. Why do we want to repeal the 1908 Act? A recent Department of Energy press release claimed that the new EC working time directive would necessitate the repeal of the 1908 Act. That must be one of the most hypocritical statements ever made by a British Government. They are fighting tooth and nail to stop the directive being approved. I understand that attempts are to be made next month to find a common position. I understand that that common position will be considered by the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers before a final decision is made.

Leaving aside the dubious political argument, the legal argument that the European directive would require repeal of the 1908 Act is manifestly absurd. If that is the case that the Department and the Secretary of State are making for the repeal of the Act, it does not hold water. The directive, like all others about health and safety at work, is intended merely to be minimum legislation and is not intended to replace more advantageous legislation within member states.

I have been looking at some of the early articles of the framework directive which governs all other directives, including those on working time. I have a directive dated 29 June 1989 which states:

> "This directive shall be without prejudice to existing or future national or Community provisions which are more favourable to the protection of the safety and health of workers at work."

Therefore, the argument that the European directive would mean an end to the 1908 Act is legally questionable. Were the 1908 Act still in force on 1 January 1993 when the directive is intended to come into place, the provisions of the framework Act and possibly the working time directive would prevent its abolition. Why do we need to repeal it? Why do the Government need to use the excuse—if that is what it is—of the European directive? I hope that the Minister will be able to tell me if I am wrong, and prove it. I shall be surprised if he can. The Government's great haste in rushing the Bill through may be because they want to wipe the 1908 Act from the statute book before January 1993 so that they are not caught by the provisions.

The second part of the Bill makes provision for a large amount of money. That really means providing for the

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privatisation of the coal industry. The Government have made it clear that that is their intention and the large amount of money is to enable them to see that through.

Since 1984, the Select Committee on Energy has repeatedly produced reports on the coal mining industry. The 1986 report said that never again should the Government allow the industry to be run down so rapidly that it created the social consequences that we saw up to 1986-87. We now find ourselves with the Rothschild report. It seems obvious that if, God forbid, we were to see the return of a Conservative Government, the industry would be privatised. However, before the privatisation programme, the industry would be cut down to the size suggested by Rothschild.

The big problem is that the Government have allowed the industry and the mining communities to be savaged but there has been very little assistance to enable those communities to recover or create alternative employment. In my area, the Wakefield metropolitan district council area, 28,000 jobs have been lost since 1985. There has not been one farthing of Government support, Government grant or European grant to help the communities recover. My constituency now has only one pit and if Rothschild has his way, it is on its way out, together with many more. There were eight pits in my area prior to the 1984 strike. The Prince of Wales called coal from the area Pontefract gold, but if Rothschild has his way, there will not be any. One can imagine the social problems that have been created.

Apart from those considerations, it is irresponsible of the Government to run down the coal industry and to sterilise billions of tonnes of coal. I was surprised to hear the Secretary of State say this afternoon that British Coal had informed him that the closure of the pits did not mean that billions of tonnes of coal would be sterilised. That was a strange remark. Only yesterday, I got a report from British Coal in which it replied to the Select Committee's report on clean coal technology and the future of the coal industry. The report made it clear that millions of tonnes of coal would be sterilised. How irresponsible is it to allow a major industry and a major source of our energy supply to be run down, and to allow the coal to be sterilised for ever? If the Rothschild report is right, capacity will go down to 30 million tonnes which would meet only half the country's demand for the generation of energy.

We may have to rely for half our coal on imports. When we cannot meet our demand, for how long will imports be cheaper than British coal? The children in the primary schools in my constituency can give the answer to that question. It is the height of irresponsibility to throw away our good fortune in having a colossal energy source under our feet and to sterilise it simply because of the political dogma followed since 1984. That is the problem that we face and I hope that, even at this late stage, the Government will have second thoughts.

The repeal of the 1908 Act threatens safety. Despite the genuine efforts of the miners and the management to maintain the markets, men are now being put in positions more dangerous than any since the coal industry was in private ownership. That is not scaremongering. I assure Conservative Members that that is the case, and that men are in danger and are being killed as a result of British Coal's policy.

9.6 pm

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): I echo the congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) on his maiden speech this evening. I also associate myself with his kind remarks about his predecessor, my good friend and colleague George Buckley. George was an especially good friend although, for 20 years, we lived 30 miles apart and never met. He was active in the Yorkshire coalfield while I was active in the Nottinghamshire coalfield. I met George only when I came here, and it was a pleasure for me to meet such a good and conscientious man of the people. I do not envy his successor, because he has a hard job in trying to follow him. George may have been small in stature, but he was a giant of a man to all who knew him.

The Bill is a preparation for privatisation. During the run-up to the general election, the Government do not want to hear the word "privatisation", but that is what is in store for the coal industry—or is it? I believe that there is a third option.

I and my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) have twice met the new chairman of British Coal. Reference was made to the high wages that the new chairman earns. On his appointment, the wages were increased from £90,000 a year—which he thought was a poor salary—to £220,000 a year. I remember that my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian challenged the Prime Minister to comment on the increase, and he answered that the chairman must be worth that salary. The Government must have thought that he was worth the money when they gave him the job and they must value his advice.

The truth is that the new chairman of British Coal has told the Secretary of State that he cannot privatise the coal industry in its present state and that the Rothschild report may understate what is really in store for the coal industry.

The industry may be run down to 12 or 14 pits, and there may be no interest from the private sector, because long-term contracts may not be negotiated, especially in view of the amount of imported coal. The imported coal is heavily subsidised, as we have said many times in the House. If the matter is left to an incoming Tory Government—God help us all if they are re-elected—the choice will be whether to keep a public coal industry or to close it. The third option is the elimination of the coal industry, and we should not overlook that possibility.

I was a miner for 23 years before coming to the House. I was a union representative for 14 years, and I know a lot about the industry and how important the legislation to protect the hours of working is to miners. When I was a union official, most—if not most, a good part—of the serious or fatal accidents that occurred at my pit involved men who were working excessive hours. I am talking not about someone working in an office for a couple of hours but about men working 3,000 ft underground in heat of up to 120 deg, who must swallow salt tablets to stop themselves fainting during their shifts. I remember when I worked at Ollerton colliery in the constituency of the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) that the management had to use haulage bogeys to take fresh water to the miners, who were drinking it faster than it could be ferried to them.

It is bad enough when people are asked to work long hours. In the coal industry, people are now working not two hours' overtime or nine or 10-hour shifts but 12 or 14

hours or sometimes more per shift. The legislation is not intended to legalise what already happens in the industry. It is not intended to legitimise the longer working day in the present industry. It is to accommodate the six or seven-day working week. As I said earlier, that is the thin end of the wedge which brings us closer to the day of ruin.

The former Prime Minister used to talk about Victorian values, and some of my hon. Friends have mentioned them this evening. Victorian days involved 12-hour shifts and six or seven-day weeks, and we are certainly returning to those arrangements. Women are now eligible to work down the pits under previous legislation, but there is protection for kids, for the 16-year-olds who come into the industry. There has always been protection to prevent them from working long hours and being exploited and bullied. The repeal which we are considering will open the way for the exploitation of young kids. We are being led back to Victorian times.

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): One element—that of the private mines—has not been mentioned this evening. I understand from the figures given to me by British Coal that more than 1,600 men are employed in private mines. We know that safety standards in private mines are absolutely abysmal and well below those of British Coal. Those miners are open to even more exploitation than the employees of British Coal.

Mr. Hood: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point. The safety record in the private sector is worse, because it reflects the fact that those in the private sector are already forced to work longer hours. Miners in the private licensed mines used to receive a few extra pounds for each shift to entice skilled workers away from the coal industry. Now British Coal is getting rid of miners and private enterprise has too much manpower, so it is lowering wages. Miners now work in the licensed mines for less than they were paid in British Coal's mines. That has been happening for some time, but the Secretary of State and the Minister should know that.

I am conscious of the time, so I say only that it will be a sad day if the Government are allowed to change the legislation, not only for the miners and their communities or for those who, directly or indirectly, are involved in or seek employment in the industry, but for the whole of society. We have treasured our coal. I do not want to rely on quotations from Nye Bevan, but he was right when he said that we were a country built on coal. That is certainly the case, but the Government are walking away from that fact by encouraging imports of coal to destroy the fabric of our communities. The mining communities have been hammered enough. The Government govern not by consent or even by diktat but by spite—spite against the mining communities.

9.14 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): I shall be brief, because I understand that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) wishes to speak. I look upon him as the authentic voice of the Labour party, and I want him to be heard. I respect his views, although I do not agree with them.

I welcome the opportunity to speak. The Government have clearly shown during their 12 years in office that, whatever the Opposition may say, one does not spend £2 million of taxpayers' money every working day with the objective of closing something down. The Government's objective was to make the industry more efficient, to bring it into the latter part of the 20th century and to make it possible for British mines to produce competitively. All that has been achieved. People with a genuine interest in mining will welcome that.

Coal must still form an essential part of our energy policy. So long as there is coal in the United Kingdom that can be extracted efficiently from the ground, I see no day when we could envisage an energy policy that did not embrace coal. That would be nonsense.

The Bill will produce the finance necessary to allow the mines to operate efficiently and effectively, and will give the people who work in them the opportunity to feel that they are part of an industry no longer hooked on public subsidy. Whatever one's views on public subsidy, the plain fact is that people involved with industries that receive public subsidies always know it and they have that awful feeling that other people are supporting them. That is not true today in many areas that previously had public subsidies.

I do not say that in order to condemn the people who work in those industries. I have tremendous admiration for anyone who has spent a lifetime in the mining industry, especially at the coalface. I have a genuine respect for people who live their lives in that way. Their unique quality is demonstrated in many ways, not least their loyalty and service to the Crown in times of need. Mining communities have always proved admirable in that way.

I see that the clock is moving on, so I shall leave much of what I wanted to say until another day, and let the hon. Member for Bolsover speak.

9.17 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) talked about subsidies, and that leads me straight to the idea which has sometimes been muttered during the debate—that the mines should not have a subsidy. Yet most mines are interspersed with farming communities. There are a lot of fields, then a pit village, a pit tip and another dozen fields. The farmers get the subsidies, but the miners are supposed to get none.

The real trouble is that we hand over £18 a week for every family in Britain—a total of £14,000 million—through the common agricultural policy. The farmers live cheek by jowl with the pits that are shutting down. Some small farmers say, "We are not getting the money either," and they are right. The tin-pot agricultural policy over there in the Common Market has sent the money to the German farmers and all the rest.

A load of hypocrisy is talked on the subject, and the business about the hours adds more. The Government say, "We are not having any social charter. Get it out of the road. We will not be infected by it." Then, when an idea about making miners in pits work up to 48 hours comes along, the Government, with all their hypocrisy, say, "Oh, yes, we shall have to implement that Common Market directive—in order to make the miners work longer."

There is more hypocrisy to do with imports. The figures for this year show that £20 million-worth of coal will be imported to Britain by the end of December—the equivalent of closing 20 average-sized pits and getting rid of between 20,000 and 25,000 miners by throwing them on the scrap heap. They will then have to get money from the dole or the Benefits Agency, which will cost taxpayers a

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great deal more on top of the £25 billion that the state is already paying out for the unemployed. That is the economics of the madhouse.

What is more, 20 million tonnes of imported coal means another £1,000 million added to the balance of payments deficit. The Tory Cabinet comprises so-called business men. Nineteen former Tory Cabinet members enjoy 59 directorships between them. Theirs is the party of big business, yet the Cabinet, littered with all these people with all their business acumen, is making Britain bankrupt because of Ministers' desire to shut pits.

We are on solid ground when we say that we will oppose this Bill. When we get into government, as we shall some time early next year, we will tell the Common Market to stuff its directive on hours. We will make sure, too, that imports are reduced to the same levels as they were under the Labour Government. If we do that, we will save jobs for the miners and make this country richer as a result.

9.21 pm

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) on a magnificent maiden speech and I agree with him and others who have praised his predecessor, George Buckley, who was a good colleague of ours.

The Secretary of State's ringing declaration that this Bill has nothing to do with privatisation is an example of the double-speak that the Tories use when they start talking about the British coal industry. The Bill clearly belongs to a continuous line of Government action and legislation aimed at the so-called ultimate privatisation of British Coal. As the Queen's Speech put it, the Government

"will continue to prepare for the privatisation of . . . the British Coal Corporation."

One of the barriers to what the Government would regard as a successful sale is the amount of regulation covering coal mining activities. That is why the abolition of the 1908 Act was sprung on us, on British Coal's management and on the work force. The Government have done this despite repeated warnings from the Energy Select Committee and from elsewhere that such moves should take place only after full consultation and agreement with the unions. I understand that my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie), who spent many years on both sides of the Dispatch Box defending the interests of the nation and the British mining industry, pointed that out in his speech.

A former Secretary of State for Energy, the right hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker), on being asked about a change in the hours of work legislation by the Energy Select Committee in 1986, said that

"if it had gone through all its processes. If the unions and the Health and Safety Commission all said it was okay",

it would be all right. This Secretary of State does not feel the need to go through such a consultation process. He wants to keep the Government's proposals for the future of the industry a deep and dark secret—and so they remained until the Rothschild report saw the light of day a few weeks ago.

The Secretary of State may try to dodge the issue but tonight he is asking us to allow him and British Coal to pay for the top-of-the-range redundancy levels which the interim report from Rothschild urges as a necessary prerequisite for privatisation——

Sir William Clark (Croydon, West): Who wrote this?

Mr. Barron: I did. The report is not part of a plot hatched by the Opposition to make the Government look bad. It is part of the Government's plot to trade mineworkers' jobs and one of the nation's most valuable assets for a fast buck. That looks bad not just because the Government commissioned the report, but because they refuse to address its contents. All the ducking and weaving since the report was made public has convinced no one.

The report has informed the contents of the Bill, so will the Secretary of State or the Under-Secretary tell us whether the Government are going to reject the advice in the Rothschild report about the future size of the coal industry? Are the Government prepared for the industrial coal market to disappear, something that is implicit in the Rothschild report? If, as we have been told, that is only one of the options, the Minister should tell us what the other options are. If he does not, the uncertainty of the past few months—which has become worse in the past three weeks—will continue to hang over the coal industry.

The Secretary of State said that one of his justifications for further cuts in the coal mining industry is the growth of environmentally-friendly gas generation which we are led to believe is cheap. My right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) disputed that in terms of the cost of gas and he had every reason to do so. The hon. Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) referred to that as well.

The debate about the price of generating electricity with gas is one of the most ill-informed debates to enter this place. As evidence of that, I want to refer to comments of Mr. Colin Webster, the marketing director of National Power. He is hardly someone who has made friendly remarks about the coal industry of late. He presented a paper on 5 April in which he stated:

"I am bound to conclude that looked at from the perspective of the economics of heat and power, it makes no sense to replace existing coal-fired plant with CCGTs unless gas prices are lower than today's."

That is not the coal lobby talking—that is the view of senior people in National Power who know exactly what is happening in terms of electricity generation in this country. That removes the Government's mask which they have worn over the past few months as they have tried to pursue the idea of cheap gas. That was simply another attack on the British coal industry.

If the Government sanction all the deals on gas burn that have been agreed to in principle, we will witness the transfer of 40 per cent. of power station coal consumption to gas. Recent information has shown that all but a few of those plants will produce power at a total cost above that of British coal at present prices. Some could be between 15 per cent. and 30 per cent. higher. Even retrofitting of flue gas desulphurisation at the big coal stations would not make them more expensive than some gas burn. That part of the power generation market will be closed to competition for 15 years because that is the length of some of the gas contracts that have been signed.

At the press conference when the Bill was published, the Secretary of State said that cuts in the mining industry are part of a plan for the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions. Those comments were quoted in *The Observer*

the following Sunday. Reducing carbon dioxide emissions to required levels will not be achieved by ceasing to mine coal in Britain.

No one would disagree about the need for a plan. However, what plan was the Secretary of State talking about in front of the journalists? Under pressure he simply blurted out a few words, but nothing follows from them. He made no mention today of a plan about what the Government are going to do about carbon dioxide emissions. They seem to think that bringing foreign coal into this country and burning it in place of British coal will do something to limit carbon dioxide emissions. What nonsense.

At least the Under-Secretary of State for Energy, the hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), is trying to be sensible. With regard to a carbon tax he said at Energy Questions on Monday that if that

"were done unilaterally ahead of the rest of the world, it could put British industry at a severe disadvantage."—[*Official Report*, 11 November 1991; Vol. 198, c. 766.]

He was absolutely right. He should not introduce such arguments when we know what the Government are after —attacking the British coal industry.

The Bill and the Rothschild report, with their prospects for the closure of 30 collieries in England and Wales, do nothing to reduce the amount of carbon dioxide that we produce. They merely pave the way for an increasing proportion of those emissions to come from the burning of imported coal. We need a plan, but we need a sensible plan —one that Britain and the rest of the world can agree. The Government obviously do not have such a plan, or it would have been mentioned today. The Government's prime motivation is to carry out an act of revenge on coal miners and coal mining communities.

These days, the Government pretend to care about the environment. However, they use it as a weapon to bash the coal industry. If only they had had the sense to invest in cleaning up our power stations, as the Germans have done, we would not watch electricity industry representatives and Ministers rushing around trying to find cheap fixes to meet their European obligations. If only the Government had concentrated more resources on the development of clean coal generators, we would not be light years behind the United States, Japan and other coal-producing countries in Europe. They profess wholehearted support for clean coal technology, but, by forcing British Coal to search for private sector money, the potentially world-beating topping cycle developments at Grimethorpe have been delayed and delayed.

Why is it that the first and second phases of planned underground gasification demonstration plants are to be made in Spain and Belgium? It is because those Governments have been arguing for coal utilisation while our Government have sat on their hands wanting to take a swipe at miners and their communities. The next Labour Government will look after the future of that great national asset. Whenever the Government want to call a general election, that is what we will do.

Some Conservative Members have made their last speeches in a Second Reading debate on coal. We have enjoyed them. The Secretary of State for Energy, on the Monday of the Labour party annual conference, phoned a few national newspaper editors to talk the Conservative party out of a general election this month. The following Tuesday, the chairman of the Tory party stood up at the Tory party conference and said, "We are going to wipe out Labour at the next general election." They cannot both be right. They did not want an election on 7 November. Instead, there are two fewer Members on the Conservative Benches than there were in July. Conservative Members know what is in store for them when they have the guts to call the general election. Opposition Members cannot wait to take the majority off them.

An integral part of Labour's plan to look after the coal industry will be the adoption of European proposals for the coal industry. Clearly, decisions reached in the forums of the European Community have affected and will increasingly affect our energy industries with the advent of the single-energy market. In the past, I have argued that using the spot price of coal on the world market as a benchmark for comparison with the British coal industry is simplistic and short-sighted. Recent discussions within the European Community endorse that view.

A current Commission-approved discussion paper that the Secretary of State must know about on state aid for the coal industry states that there is an urgent need to define the reference price for European coal. That is, a price that would establish an acceptable ceiling on production costs, taking account of the regulatory effect on the world market and a premium for security of supply. The reason for that is that the spot market varies with the dollar exchange rate and, for a long time, has been affected by the dumping of coal into Europe—something about which British Coal has complained to the Commission. We still never hear Ministers support the anti-dumping case. The reference price would allow aid for a long-term market to be established.

When the Council of Energy Ministers meets with those proposals before it, Opposition Members and the British coal industry would like to know what attitude Britain's representatives will adopt. Will they support the proposals that would provide for the coal industry's future? Will the Secretary of State bat for the British coal industry in the way that the German Government bat for theirs? It seems perverse that the expensively subsidised and more expensive German deep-mined coal industry has not suffered the rigours through which our coal industry has been put. The agreement that has been reached——

Mr. Hannam: The agreement is just about to be reached.

Mr. Barron: The hon. Member for Exeter may say that an agreement is about to be reached, but agreement has been reached this week. It will reduce our production by 15 million tonnes between now and the year 2005.

Mr. Hannam: No, the year 2000.

Mr. Barron: No, it is the year 2005 when the figure will be 15 million tonnes. The British Government have been practising euthanasia on the British coal industry and the Rothschild report is about to take that even further. Its proposals will make what has happened up to now look like a day out at the seaside.

It seems odd that the coal pfennig has been given the green light by Brussels when we have been continually led to believe that state aid for our coal industry would not be allowed. Industries in Europe, however, will receive state aid until the year 2005. That is not good enough. Nobody could believe that the Government do anything for the British coal industry because they are absent from the debate and have not done anything to help our plight.

[Mr. Barron]

The Secretary of State and his Back Benchers talk about how the Government have supported the coal industry. That is yet more Tory doublespeak for a decade that has seen the Government inspire a decline in coal production from 120 million tonnes per annum to 91 million tonnes; for a decline in employment from 223,000 jobs to 74,000 jobs and for the closure of more than two thirds of our collieries. If that is support for an industry, I should not like to be part of an industry that the Government were against.

Thurcroft colliery in my constituency is now threatened with closure because of a short-term geological problem, yet it has 20 million tonnes of workable low-sulphur reserves. If the colliery were allowed to overcome that problem, it could soon continue to earn the money that it has earned ever since the pit was sunk earlier this century. However, the Government are intent on that pit closure by which the nation will lose that asset of 20 million tonnes of coal.

My hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Mr. Cummings) referred graphically to Murton colliery in the north-east and spoke about what it means to a community to lose 600 jobs. That is what is threatened at Thurcroft at the moment.

Even when the Government have closed the pits, their vendetta against our communities continues. What other complexion can we put on their refusal to conform to the EEC regulations on RECHAR? What reason can there be other than the Tory party's vendetta against our coal mining communities?

The Secretary of State said that British Coal's market has been in decline for decades. That was certainly the case until the early 1980s, but British miners then started to lose their jobs to imports. That is what the Government want to continue to happen to miners even after all that they have been through to achieve their productivity increases of 100 per cent. in the past six years. Despite that, the Government want to take away thousands more jobs by importing coal.

The Secretary of State also said that the restructuring grant limit is

"not determined by any view of the future of the industry."

I hope that I have quoted the right hon. Gentleman correctly. However, only last year in discussions on the level of restructuring grants, I was told by the then Under-Secretary of State that that was

"linked to expected redundancies. It is for British Coal to decide what manpower it requires ... However the Government need to make some estimate of the number of redundancies in order to seek the necessary estimate provision for restructuring grant."

Everyone knows that the Bill is part of the privatisation process. The Government and their Back-Benchers know it. We know it, miners and their families know it, and the country knows it. That is why we shall oppose the Bill in the Lobby tonight.

9.39 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): The debate has been characterised by deep-seated differences of opinion, but it has been recognised on both sides of the House that the British coal industry faces formidable challenges. That was certainly recognised by the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) in his maiden speech. He made it clear that he will represent the industry in his own way. I disagreed with much of what he had to say, but I welcome him to the House from this Bench and look forward to debating these issues with him on many occasions.

We can certainly agree that coal sales are dominated today by the contracts between the generating companies and British Coal. The contracts specify both prices and volume—70 million tonnes this year, falling to 65 million tonnes next year. They have been cleared by the European Commission because they were transitional contracts. They expire in March 1993. Thereafter, the market will not be easy. Several large gas-fired electricity generating stations will begin to operate and that will inevitably take away a proportion of the market.

Just as natural gas displaced some of the coal and coal gas in the domestic market during the 1960s, so gas-fired stations will affect electricity generation in the 1990s. That is inescapable. But despite those structural changes, there will continue to be a large market for coal. Like Opposition Members, we want to see British Coal secure as much of that market as possible.

Negotiations for contracts after 1993 have not started, so we do not yet know the tonnages or the volumes. However, we know that the volumes will depend on the efforts of the managers and mineworkers in responding to those opportunities. Any Government and any industry in the public or private sector has to face those challenges in not only Britain but other countries.

Mr. Barron: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I wish to make one more point. The hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) mentioned Germany in his closing remarks. The German coal industry has been held out as something of a model by Opposition Members. It has recently announced a likely 30,000 job losses in the years ahead, on top of the 26,000 or so redundancies made during the past three years. The restructuring that we are seeing is mirrored on the continent.

Mr. Barron: The Minister mentioned volumes. Will he or the Secretary of State reject the volumes mentioned in the Rothschild report—25 million tonnes deep-mined and 15 million tonnes opencast?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: As the hon. Gentleman has referred to the Rothschild report, let me make it crystal clear that we have appointed advisers, including Rothschilds, to analyse options for privatisation of the industry. As part of that, it considered a range of possible developments in the energy sector. No decisions on the timing or form of privatisation will be taken until after the general election. Those decisions will be taken by the Government, not advisers. Rothschilds and the other advisers have absolutely no role in decisions on the future of individual collieries.

It is perhaps characteristic of the hon. Members for Rother Valley and for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) that they take the most pessimistic scenario and present it as fact. We are determined to ensure the development of the largest possible economic coal industry that the market can support. We are confident that when the new contracts are negotiated the industry will respond to keep the lion's share of that market throughout the 1990s and beyond. Productivity improvements over the

past five years, admittedly from a very low base, have been highly impressive. Moreover, the industry is beginning to lose the industrial image that it once had of a strike-torn and unreliable supplier. I am confident that that, too, will help in the years ahead.

Mr. Benn *rose*——

Mr. Hardy *rose*——

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Both the right hon. Gentleman and the hon. Gentleman made speeches. I ask them to forgive me for not taking interventions.

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): Will the Minister give way? I have not spoken in the debate.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Yes.

Mr. Ashton: The Government have encouraged the Union of Democratic Mineworkers to consider buying into any sort of privatised industry. If the Government are re-elected—God forbid—is it not a fact that privatisation would come in 1992 and that in 1993 contracts for the supply of coal to the power stations would be awarded? With massive imports, the Union of Democratic Mineworkers would not be able to match the price of that coal and would have to advise its members to take wage cuts to meet the contracts. Is not that the reality?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Absolutely not. We believe that the best chance of keeping out imports is to improve the efficiency and productivity of the industry. We believe also that that will be best done in the private sector. That is why in due course we shall be making proposals to do just that.

I recognise that there will not be an easy transition. That is why we are introducing the Bill and why clause 1 extends the overall limit on the payment of restructuring grant by a further £1·5 billion. I remind the House that since 1979 the Government have approved over £7·5 billion of new investment and have provided for grant aid of about £17 billion to the industry. That has been provided by the Government—by the taxpayer—and is a measure of the Government's commitment to the industry. We are continuing to invest in it at a rate of over £1 million for every working day.

Restructuring grant represents a specific commitment by the Government to the work force. The money supports British Coal's costs of redundancy, transfers between collieries, retraining for jobs outside the industry and the excellent work of British Coal Enterprise. The money helps BCE to carry out a range of initiatives, including the provision of soft loans for new businesses, managed workshops for new businesses, low-cost premises for expanding businesses, training for ex-mineworkers and job shops. I listened carefully to my hon. Friends, and especially my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart), when they set out their ideas for extending and expanding the work that I have described in the affected areas. We shall consider their proposals carefully.

Restructuring grant has been paid by the Government since 1987. It has been raised in progressive stages to the present limit of £1,500 million. The grant provides support for 90 per cent. of the costs of the corporation when it pays redundancy sums to mineworkers. It allows the corporation to pay its mineworkers lump sums of up to £37,000 on leaving the industry, which is generous by any standards. That is why Labour should be supporting the Bill instead of criticising it. If we are to continue the high levels of payment to those affected by restructuring, the Bill is essential. If we are to continue the retraining and employment schemes, we need the Bill.

The Labour party should know about the cost of restructuring because it did so itself when in government. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, between 1964 and 1970 it was a Labour Government who shut nearly 280 collieries. As a result, 170,000 men lost their jobs in the mining industry during those years. In that period, however, there were not the generous redundancy terms or the restructuring payments that are now available.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Will the Minister accept that the flaw in his argument is that no figure is projected for the next financial year which will take the amount needed over the present limits agreed under the 1987 legislation? We do not need to increase the limits for at least another 18 months.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We do not yet know the precise figures required—that is up to British Coal. It controls individual collieries and it will decide the sums required. It is a restructuring grant paid to British Coal, to fund up to 90 per cent. of the sums that may be required when British Coal shuts collieries as part of its restructuring exercise.

Mr. Allen McKay: In the finances that are being made available, is there anything to continue the concessionary fuel arrangements? If privatisation occurs, will the Government guarantee everything that currently exists, will that be left to the private owners, or will the miners be sold down the river?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am happy to give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that entitlement to concessionary coal will be preserved. I am happy to put that on the record once again.

If Labour Members oppose the Bill, they and the miners will know that the redundancy terms on offer—which are generous by any standards—the transfer payments available for those wishing to move to other pits, the retraining help, and the managed workshops are all being provided by a Conservative Government, despite opposition from the Labour party. They know that all that would be put at risk if there were the prospect of a Labour Government. Frankly, it is not an adequate response for Labour Members to pretend that they can somehow keep the market for coal at its present level.

The hon. Member for Rother Valley referred to a national plan for energy. He did not tell us what was in that plan, other than mentioning something called a reference price. He did not tell us what the reference was. He avoided any of the hard decisions that would have to be made if he wanted to stabilise the industry at about its current size, as promised by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras. The hard decisions——

Mr. Barron *rose*——

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I shall not give way as I am responding specifically to the hon. Gentleman's speech.

Will the Labour party shut down the new gas-fired generating stations, break those contracts and lay off the men? Will it restrict the use of the electricity interconnectors to France and Scotland? Will it ignore the European single market and GATT by restricting coal imports? If so, that is hardly in line with Labour's

[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]

new-found enthusiasm for the European single market and free trade. Without facing at least some of those hard choices, Labour's promises remain, quite simply, empty phrases.

We have heard from Opposition Members a wholly misleading account of clause 2. The 1908 Act is an obsolete restriction that is not appropriate for modern mining methods. It has been overtaken by local practices and informal agreements—and that has been the case since mechanisation of the industry began in the 1950s. If it is true, as alleged by Labour Members, that the 1908 Act is so essential for safety today, why did not the previous Labour Government enforce it? I wish that the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) had dealt with that point in his speech, because he was the Energy Minister when the letter of the Act was being breached. He did nothing about it then, so how can the Opposition claim that the Act is pivotal to safety in today's mines?

Repeal of the 1908 Act will not jeopardise safety—we would not let that happen. The coal industry has a good safety record and it has a strong safety culture reflecting the accumulated wisdom of the management, the work force and the mines inspectorate. The Act plays no part in the safety regime. Therefore, we intend to repeal the Act when alternative regulations governing working times are in place. That does not affect our commitment to safety and it has nothing to do with privatisation. For Opposition Members to suggest otherwise shows that they have either not understood the Bill or are trying to bolster a weak case with irrelevant scares.

Hon. Members from both sides of the House have commented on the environment.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. At 10 o'clock when the Division bell goes, the House will have been sitting for seven and a half hours, from prayers through questions, statements and this debate. Is not that a long enough period for miners to be working down the pit? Some of us will believe that we have done a good job during that period.

Mr. Speaker: That has nothing to do with me.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My hon. Friends have made the good point that the Labour party is posing as the party of carbon dioxide reductions while at the same time it wants to force electricity generators to burn more coal, phase out the nuclear industry and, in its phrase, to "deter" the generators from using gas for power generation. That is a neat package for increasing the output of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

But when talking to a different audience at a different time, the Labour party poses as the green party, committing itself to the tough and demanding target of cutting carbon dioxide emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2000. That is a glaring and continuing contradiction between its energy and environmental policies, and it cannot disguise the fact.

However, I shall at least admit that that contradiction does not exist on the Liberal Democrat Bench. I have been examining the Liberal Democrats' environmental document called, "Costing the Earth". They want—I suppose that there is some merit in honesty—an immediate energy tax with the highest rate on coal specifically designed to switch fuel use away from coal. Their energy tax is targeted at coal reduction.

I then looked at the section of the report headed "Economic Impact" where there was nothing at all about the damage to the coal industry. It was not even mentioned. That is how it dismisses the coal industry. There may be some honesty there, but please do not let us hear from the Liberal Democrats that, if they vote against the Bill this evening, they have anything constructive to offer either existing coal miners or those displaced by restructuring.

This evening we have seen the old familiar Labour party of intervention, protectionism and high prices. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) for reminding us of that in the last speech from the Opposition Back Benches. What we do not know is how it squares those beliefs with its later beliefs in market forces, the EC and industrial efficiency. I shall leave that to be worked out by the political analysts.

I am concerned about the practical effect of the Labour party's opposition to the Bill, which would be to hamper or prevent the necessary restructuring of the coal industry which we all know to be necessary. The Bill will allow British Coal continued and necessary access to restructuring grant. Without that, British Coal will be unable to continue the present level of redundancy pay or the redeployment, retraining or job placement schemes that it supports.

The Bill also empowers the Secretary of State to repeal an obsolete and out-of-date Act of Parliament from 1908 which threatens the industry's productivity and the earnings of its work force. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 287, Noes 196.

Division No. 10] **[10 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Aspinwall, Jack
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina

Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Key, Robert
Killedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lawrence, Ivan
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dewar, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Enright, Mr Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David

Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stephen, Nicol
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ray Powell and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Have you had any intimation from the Government that they might wish to make a statement on what has been said this evening on the wire: that Mr. Marlin Fitzwater, on behalf of the American President, is to consult the British Prime Minister about a response to what has happened in relation to the Libyan findings and that apparently he does not rule out a military response? Some of us, especially those who have recently been to Libya, think that war solves nothing. We are conscious that 5,500 of our fellow countrymen work in Libya and we wonder whether we can have a statement before any rash action is taken. We should at least wait until a trial takes place.

Mr. Speaker: Having not seen the tape this evening, I am not aware of this matter. I am sure that what has been said will have been heard by those on the Government Front Bench.

COAL INDUSTRY BILL *[Money]*

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Coal Industry Bill, it is expedient to authorise any increase in the sums payable out of money provided by Parliament which is attributable to—

(a) increasing to £2,500 million, with power to increase by order to £3,000 million, the limit imposed on the aggregate amount of grants made under section 3 of the Coal Industry Act 1987, or

(b) enabling such grants to be made in respect of costs falling to be charged to accounts in respect of financial years ending after March 1993 but not later than March 1996.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

Public Health

That the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning) (No. 12) Order 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 2077), dated 13th September 1991, a copy of which was laid before this House on 16th September, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

Question agreed to.

ENERGY

Ordered,

That Mr. Eric Illsley be discharged from the Energy Committee and Mr. Joe Benton be added to the Committee. —*[Mr. Wood]*

WELSH AFFAIRS

Ordered,

That Mr. Alan W. Williams be discharged from the Welsh Affairs Committee and Mr. Huw Edwards be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

PETITION

Tobacco Advertising

10.15 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I beg to ask leave to present a petition on behalf of Yorkshire Action on Smoking and Health. It calls upon the Government to sign the EEC directive to ban tobacco advertising. There is clear evidence of a relationship between tobacco advertising and the likelihood of children starting to smoke.

To lie upon the Table.

Brewing Industry

10.16 pm

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

Mr. Stan Crowther (Rotherham): I declare an interest in this matter, as I am the parliamentary adviser to the National Licensed Victuallers Association. I am pleased to have an opportunity to draw the House's attention once again to the upheaval that has taken place in the brewing industry and the licensed trade since the beer orders of December 1989.

There can hardly ever have been a piece of legislation that has so utterly failed to achieve its stated objectives. We were told that the orders were introduced with the intention of increasing competition, thus providing more choice for customers and holding down prices. In fact, competition has been reduced, prices have rocketed, thousands of public house tenants have been forced out of the trade and thousands more have felt that they have no reasonable option other than to accept the terms being imposed upon them by the brewers and accept long leases at enormously increased rents, with full responsibility for repairs. The brewers have decided to destroy the traditional tenancy system. It is on its way out.

It must be understood that the brewers' actions have not been forced upon them by the legislation. The beer orders did not require them to do anything of this sort. In that connection, I should like to quote from a letter that the Secretary of State wrote to the right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) who was concerned—rightly so—about a letter that a tenant in his constituency had received from Grand Metropolitan Estates. The Secretary of State wrote:

"I can assure you that the action the company has taken has not been forced on it by any of the measures the Government has introduced following the MMC's report on the brewing industry."

The Secretary of State went on to say that he was concerned that the letter from Grand Metropolitan Estates tried to imply that the orders had forced the company into the action it was taking against the tenant. The Secretary of State was right. The orders did not require such action to be taken. I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Selby for allowing me to quote from the letter.

In discussions with me, representatives of all the major brewing companies have admitted that the orders did not force them to take those actions against the tenants. I have been told that the companies were merely prompted by the orders to "review" their commercial strategy. Whitbread and Bass have both used that expression. What they mean by "reviewing" their commercial strategy is that, because they will have to dispose of 11,000 tied houses, they are determined to squeeze every penny they can out of those that remain. The way in which they do that is to abolish the old tenancies and to introduce long leases under which full repairing responsibility is placed on the tenants. On top of that, they introduce massive rent increases.

In your constituency, Mr. Speaker, the case of Mr. David Harper of the Clifton Arms is typical. I have spoken to your constituent and he is happy that I should cite his case, because it demonstrates the way in which things are happening. In Mr. Harper's case, less than two years ago, his rent was doubled from £12,000 to £24,000. The amount was then increased by another £2,000 because it was related to the retail prices index—I do not know why. Now his landlord, the Allied Brewery group, has invited him to accept a 10-year lease at a starting price of £36,000 a year. Before he can even accept the lease, he is required to put the place into good repair, which may cost him another £30,000. Such things are happening all over the country.

Many public houses have been grossly neglected for years by their owners, yet the owners now demand that the tenants pay all the cost of putting the public houses into good order. In some cases, the costs are enormous. I know of at least one case in which the cost is likely to be £80,000, which is a measure of the neglect by the brewers of their own properties.

I have details here of scores of cases, but as I cannot take up the time of the House in referring to all of them, I will pick one or two examples. There is a Whitbread house, the Kings Arms, in Temple Sowerby near Penrith. The present rent is just under £12,000, but the proposed rent is £22,000. The capital cost of the repairs which the tenant must pay before he can even have the lease is £10,000. There is a Whitbread house, the Seven Stars, in the Wirral. The present rent is just under £15,000, but the rent now being demanded is £35,000.

There is the Black Bull at Birstall in West Yorkshire, which I know. It is a nice, small public house for which the rent is £16,120. The owners now want £30,000. It is impossible for the business at that pub to be increased to such an extent, because it is a very small house. There is a John Smith house called The George at Stanningley near Leeds. John Smith is now part of Courage, although Courage is now called Fosters. The present rent there is just under £14,000, but the proposed rent is £33,000.

One of the worst cases is that of the Broadway hotel at Dunscroft in Doncaster. It is again a Courage house, for which the present rent is £18,000. The company now seeks a rent of £42,000. That is happening all over the country and the tenants will be required to accept all the costs of repairs.

Earlier this year, the Secretary of State met the representatives of all the major brewery companies, having received a deputation from the National Licensed Victuallers Association. To his great credit, he persuaded the brewery companies to accept the principle of independent arbitration. I thought that we were making progress. Unfortunately, matters are not quite as simple as some of us thought they were. Bass, for example, requires a tenant to put down a deposit of £1,000 before he can even contemplate arbitration. In many cases, the arbitrator may be appointed only from a list of people approved by the brewer. Many of them usually earn their living by carrying out valuations on behalf of brewery companies. The most astonishing thing—indeed, it is almost unbelievable—is that tenants are required to sign a lease before the rent has been fixed. What type of arrangement is that? In normal commercial life, no one would dream of doing such a thing. It is not surprising that, in those circumstances, very few tenants are invoking the arbitration procedures.

I asked Grand Met how it justified the rent increases being imposed. As many hon. Members know, Grand Met is no longer a brewer, as it has transferred all its breweries to Courage, or Fosters, as it is now called. Grand Met is essentially a pub-owning company, apart from its other interests. When I asked Grand Met how it could justify the high rent increases, I was told that tenants could easily afford them because tenants would now receive all the

[Mr. Stan Crowther]

proceeds from the amusement machines instead of sharing them with the brewers, although they still have to pay a high licence fee and rent.

I was told that the tenants would also make more profit from guest beers. How are they to do that? Grand Met said that tenants could negotiate a discount of £30 or £40 a barrel. I said that, as brewers never sell beer at a loss, why did not the brewers knock £30 or £40 off the price of a barrel to the tenants of their tied houses in the first place? I did not receive an answer, but the sum involved would have been about 10p a pint, which could be taken off the retail price and still leave brewers with a profit.

I also asked Grand Met what percentage of its tenants had left the trade completely since the beer orders were introduced less than two years ago. The answer was 40 per cent. My inquiries suggest that roughly the same figure applies to all major companies in this country. That is appalling. The tenants gain great skill and experience over the years in serving the public and in running their public houses. They have disappeared from the scene, but I am sure that that is not what the Government intended.

Meanwhile, the concentration of ownership has continued apace. When the MMC's report was published, the four biggest brewery companies had 58 per cent. of the market. They now have 70 per cent. of the market, and the proposed merger between Allied and Carlsberg will push that figure even higher.

The latest scheme devised by Bass to circumvent the beer orders—the intention, not the letter, of the orders—is to sell 372 public houses to a company called Enterprise Inns, which has immediately signed a contract with Bass to supply Bass beers to all those public houses. Nothing has changed—they are as tied as before, but they are now excluded from the beer orders, so that they have no guest beers.

I am repeatedly told that all the fuss is being caused by a vociferous minority of licensees. No one can persuade me that the 3,000 licensees who went to Blackpool to take part in a protest march during the week of the Conservative conference are all mindless militants. They are ordinary, decent licensees who want to continue to do their job of serving the public. They see their livelihoods put at risk and the traditional tenancy system disappearing. That is what concerns them.

Despite what I have said, I am not especially critical of the brewers. They operate in a hard commercial environment. They are looking after their commercial interests, but unfortunately they are doing so at the expense of the tenants and customers, the very people who are supposed to benefit from the legislation. That is the paradox that the Government will not acknowledge and that is why I must criticise them. I do not criticise them for getting it wrong in the first place. Anyone can make a mistake. I criticise them for refusing to accept that they made a mistake and for refusing to take any action to put matters right, when it was patently obvious that everything was going disastrously wrong.

In another measure, the Government extended the Landlord and Tenant Act protection to the licensed trade but they would not bring it in immediately—it had to be implemented some time in the future. Protection that does not come into effect until half the people whom it is supposed to protect have already disappeared from the scene is hollow protection indeed.

Many hon. Members believe that the Secretary of State should immediately instruct the Director General of Fair Trading to review the position urgently and in detail, so that we can discover whether there is still some possibility of saving something from this awful mess. He should not wait until 1993, which is the present proposal. By then, all the damge will have been done.

I am reminded of the famous poem, by Robert Southey, about the battle of Blenheim, when little Peterkin asks:

"But what good came of it at last?"

Old Kaspar replies:

"'Why that I cannot tell,' said he,
'But' twas a famous victory.'"

Almost two years after the beer orders went through the House, we are entitled to ask the Minister what good came of them at last. The Government certainly cannot claim that it was a famous victory. The customers are definitely no better off. Tenants have suffered great distress; many thousands of them have been forced out of their homes and businesses. The brewers, who spent millions of pounds campaigning against this legislation, have shot it to pieces.

10.31 pm

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): I had applied for an Adjournment debate on this subject, but I realised that the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. Crowther) had a prior right, representing as he does the NLVA.

I have today won a concession from the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, in as much as he is going to give a delegation from the Southampton and district licensed victuallers an opportunity to see him at the Department to talk over some of these matters. Worthy servants of the brewers are being turned out of their livelihoods and homes by these draconian rents, set in the main by estate agents who have no concept of the harm that will be done to these people.

I thank the Secretary of State for this concession, and I am sure that, with good will on the part of the Government, we can arrive at a successful outcome.

10.32 pm

The Minister for Corporate Affairs (Mr. John Redwood): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. Crowther) for raising this important subject. He has tirelessly put the views of the National Licensed Victuallers Association to the Government during the course of these discussions and changes.

The hon. Gentleman suggests that the orders have failed, but the main order, to break the tie, is not yet in effect, so it is premature to say that the proposal has failed to introduce competition. We must wait and see what its impact is before making that judgment.

To review the position before this judgment can be made would be far from helpful. It would create a great deal of additional uncertainty for tenants, customers and all in the brewing industry. Perhaps, on reflection, the hon. Gentleman will agree that that could make matters worse. It would certainly encourage the brewers to look again at their commercial strategy. The hon. Gentleman was critical of the way they had done that as a result of the orders while the review was under way. It would be wrong to encourage such a move before it is possible to form a view on how the orders have worked out in practice.

I am grateful that the hon. Gentleman pointed out that the closure of pubs, which was a common feature of the industry before the orders were thought of, has nothing to do with the Government's policy or the MMC inquiry.

If a pub is closed, that is a commercial judgment by the publican and the brewer depending on the relationship between them. It is usually by the brewer. That commercial judgment is made on the basis of the pub and its location. Hundreds of pubs closed before the orders and, unfortunately, some pubs are closing now. Closing a pub does not help a brewer to comply with the important brewing order; it is essential that the House understands that, as many hon. Members have problems involving pubs, and they need to answer that point, which shows that the brewing order is not the cause of the pub closure.

The hon. Member for Rotherham made some interesting points about independent arbitration. The Secretary of State and I have worked hard in discussions with the brewers to get improvements in the way in which they treat their tenants. One of the important points was to get the offer of independent arbitration where all else has failed. I will certainly consider the points that the hon. Gentleman made when I read *Hansard* and consider the ways in which it may be possible to dilute or circumvent the effect of independent arbitration in the way that the hon. Gentleman suggested.

The Government are committed to pursuing a vigorous competition policy in the brewing industry and elsewhere. We will continue to look closely at mergers in the brewing industry which fall for consideration under the fair trading legislation. Although the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report did not think that concentration in brewing was a problem, the authorities do not wish to see undue erosion of competition in brewing, and that will obviously inform our assessments and judgments in future transactions.

There has been little change in the combined market share of the six national brewers owning more than 2,000 pubs since February 1989. The increase in concentration of the big four, to which the hon. Gentleman referred, is entirely due to the Grant Met-Courage pubs-for-breweries deal. Those transactions were considered fully by the MMC. The number of pubs freed from ties as a result of the undertakings required by the Secretary of State will be much greater than would have been required under the orders. It was the tie which the MMC thought created all the problems. That explains the judgment in that case.

I do not accept that recent acquisitions of regional brewers and closures of breweries are the result of the beer orders. Regional brewers are not affected directly by them. The industry has long been characterised by mergers between brewers, closures of breweries and sales of public houses. The decisions of regional brewers such as Boddingtons and Greenalls to cease brewing were commercial ones taken by the managements of those companies and they were not forced on them by any of the Government's measures.

An important way of encouraging vigorous competition in the brewing industry is to give regional brewers the chance to expand. The beer orders do just that. Regional brewers have opportunities to acquire further premises from the national brewers, and they can sell their beers to a greater number of "free outlets" after November 1992. Regional brewers such as Morlands, Greene King and Wolverhampton and Dudley have already seized the opportunity to expand their estates.

The guest beer provision also provides opportunities. The *Publican* on 17 June reported:

"the guest ale tidal wave is swelling, as many national tenants prepare to take a non-brewery tied beer".

The *Morning Advertiser* of 24 September reported on an in-depth survey that it had carried out into the effects of the guest beer provision. This found that some 40 per cent. of the tenanted pubs of the national brewers were now offering guest beers. That figure could well increase significantly. The survey found that Wadworths, Youngs, Fullers, Marstons and Adnams among the regionals had all done particularly well from the provision, accounting together for nearly 30 per cent. of the guest beer market.

Several new micro-brewers have sprung up. The *Morning Advertiser* of 30 October reported the story of Jim Botur, who spent his redundancy money from Matthew Brown on starting his own independent brewery. He said:

"We have received a lot of support from both free trade customers and tenants who are now able to stock a guest beer in their pubs. We were confident that the new Beer Orders would give us the opportunity we needed."

The hon. Gentleman referred to recent increases in the price of beer which, I agree, have been large. As the brewers do not have to comply with the main measure of the orders until 1 November 1992, it is too soon to judge what impact the orders will have on prices. I notice that the steepest price rises in past years have been in pubs tied to the national brewers. The beer orders target precisely those brewers, by ordering a reduction in their tied estates by 11,000 outlets. Customers will have more choice of outlet and beer. They can shop around if some prices rise too far. We have asked the Director General of Fair Trading to review the orders in late 1993, when their effectiveness can be properly assessed.

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): Apart from what the customer may or may not find with the price of beer, is it not the case that what the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. Crowther) has described would not have taken place if the beer orders had not been passed by the House?

Mr. Redwood: I am not sure whether that is true. We can never be sure, because those events took place. However, there were changes under way in the brewing industry before the beer orders were drafted and put to the House. We saw leading brewers thinking about segregating property from brewing, and we saw one major brewer thinking about introducing new styles of lease, which is the main burden of the hon. Gentleman's criticisms. One can argue that there were changes under way in the brewing industry before the beer orders came along. I am not sure whether all those changes are the result of the beer orders or the threat of the beer orders.

I and the Secretary of State are worried about the notices to quit that some brewers have issued to many of their tenants. The major brewers do not have to evict tenants to comply with the requirement that they release pubs from ties by 1 November 1992. Closure of a pub does not help them to comply with the orders in any way. Most of the notices have been issued to allow the brewers to renegotiate existing agreements; few will result in eviction.

The Secretary of State and I have urged the brewers concerned to keep the number of notices sent out to an absolute minimum, and to make their purpose clear to tenants. The timing of notices was determined by the fact that all tenants will be protected by the Landlord and Tenant (Licensed Premises) Act 1990 by July 1992 as a result of the legislation that we enacted last year at the

[Mr. Redwood]

tenants' request. I remember seeing a delegation from the tenants at that time. The Government moved swiftly to meet their requirement to introduce the landlord and tenant legislation.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Does my hon. Friend agree that, in certain cases, it has been extremely difficult for some smaller pubs to be able to pay the amount of money that some of the brewers have been asking them to pay?

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): It is impossible.

Mr. Cash: It is a simple point, but it has caused certain distress.

Mr. Redwood: I know that tenants are worried by the extent of the price rises for their rents that the brewers are suggesting.

Mr. Winterton: Are you?

Mr. Redwood: But that will be determined by the marketplace. There will be independent review in cases where agreement cannot be reached. Of course I would like tenants to have realistic rent demands and then have successful businesses on the back of them, and I hope that the rent demands will turn out to be realistic in relation to the actual security of tenure offered under the new style of lease and in relation to the business opportunities offered under that style of lease as well. The hon. Gentleman fairly pointed out that there is a larger range of business opportunities available under the new leases, and that, of course, will be reflected in the rent charged under those lease arrangements.

The longer-term leases which many brewers are insisting should replace existing tenancy agreements represent a different kind of lease with a different rental price on them. Over the summer, the Secretary of State and I met to encourage them to adopt best practices in dealings with their tenants. At our prompting, all the major brewers have now agreed to allow independent arbitration or assessment of rent in difficult cases where agreement cannot be reached. They have accepted the need to be flexible towards tenants who would have real difficulties in taking on a long-term lease, treating those nearing retirement with special consideration. That flexibility might involve the offer of a short-term agreement or a long-term lease with an appropriate break clause. The brewers have also agreed to consider offering compensation to such tenants in exceptional circumstances on a case-by-case basis.

The Secretary of State, in the letter he sent to all hon. Members, said that it would be unrealistic to expect the removal of all differences between brewers and their tenants. We have been encouraged to hear from the president of the National Licensed Victuallers Association that he has seen some softening in the brewers' approach since our meetings with them. I understand the NLVA's continuing fears, but I am glad that its most recent letter to the Secretary of State began by saying:

"the reaction of the national brewers to the recent series of meetings held with yourself and John Redwood MP would initially seem to be both positive and encouraging".

I shall, of course, continue to watch the situation closely and will read all the comments that have been made tonight, including those made from sedentary positions in support of the hon. Member for Rotherham. I shall also do all that I can to ensure that brewers behave responsibly towards their tenants. However, I am convinced that a further review of the industry at this stage would only create additional uncertainty, which would not be in the interests of the industry, the tenants or the customers.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at sixteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 15 November 1991

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Citizens Charter

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

9.36 am

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Francis Maude): I am glad to have the opportunity to debate in the House today the White Paper which we published in July this year entitled "The Citizen's Charter". The citizens charter is simply the most comprehensive programme ever launched by any Government anywhere to improve public services. It will cover all the public services, including Government Departments and agencies, local authorities, hospitals, schools, courts, railways, buses the Post Office and the utilities, such as gas, electricity, water and telecommunications. No part of the public service will remain untouched and the citizens charter will improve the life of every citizen in the land.

For too long, it has seemed to us, involving the citizen in how public services should be provided has been seen as an optional extra. It is important that we should question that. All public services are paid for by individual citizens, either directly or through their taxes. In return, citizens are entitled to expect high-quality services which are responsive to their needs and provided efficiently at reasonable cost. Certain essential services such as health and education should be available from the public sector irrespective of the citizen's means.

The citizens charter is all about achieving what I have described. It starts by recognising that the best way to improve standards of services is to increase competition. In a free market, where the consumer has choice, competing firms must strive to satisfy their customers or they will not prosper. Where there is limited choice or competition, as in many public services, individual citizens cannot as easily make their voices heard or their views count. Often, they simply cannot make the ultimate consumer's choice, which is to vote with their cash and their feet and go to someone else for the service.

Wherever possible, we need to increase choice and competition. Where that is not possible, we need to develop other ways of ensuring good standards of service —for example, through regulatory bodies which have real powers and responsibilities. As promised in the citizens charter, we shall shortly publish a White Paper which encourages and makes possible a much more open attitude to the buying of services in the public sector.

The citizens charter sets out principles that will govern the way in which every public sector organisation treats those who use their services. It builds on what is best in the public service. The first principle is standards. Each organisation will have to publish explicit standards on what it will offer to its customers. Standards should not be hidden away for internal use only, but should be clearly displayed at the point of service delivery. They should include a commitment to prompt and effective action. That will be expressed perhaps in terms of target response, waiting time and accuracy in carrying out the service, and always in terms of courtesy and helpfulness from staff. The standards should improve as the service becomes more efficient. Every year, we expect public service standards to be ratcheted up.

Another important principle of the charter is openness. There should be no secrecy about how the service is delivered, how much it costs, who delivers it and whether it is meeting the standards set for it. The days of faceless, nameless bureaucracy are gone. That is welcomed by those who work in the public service as much as by those who use it. Unless there is a real threat to personal safety, all those who deal directly with the public should wear a name badge and give their name on the telephone and in letters. Even now, visitors crossing the hallowed threshold of the Treasury are met by an individual wearing a name badge.

Information is another vital principle to enable the citizen to influence the provision of services. Again, the citizens charter builds on past achievements. For example, the days of dull, impenetrable forms that seemed designed to obscure rather than to convey information are passing. Much excellent work has been done, and the work of Government Departments and agencies has resulted in 29 awards from the Plain English campaign. This is not just about forms; it is about telling people about all the available services, explaining properly how to use them and what to do when things go wrong. It is about making services easy for people to use and telling people what to expect.

Not only should targets be published: more importantly, the results achieved against those targets should be published. They, too, should be made more straightforward for people to understand and should be provided in a comparable form. In that way, people can see how effective the organisation is against other providers or against a regional or national average. That creates strong pressure to emulate the best and so will lead to improved quality and efficiency. Quality and efficiency go firmly hand in hand. The Education (Schools) Bill, which was published last week, aims to do precisely that. In future, schools will publish more information in a comparable format, so that parents can see easily whether their child's school is up with the best.

Choice should not be just a private sector option. Wherever possible, the public sector should provide a choice of services. That choice should not be limited to "the way we have always done it" or by the organisation's view of what it should be delivering. Decisions should take account of the views of customers. Their views should be sought regularly and systematically to inform decisions about what services should be provided.

British people are sensible. They know that they cannot have everything and that on occasions they may have to wait. They will consider paying a bit more for a premium service. What they do not like is being let down. If a public sector organisation says that it will do something at a certain time, the customer wants that to happen. We should ask the people what they want and trust them to answer sensibly. I intend to commission a survey soon to find out more about what the public want from the citizens charter and what their expectations and priorities are in taking forward this work.

[Mr. Francis Maude]

Access is another important principle of the citizens charter. Services should be run to suit the convenience of customers, not of staff. Services should be easy to find and to use. That means flexible opening hours to suit local users, telephones that are answered promptly, inquiry points that are helpful, informative and efficient in directing the caller to the person best placed to help him or her, and signposts to help the citizen locate whatever he or she wants.

Inevitably, there will be times when things do not go right. When that happens, it is not a question of simply saying that money should be poured into the organisation as a remedy. One of our primary responsibilities as a Government is to the taxpayer, and we will not neglect that responsibility. When things go wrong, the citizen wants to be told fully, honestly and, preferably, there and then why it has gone wrong.

For example, most people will not mind waiting a few extra minutes in a hospital waiting room if they know that the doctor has been called away to deal with an emergency. They will not put up with simply being left without being told the reason for being apparently let down. When things go wrong, people want an apology properly expressed, and they should be entitled to one. There should be a well-publicised and readily available complaints procedure. Lessons should be learned from complaints, so that mistakes are not repeated.

People want to have the sense, when things go wrong and they complain legitimately, that the system about which they are complaining is taking some notice of what they are saying. No one wants to see money diverted from service improvement to the detriment of the existing service, but where compensation can be made to increase rather than detract from efficiency, compensating procedures should be set out.

I make no apology for setting out in such detail the charter's principles. They are important, and together they form the charter standard. How are the public to know who has adopted those principles and is improving services as a result? Organisations that can prove that they are living up to the charter standard and are providing high-quality services that put the customer first will become eligible for the Charter Mark award. This voluntary scheme will be an acknowledged and easily recognisable sign of quality. It will provide an incentive to staff and management alike to bring about a progressive improvement in the delivery and quality of their services and to provide value for money through progressive improvements in service.

Every public sector organisation that serves the public directly will be able to apply for the Charter Mark. So, too, will privatised utilities, such as the water companies or similar regulator regimes. The award will be within every organisation's reach, but not necessarily within immediate grasp. It will not be a soft or easy option. I look forward to announcing the details of the scheme before long.

The implementation of the charter is an ambitious task. It is a programme which has set a lead. No programme so ambitious or comprehensive has ever been attempted anywhere in the world. Great interest in the charter has been shown in Europe, north America, Australia and elsewhere. We are determined to implement it successfully. I pay tribute to Sir James Blythe and his fellow members of the advisory panel for their energetic and imaginative work in driving the programme forward.

The real results are the improvements that take place on the ground locally. It is in the local tax office, the local hospital and the local school that the citizen will look for improvements and judge whether the charter is a reality.

Much has already happened. The next steps programme has played an important part. In the case of the Benefits Agency, for example, more telephone calls than previously have been handled in five languages with specialist help lines, and waiting times have been reduced by half. The Employment Service achieved more than 95 per cent. accuracy in its benefits payments in 1990-91. It is integrating its local office network with benefit offices, to offer users a one-stop shop. For example, at the Driving Standards Agency, waiting times for driving tests have been reduced.

Another example of what has started to happen and will happen under the citizens charter programme is that, in the national health service, there will be fixed-time appointments for patients from April next. No patient should have to wait more than 30 minutes. We want to say a final goodbye to the old arrangement whereby 50 patients were called for appointments at 9 o'clock in the morning but many of them were not seen until well into the afternoon. That is no way to treat people. The patients charter will put an end to it.

There will also be guaranteed waiting times for NHS treatment. Each district health authority will set maximum waiting times for each specialty, and none of the maximum times can be more than two years. Once again, waiting times should come down and people should know they can expect, what standard the local provider of that service has undertaken to deliver.

All parents will receive school reports on their child's progress at least once a year. In the utilities, to take two examples, East Midlands Electricity has introduced fixed-time appointments for customers, and SEEBoard has introduced a new, simple, flat-rate compensation system for its customers.

We have also taken steps to introduce legislation, where needed, to take forward work on the charter. The Competition and Service (Utilities) Bill, published last week, will give customers a better deal by giving tougher powers to the regulators—allowing them, for example, to set guaranteed service standards for individual customers, such as fixed appointment times—no more waiting for the gas man.

The regulators will also be able to ensure that compensation is paid where those service standards are not met, that each utility has satisfactory procedures for handling customer complaints and that those procedures are published. As the utilities operate in the private sector, they are already going fast down that track of improving customer services. We want that to continue.

The Local Government Bill, published on 4 November, will require local authorities to publish information showing what standard of service they are providing and at what cost. The Audit Commission and its Scottish equivalent will have powers to report on the performance of local authorities both individually and collectively, to which all local authorities would have to respond publicly.

The Education (Schools) Bill sets up a framework to implement the main proposals of the parents charter, published in September. It will ensure regular and

independent inspection of schools, and that the inspection report is made available to parents. It will empower the Secretary of State to collect and publish information about schools. That will be published annually by region and will include public examination and national curriculum test results, truancy rates and the first destinations of school leavers. That is all vital information that parents are entitled to have. Under the legislation, in future they will have it.

I shall shortly publish a White Paper entitled, "Competing for Quality" which sets out the Government's commitment to improving public services by expanding choice and competition. That is a key element of the citizens charter programme. It sets out how, in setting targets and freeing managers to buy services in open competition, public services can respond better and more efficiently to the wishes of their users. Buying services in open competition is good news for the taxpayers, who will get better value for money, and for managers and their staff, who can work together to achieve the best deal for customers. Last, but by no means least, it is good news for local businesses, giving private firms new opportunities to market their services in free and open competition.

Other legislation will be needed, too, to take forward the proposals outlined in the charter White Paper. When we are returned to government, we shall introduce legislation to give the citizen a right to challenge unlawful industrial action affecting public services, and legislation to privatise the railways and to deregulate London buses. We also plan to limit the Post Office monopoly, to establish a new regulator for postal services, and to give the Secretary of State powers to set standards and targets for the Post Office. We plan to extend delegation in the civil service and to deal with the problems of technical redundancy.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Am I to read into what the Minister says that the Government intend to put more and more services out to arm's-length agencies which are not effectively accountable to Ministers, and certainly not accountable to Members of the House? Does he not think that the citizens of Britain would be better served if Ministers were more prepared to answer the questions asked by the House, rather than avoiding them by putting everything out to agencies?

Mr. Maude: The hon. Gentleman betrays a woeful ignorance of how the process works. I am also interested to hear the devotion of the new-style modern Liberal Democrats to old-fashioned bureaucracy.

I commend to the House the programme of putting all the executive operational parts of the public service of central Government out to executive agencies under professional chief executives who are directly accountable to Ministers who are themselves directly accountable to the House. That will provide ever-better services to the public, because they are accountable and because they have the freedom to manage. I make no apology for that programme. I am sorry to hear once again that the Liberal Democrats seem to be devoted to the process of reaction and opposition to any progressive improvement or reform.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Do we not need a Members of Parliament charter, so that, when we send letters to benefit agencies, instead of their taking ages to answer, we will begin to get some response? It is said that the citizens charter allows more information to be generally available to individuals, but less and less information is available to Members who ask questions in the House, as areas are hived off to agencies and privatised, so that the service providers are no longer democratically accountable. Democratic socialism adds parliamentary accountability and parliamentary avenues.

Mr. Maude: Once again, I say that there will be no reduction in accountability. There is an improvement in transparency, and we are moving away from the old bureaucratic culture to which the Opposition, whether Labour or Liberal Democrat, seem devoted. We can achieve much greater accountability, efficiency and effectiveness and delivering real and good services to citizens by moving in the direction of open and accountable executive agencies than by saying that the man in Whitehall knows best, and that we shall have a nice pyramid of bureaucracy in which everyone is concerned about what happens inside the organisation, but fewer people are concerned with what happens when the service is delivered to the citizen.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): One of the agencies that serves my constituency is the social security office at Wentworth house. I have to admit that, even before that office became an agency, it was extremely good, and answered my letters within seven days. Its benefit service was exceptional. Since becoming an agency it has got even better. Payments now go out within four days of a request being received. That means that the office deals with the paper work, the calculation, checking and the provision of a cheque within four days. That is staggering. The carping from Labour Members should be put down to sour grapes, because this is something that they did not think of for themselves.

Mr. Maude: My hon. Friend's experience of the improved service provided by the new agencies reflects similar, widespread experience. I make no apology for saying that the Government propose to press ahead full steam with the process of transferring services—the operational parts of central Government—to executive agencies.

It is not for me to speculate on the motivation behind the Opposition and Liberal Democrat resistance to this excellent process. Perhaps it is not so much sour grapes as simply the fact that they are stuck in the mud. They are devoted to adhering blindly to the old way of doing things. They suffer from a straightforward reluctance to look to the future to see what can be done to make things better.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling): The comments from the two socialists are insulting to those who work in the new agencies. Those workers are already aware of the progress that has been made and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) has said, they know that a better service is being delivered. However, the Opposition parties want to try to turn the clock back to a system that did not work as well.

Mr. Maude: My hon. Friend is right. Those who have had dealings with the new agencies are aware that the managers and staff find it far more satisfactory to work for an agency whose sole purpose is to deliver high-quality service to the customer with as much efficiency as possible. Those who work in the public services are beginning to rediscover pride in what they do, and the Opposition should support that.

[Mr. Maude]

The programme of reform will last for a decade—it is not an overnight miracle. There are a number of things we need to do to drive it forward. We must ensure that pay throughout the public services becomes increasingly dependent upon performance and the delivery of service to the customer. Pay review bodies will take that into account when considering future pay claims. We want a much clearer link between rewards and performance. The process is already yielding results, and I believe that there are many more to come.

We have been pleased with the response that we have received from commentators and from those who work within, or use, the public services. We have had a sour, griping, sneering and mean response to our initiative from two quarters alone—the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats.

I can understand why the Labour party is so opposed to the initiative, because the citizens charter puts people first. They are put ahead of politicians, councillors, bureaucrats and the producers, and ahead of Labour's vested interests—ahead of Bickerstaffe's big battalions.

I have some questions for the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), and I hope that he will take the opportunity of this full day's debate to provide the House with the answers that it is eagerly awaiting.

Does the Labour party support our commitment to extend competition and to provide greater choice for the users of services, or does the Labour party want a Soviet system of no choice for the citizen? If the Labour party supports the idea of choice for the citizen, why has it opposed every reform to extend choice that the Government have initiated in the past 12 years?

Why did it oppose, root and branch, the right to buy for council tenants? Why did it oppose our school reforms that have given parents greater power to choose what they want for their children? Why did it oppose our NHS reforms to provide greater power for patients and greater choice? Why did the Labour party oppose our deregulation of the bus services, which has provided greater choice for the customer? Why did it oppose the introduction of competition into telecommunications?

Mr. Harry Barnes: That is all easy to answer. Give us the hard stuff.

Mr. Maude: The House is interested to know the answers. If the Labour party proposes to justify its opposition to those excellent reforms, let us hear which of them it proposes to reverse.

Mr. Barnes: The Minister appears to suggest that we have had 12 years of preparation for the citizens charter and that all the principles that have been propounded during that time will be capped by the charter. If so, the people will understand what that charter means—it is just the load of rubbish with which the Government have been involved in the past 12 years.

Mr. Maude: It is nice to hear a coherent argument, put with eloquence and elegent rhetoric. The House wants to know the answer. Does the Labour party support choice or not?

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Real choice.

Mr. Maude: That sounds like the voice of the old Soviet Union—go to the Gum store and have a choice of something or nothing. That is not what the Government propose to offer the people of this country.

We expect to hear the answers from the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury. Does the Labour party support the extension of choice and competition in the public services? Will the Labour party support the Education (Schools) Bill that will provide more of the information that parents want so that they can exercise their choice in a more informed manner?

Will the Labour party support the Local Government Bill that will enable the Audit Commission to identify those authorities that provide good services at good cost and with efficiency? Will the Labour party support such transparency and openness, or will they oppose it out of the dogmatic fear that that will expose Labour councils to justified contempt?

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury) *rose*—

Mr. Maude: I shall finish the list of questions; then the hon. Gentleman can provide a portmanteau of answers to them all.

Will the Labour party support the waiting time guarantee scheme that we have introduced in the health service? The Opposition claim that that scheme is too little, too late, but if it is so easy to do, why on earth did the Labour Government not introduce that reform when they were in power? Do the Opposition understand that one cannot introduce a waiting time guarantee scheme without having first introduced the NHS reforms that we have put through? That scheme has provided evidence of how the NHS reforms have benefited patients in the way that patients want.

Will the Labour party support the introduction of a compensation scheme for passengers on British Rail? Do the Opposition join Jimmy Knapp in saying that that proposal is a con trick and a gimmick? Do they believe that British Rail frequently does not provide the service that people expect? Will they support the provision of compensation to those who are cheated by the system? Does the Labour party support the notion of performance-related pay, related, for example, to absenteeism and punctuality among those who work for British Rail and London Underground? Will the Labour party support that proposal or will it go along with what Jimmy Knapp lays down?

Will the Opposition support the introduction of an independent, lay element into the inspectorate of schools? Do they remain doggedly wedded to the idea of professionals cosily inspecting other professionals? Do they support our idea to introduce an independent element —a voice for the consumer—into the inspecting process? Will the Labour party support the introduction of league tables in the NHS to compare the performance of one health authority with that of another? Will it support such transparency and openness?

Mr. Chris Smith: Will the Minister give way, at last?

Mr. Maude: I shall do so if the hon. Gentleman will answer the questions.

Mr. Smith: I have risen twice to put an important point. The Financial Secretary keeps on talking about the importance of transparency and openness. How about

transparency and openness in the workings of government? Why do the Government not support a freedom of information Act?

Mr. Maude: The citizens charter is all about transparency and openness. The thing that provides the greatest openness about the way in which central Government services are provided to the citizen is the next steps initiative, because that transfers the operational part of central Government to agencies.

I strongly support the principle of openness, and we shall pursue it vigorously. Does the hon. Gentleman propose to support our commitment in the patients charter to limit the waiting time for out-patient appointments to 30 minutes?

We expect answers to all those questions, but I suspect that I know what the answer will be. I was interested to see a distinguished periodical describe the Labour party the other day as the "preservative party"—dedicated to preserving all that is bad, and opposing all progress and improvement. That craven indebtedness to producer interest means that Labour Members must maintain that all public services are in perfect condition, unimprovable save by the additon of more money. That is Labour's answer to all problems—write a cheque, drawn not on our money but on other people's.

Why, if money is the answer to all our problems, are there such startling and marked differences in efficiency between different parts of the public service? Why does it cost three times as much in Southwark as in Wandsworth to empty a dustbin? Is it simply a question of money? Does Southwark need more money so that it can provide a worse service at greater cost?

Why should one hospital's administration cost three times as much per patient as another, or its operating theatre cost twice as much to run? The answer is simply that one operation is far more efficient than the other, and we need not put in more money to make the less efficient as good as the best. It must be made more efficient. If we can do that, we shall improve the public services without spending more money.

That is anathema to Labour, because it means being prepared to take on some vested interests and face some tough fights on behalf of the consumer and taxpayer. Those vested interests must be taken on, and we must win. Labour will never do that. Would the Liberals be prepared to do it?

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: It is all very well for the Minister to talk about inefficiencies in the public services. Nobody is denying that there is room for improvement and that mechanisms for improvement are worth exploring, but the Minister is throwing up a smokescreen to obscure the accountability of Government. It has been estimated that the poll tax debacle has wasted £19 billion of taxpayers' money—*[Interruption.]* Ministers have admitted that hundreds of millions of pounds have been wasted on it, and they can easily lose a nought here or there. In those circumstances, what satisfaction can the citizen get in calling the Government to account for their incompetence and waste of public money?

Mr. Maude: It is easy to see why even the Liberal Democrats have not appointed the hon. Gentleman their shadow Treasury spokesman. His grasp of arithmetic is slight, and he seems firmly entrenched in the world of fantasy. He has obviously thought of a figure, multiplied it by 10, doubled it and ended up with a figure from the realms of fantasy.

The hon. Gentleman dismisses talk of extra efficiency and says that, if there has been any, it has simply been a bit of extra efficiency here and there. If one hospital is two or three times more efficient than another, is that simply a little more efficiency at the margin? It represents a huge amount of extra public resource being converted into service to the customer instead of being used inefficiently.

Does the hon. Gentleman support us in trying to root out such inefficiency and ensure that every pound we take from the taxpayer and spend on his behalf on patient care is spent as well as possible? Will he now support our NHS reforms, which are devoted to providing that greater efficiency and the better care that will flow from it? I will willingly give way if he wishes to say whether he now supports that initiative to achieve those efficiency gains for the patient and the NHS.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: The Minister well knows that any hon. Member would support such steps if that degree of efficiency could be achieved. He also knows that the citizens charter obscures incompetence and inadequacies in government. If the charter is such a good idea, the Government should have introduced it 12 years ago.

Mr. Maude: I have made it clear many times that the citizens charter continues the programme of reform that we have put into place. We could not have introduced the maximum waiting time guarantee scheme without having had in place the NHS reforms that were introduced under the leadership of my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher). The two are inextricably linked.

If Opposition Members intend to oppose, as they have consistently, doggedly and dogmatically opposed, our NHS reforms, they must be honest with the British people and admit that they oppose our plans to introduce maximum waiting time guarantees for operations. Or do they accept our plans? I fancy not.

Labour is interested only in what is spent and what is put into public services. It is never concerned with what is bought and what comes out of those services. Labour consistently tries to hide that fact, whereas we know well that it is not what one spends but what one buys that matters. That is why Labour Members fear a real citizens charter. It is why the Government will press on with the charter and our programme of reform on behalf of our citizens, so making sure that the services they get, provided by the taxpayer, improve and get ever better.

10.15 am

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): When the Prime Minister announced that the citizens charter would be the centrepiece of his governmental activity, he said that it would be nothing less than a revolution and the most comprehensive quality initiative ever launched. The Financial Secretary has also been at the hype game this morning. He talked about the largest programme ever launched anywhere to improve public services.

Mr. Maude: If the hon. Gentleman disputes that, will he point to another initiative anywhere which is more comprehensive and rigorous?

Mr. Smith: I intend to dispute it bit by bit as my speech progresses, because the Government's claims for their citizens charter must be weighed against what their proposals will achieve. Despite the great fanfare with which the charter was introduced, what has emerged is half-baked, minimalist, inadequate and in some cases positively counter-productive. It is as though an elephant has laboured long and brought forth a mouse.

The Financial Secretary asked why Labour Members were opposed to the initiative. We are not opposed to the idea. We are not opposed to the principle of ensuring that the customers and users of the public services achieve an efficient, courteous and proper delivery of service. But we believe that the Government's proposals will not take us in that direction. We are not opposed to the idea: we are opposed to what the Government are offering.

The answer to the Minister's question whether we have relented in our opposition to the so-called reforms of the past 12 years is a resounding no. Most of those reforms have produced overwhelmingly worse public services than existed previously. He asked whether we intended to oppose this year's planned legislation by the Government. We shall, because in the great majority of cases it will not produce any real extension of choice for the British people.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman appears to be doing himself and his party an injustice. Among the reforms to which the Minister referred was the right-to-buy scheme. Labour Members opposed that root and branch for a long time, until they realised how popular the scheme was with the public and then they decided to support it. So it is not true to say that Labour Members have maintained their opposition to Government proposals for change. In a number of key areas they have abandoned their opposition.

Mr. Smith: Our opposition to the right to buy when it was introduced was that it would reduce the opportunities for those who wanted to remain council tenants and for people in need of council accommodation. We were subsequently proved right on both counts.

We say now, correctly, that it is entirely right and proper that tenants should have the right to buy their council accommodation, but local authorities should have a duty to replace accommodation that is disposed of in that way. The Government have totally failed to introduce that crucial element into the system.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): That issue is of great importance in Northern Ireland, because there is a contradiction between the actions of the Conservative Government there and in England. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Northern Ireland Office will not allow council tenants in the Province to buy their houses?

Mr. Smith: The right hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. The Government refuse the right to buy not only to council tenants in Northern Ireland but to private sector tenants. There are inconsistencies in the Government's actions.

I suppose that we should be glad about two aspects of the citizens charter. The first is that the Government seem to realise that the public services matter. They have spent the past 12 years running down our public services, closing local government and depriving our citizens of a real voice. It is little wonder that we are somewhat sceptical of the sudden conversion that appears to have occurred with the Government's dawning realisation that the people believe that public services are important, want them delivered properly and want a Government who are determined to improve them. The Government realise that public demand, but cannot deliver on it.

Mr. Arbuthnot: In describing the operations of Islington council, which will be familiar to the hon. Gentleman, a recent Queen's Counsel's report said that

"having the cash office staffed by the innumerate, the filing done by the dyslexic and disorganised, and reception by the surly or charmless, seems to us a recipe for administrative chaos."

Do not the Government have some justification for their attitude towards local government?

Mr. Smith: The Government cannot justify their treatment of local government over the past 12 years. Of course there are instances in local authorities under all shades of political control of services being discourteously or inadequately delivered. No one contests that. The key question that the House must address is how to achieve the necessary improvement. The Government's actions over the past 12 years and their proposals for a citizens charter will not achieve that.

Our suspicion is that the Government's conversion to the importance of public services is more of a pre-election gimmick than a change of heart.

We should also be glad—I suppose that it is a form of flattery—that the basic idea of a citizens charter was plagiarised from Labour. As long ago as 1921, Herbert Morrison wrote a pamphlet for the Labour party entitled "The Citizens' Charter", which argued rumbustiously for the role that local government could and should play in enhancing the quality of service received by the public.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is reverting to the days of Herbert Morrison. I expected him to develop and to put more meat on his earlier point about the Government's attitude to public services. One of the most sensitive and controversial public services and one which has featured in recent debates is the national health service. Can the hon. Gentleman deny that the Government's record of investment in the NHS over the past 12 years is infinitely better than that of his Government in the 1970s? Can he deny that before the citizens charter came along, reforms were proposed and, in my own constituency for one, effectively implemented for hospital trusts, which will bring better services for patients? That happened before the citizens charter was conceived.

Finally, can the hon. Gentleman deny that Labour is opposed to competitive tendering in public services and thus threatens worse services to patients and other consumers?

Mr. Smith: If the hon. Gentleman talks to patients, he will find that their perception of hospitals opting out, the internal market and the way in which the Government's so-called reforms have been implemented do not accord with the version that he just gave.

I said that Labour has for a long time been arguing for the kind of approach that the charter is supposed to represent.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: Perhaps later. I am sure that other things that I have to say will bring the hon. Gentleman to his feet.

In April 1986, when my right hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) launched Labour's "At Your Service" charter for better local services, he said:

"We will require every local council to set clear target standards for every service, so that the community knows exactly what they should expect. We'll require the council to publish every year a rating of performance and public satisfaction for every service, so that the community knows exactly how far the council has gone in reaching its aims. And we'll ensure that local councils consult with local people on public transport, social services, and other key issues."

It comes a little rich from the hon. Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) when he says that the citizens charter was not something that my party had thought of. We did and put it forward—and at last the Government have woken up to the fact that something must be done.

To build on the document that we published in 1986, in April 1989 we issued our "Quality Street" proposals on the work of local government, in which we set out the kind of quality programme that we wanted to be introduced. We insisted, for example, on a system of quality audits:

"We would introduce local quality audits for council services, whether provided by the council's own staff, by voluntary organisations, the public sector, a housing association, or managed by community groups."

This year, we launched our own citizens charter setting out a series of new proposed rights—rights much more real than those that the Government seek to trumpet and which I will describe later.

The idea of having a citizens charter is right. Indeed, it is essential. However, the Government's execution of that aim is failing miserably.

I shall now examine some of the specific proposals in the Government's citizens charter and consider some of our principal criticisms of it. First, it excludes any of the Government's decision-making processes from the system of accountability. The Financial Secretary made much of the importance of transparency and openness; he stressed that several times. But the citizens charter and the Government's legislative programme contain no commitment to provide for freedom of information legislation to give our citizens the right of access to information on what the Government are up to.

Information and access to it are the absolute preconditions of power in a democracy. The Government are restricting people's right of access to that democratic power. The Government have an opportunity to reverse that. The hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd), who I was delighted to see was placed sixth in the private Member's Bill ballot this year, has said that he will introduce a Bill on freedom of information. If the Government's rhetoric about the citizens charter, openness and transparency is genuine, they have an opportunity to say now that they will support the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills and not use the payroll vote on a three-line Whip to vote down an eminently sensible measure, as they did previously when the hon. Member introduced a similar Bill. They could state that they were going to enforce, support and even improve the provisions of his Bill.

I challenge the Financial Secretary to say that the Government will support the Bill on freedom of information which will come before us in a couple of months. If he does, we shall have more reason to believe that the Government's devotion to openness in the processes of government is genuine. I suspect that the Government will do nothing of the sort, but unless and until legislation on freedom of information is introduced —as the Labour Government will in their first year of office—talking about citizens' rights is nothing more than windy rhetoric.

Mr. David Nicholson: If the Labour party is now so keen on freedom of information, why did not it extend that freedom and introduce a Bill on the subject when it was last in power, particularly as it was pressed by the Liberals to do so during that strange period of the Lib-Lab pact?

Mr. Smith: I suspect that, like me, the hon. Gentleman was not in the House then, but he will recall that the then Labour Government did not have a majority. Even in the days of the so-called Lib-Lab pact, they did not have an overall majority towards the end of their term and when the opportunity arose for a private Member's Bill on freedom of information, it proved impossible to enact it because the Conservative Opposition opposed the idea root and branch, as do the present Conservative Government.

Mr. Steve Norris (Epping Forest): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: No, I have given way many times and although I have considerable respect for the hon. Gentleman and his record on the issue, there is still much more for me to say. I do not wish to detain the House for too long.

Our second major criticism of the Government's citizens charter programme is that it contains no proposals for the necessary funding of any improvements to the public services that it might introduce. It is no good the Government saying that they will improve schools' performance by publishing league tables of exam results, which the Government should recognise can be misleading —although I have no objection in principle to publishing such information—when children are sitting in classrooms with leaking roofs, insufficient school books and inadequate pupil-teacher ratios. Those are the real challenges that should be addressed, but the Government are not doing so. It is no good the Government saying that there should be compensation for the late arrival of a train when, for year after year, they have under-invested in the railways and the public transport networks. Investment could have procured a better service.

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): Is not the hon. Gentleman aware that since 1979 the Government have invested £12 billion in British Rail and are investing £1·5 billion this year and £2 billion next year? How much does he believe should be invested and how much would a Labour Government set aside to invest in British Rail?

Mr. Smith: Were the hon. Gentleman to take a trip to France or Germany, he would see that those countries have invested far more substantially in their public transport networks than we have and also have more sensible ways of ensuring that that investment can take place. The French railway system can raise money from the private sector in ways currently denied to British Rail.

The Government make much, and the Financial Secretary made much, of the importance of factors such as name tags, plain English awards, signposts in offices, Charter Mark awards and so on. We have no quarrel with

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the aim of such changes. They do not add up to a revolution, but are a necessary improvement in courtesy and efficiency with which no one could disagree. The Government have failed to realise that unless they devote the growth in our national resources to the improvement of public services, we shall not achieve the sort of improvement in quality that we want.

Mr. Maude: The hon. Gentleman has now come to the issue that I thought would arise and which I foreshadowed in my remarks: the Labour party's remedy for any defect in public services is to pump in money. Will the hon. Gentleman come clean and say from which of the Labour party's spending pledges, which we costed in our document earlier this year, he now seeks to resile? Which of them does he now believe is wrong? Let us have a full, clear and honest answer for once.

Mr. Smith: The Government's response to public services during the past 12 years has been to starve them of resources, which is not a policy that we want to follow.

Mr. Maude *rose*——

Mr. Smith: The Financial Secretary must restrain himself a little; I am about to answer his important point.

The Labour party is saying to the people of this country and will continue to do so during the coming general election campaign, that citizens have a choice between a party that has said that its primary aim is to reduce the rate of direct taxation and a party—the Labour party—which has said that it will not pursue that policy. We shall devote the increased resources available to a Government through the proceeds of economic growth, year by year, to the improvement of public services. The electorate has a clear choice. It can decide whether it wants a Government who give priority to cutting taxation or a Government who give priority to improving public service. A Labour Government will be offering those improved public services.

Mr. Maude: Will the hon. Gentleman now answer my question? From which of the £35 billion worth of Labour spending pledges does he now dissent?

Mr. Tony Banks: It is a rubbish figure.

Mr. Maude: The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) says that it is a rubbish figure. Let us hear in what way it is rubbish. From which of those spending pledges—all made clearly by Labour spokesmen —do they now resile?

Mr. Chris Smith: It is a rubbish figure: Ministers sat down together to produce a global total so absurd that I do not think any sensible commentator takes it seriously.

Mr. Maude: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: I shall give way to the Minister for the last time, although I might add that he did not extend a similar courtesy to me.

Mr. Maude: I sought to intervene only to help the hon. Gentleman by giving him, once again, the opportunity to come clean with the House. He says that Ministers sought to give a global total. That is nonsense and he knows that it is nonsense. We took the pledges from what Labour spokesmen had clearly said. We then set out the specific details and made plain the method used to calculate the cost of each pledge. As the hon. Gentleman knows well, commentators have taken that total very seriously.

Mr. Smith: The Financial Secretary is really trying it on. The figures that he, his ministerial colleagues and their friends in Tory central office have come up with are completely ridiculous. The Financial Secretary knows it and the people know it. I might add in passing that it comes ill from a Government who imposed the poll tax and the cost of the poll tax on the British people to start complaining about the spending aims of other parties.

The Government have given no commitment to devote more resources to the improvement of public services. Instead, £8 million worth of taxpayers' money has been spent on glossy advertising to promote the idea of the citizens charter. That is extra spending and the money could undoubtedly have been better spent.

Our third objection to the citizens charter and the way in which the Government are going about implementing it concerns the reliance on privatisation to ensure an automatic improvement in public service. The Government seem to have failed to realise that there is bad private provision as well as bad public provision. The task should be to secure and guarantee improvements in both and not simply switch from one to the other and think that one's aim has been achieved. Take the Government's proposals for the Post Office. I very much doubt whether people living in rural areas in the regions would applaud the effects on their service of the introduction of competition and the removal of the Post Office monopoly on the delivery of mail. The principle of a universal service at a universal charge is the basic one on which the Post Office has operated for decades and it is extremely important in ensuring that, no matter how expensive it may be to deliver a particular letter, everyone, everywhere gets the same quality of service. The Government assume that the introduction of competition and an element of privatisation will somehow bring improvements. In fact, they are going in the reverse direction and their proposals are likely to make a substantial portion of the service worse.

It is worth having a careful and critical look at a number of specific aspects of the citizens charter. The Government have made much of the introduction of the Competition and Service (Utilities) Bill, which we shall be debating next week. But that Bill contains no proposal for a statutory ombudsman and no regulation of profiteering by the privatised utilities—no requirement on British Telecom to give back to the customers some of the absurd profits that it is now making. The Consumers Association says that, in introducing the Bill, the Government have missed a golden opportunity for a thorough review of the regulation of the big utilities. The Bill gives the regulators no real teeth although it should. All in all, the Government have introduced a very inadequate measure.

The Government have recently introduced the so-called patients charter. It is interesting to note that seven of the 10 so-called rights that the charter gives to patients already exist. We welcome the fact that they are being publicised, but there is not very much that is new in the charter. Most of the three new rights that the Government propose are already operated by the majority of health authorities. In the overwhelming majority of cases, for example, the aim of admission to hospital for an operation within two years

is already achieved. Of course, we welcome the tightening up of such rights, but the patients charter hardly represents major progress, as the Government claim.

At the same time, the Government are pressing ahead with their proposals for changes in the national health service, such as the introduction of the internal market and the opting out of hospitals, some of which run directly counter to the provisions of the patients charter. For example, the patients charter refers to appropriate plans for discharge from hospitals, yet the Government are introducing financial systems that place hospitals under intense pressure to empty beds and to bring in new patients as rapidly as possible. How do the Government square that with the appropriate plan for discharge proposal in the citizens charter?

Let us consider the proposals for school inspections. The Financial Secretary made much of what he called a lay element in the process. What does that mean? It means that the Government plan to cut the number of Her Majesty's inspectors from 500 to about 175. Moreover, of the 175 who will be left, only 39 are earmarked by the Department of Education and Science for involvement in the quality assurance of independent inspections. In other words, the Government are establishing a privatised inspection process, but only 39 inspectors in the entire country will be designated to monitor what the private inspectors are up to. That is no guarantee of quality assurance. We shall vigorously oppose the Government's proposals on that.

Such inadequacies are to be found throughout the charter. An examination of the fine print shows that the proposals for improving motorway service areas simply mean that they will be built more quickly, less properly spaced and will make a bigger profit. There is no way of ensuring that they provide a better service to the people who use them. What has happened to the proposals for commonhold legislation and rights for leaseholders which we were told would appear in the Queen's Speech? What about the need for a fully independent investigation system for complaints against the police? The charter contains nothing to improve the present procedures.

It seems that the Government have suddenly woken up to the fact that the Department of Social Security, through its face-to-face contact with people in Benefits Agency offices, sometimes falls down in its dealings with the public. The charter says:

"Visiting benefit offices should never be a daunting or demoralising experience".

Coming from the Government, that is rather rich. Every week for the past eight years I have met constituents who find visits to DSS offices and Benefits Agency offices thoroughly demoralising and daunting. I raised the matter in the House five and a half years ago. At one particular DSS office, some of my constituents were treated as Dickensian supplicants rather than as citizens seeking to secure their rights. There are still inadequacies in the way in which the Benefits Agency treats people.

Mr. Maude: May I assume from the hon. Gentleman's indignation that he wholeheartedly supports our proposals to improve matters?

Mr. Smith: I wholeheartedly approve the Government's aim of seeking to improve matters, but I am not convinced that their specific proposal will achieve it. If the Government are serious about removing the demoralisation and the daunting nature of approaches to benefits offices, it is about time that they removed the most grotesque form of demoralisation, which is the operation of the social fund. That was dreamt up by the Prime Minister when he was a social security Minister and is the most demeaning aspect of the social security system. Reform of the way in which that operates would be a real benefit for the citizen. New name tags and nicer offices are all very well, but fundamental parts of the system need to be changed.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The hon. Gentleman has been generous in giving way. I hope that he will forgive me for saying that his approach to the citizens charter is beginning to sound a little churlish. The impressive aspect of the charter is not so much the individual actions, impressive though they are, but the fact that it will change the entire public service approach to citizens. It is not the individual programmes but the approach of the public service to citizens that matters. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be a little more welcoming than he has been so far.

Mr. Smith: I suspect that the hon. Gentleman is not living in the real world. The proposals that the citizens charter purports to contain will produce little real change in the way in which our citizens receive the services to which they are entitled.

Mr. Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: No, because time is pressing and I want to make some progress.

Mr. Tony Banks: Go on, give way.

Mr. Smith: In response to the blandishments of my hon. Friend, I shall give way to the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson), who used to be one of my constituents. This is the last intervention that I shall allow.

Mr. Summerson: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the charter would improve the performance of the Clerkenwell neighbourhood office in his constituency? Following a recent council by-election, the staff in that office are refusing to co-operate, not only with the local council, but with the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Smith: I have said loudly that the performance of that neighbourhood office, which was the subject of some doorstep discussion before the council by-election, leaves something to be desired. Precisely the same can be said of many local authorities, whether controlled by Tories, Liberal Democrats or Labour or where no party has overall control. The citizens charter will not make much difference to the way in which those authorities deliver the services that they should deliver efficiently, promptly and courteously.

The hon. Member for Walthamstow fails to recognise that many Labour-controlled local authorities are already implementing many of the aims to which the Government are now waking up in the charter. For example, over the past three years, York city council has been implementing a citizens charter containing guaranteed levels of service. I have here a leaflet which the council has issued about street cleaning in part of the city. It lays down the exact standards of performance that are expected, the timing of street cleaning, the standards to be achieved, the rota on which the work will be done and the provisions that the

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residents in the area can expect to achieve from the council. York city council is a pioneer in ensuring that such a contract between the local authority and the people whom it serves will deliver the standard of service that people deserve.

Oxford has a nine-point customer contract on refuse collection which guarantees a whole series of provisions to the citizen. Milton Keynes has a customer contract which includes a guarantee to remove graffiti within specified times. The London borough of Hounslow has published a service charter on answering the telephone and responding to letters. Those are examples of Labour-controlled authorities which are getting on with doing what the Government are only talking about.

A Labour Government will seek to ensure for citizens a wide range of additional rights that the Government do not propose in their citizens charter. We shall ensure that all users of public services will have access to complaints procedures, which will include strict timetables for responding to complaints and an appeal to an independent ombudsman.

We shall ensure that, for council services where a fee is charged and for public utility customer services contracts, compensation will be paid where a service falls short of the published standards. We shall ensure that firms and public bodies that breach or fail to meet environmental standards will bear the cost of abatement and cleaning up of pollution. We shall ensure that people suffering from excessive noise pollution from factories, airports, railways and other commercial sources will be entitled to compensation for the installation of better insulation from those causing the noise nuisance.

We shall ensure that complaints against the police will be investigated by an independent police complaints authority. We shall ensure that prisoners will be given access to an independent prison ombudsman. We shall introduce a right to have misleading or inaccurate personal information held by public or private bodies corrected or erased. We shall ensure that individuals will have the right to publication of a full apology, or the award of a right to reply, where their privacy has been unreasonably invaded by the media. We shall ensure that, where there is prima facie evidence of a miscarriage of justice, an individual will be able to have his case investigated by an independent body, separate from the courts, in the last resort.

We shall strengthen the accountability of local authorities to their electors for the budgets that they set and the services that they provide by ensuring that a proportion of every council is elected each year. We shall ensure that tenants will have the option to be active partners in their housing, with the right to take over estate management if they wish. We shall ensure that the right of community health councils to be present at all health authority meetings—a right removed by the Government—will be restored. Community health councils will be encouraged to speak for all patients across the range of NHS services and will be given funding independent of the regional health authorities.

Those are just some of the measures that a Labour Government will introduce. They will provide real rights for people—rights which they can exercise to ensure that they get the quality of service that they deserve. We shall also have in place a proper system of monitoring, of satisfaction surveys, of regulation and of annual elections and we shall establish a quality commission to examine quality as well as value for money. There will be a complaints procedures and redress, to follow up the rights that we shall ensure that people have.

Above all, we shall give priority to the improvement of public services over and above the offering of tax cuts to the electorate. That is the basic choice that will be in front of people at the next election. It will be a choice between a party that offers tax cuts and a party that offers better public services. We realise that one cannot put right the damage of 12 years of neglect and deterioration with a few cosmetic gestures. We understand that, to achieve real rights for citizens and real improvements in the quality of our public services, we require a Labour Government and the people of this country will vote for one—the sooner the better.

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Hillhead): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Have you received any notification from the Government of their wish to make a statement about the extraordinary new revelations in *The Guardian* this morning about the bizarre and mysterious death of Robert Maxwell, a former Member of Parliament? Around the world, speculation is mounting about the theory that Mr. Maxwell may have been murdered, for the reason that dead men tell no tales. Surely the Government must soon allow a debate on Mirrorgate. Have you heard whether that will be sooner rather than later?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I have heard nothing about that, and I have had no request from a Minister to make a statement.

11.4 am

Mr. Steve Norris (Epping Forest): Listening to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) saying that it was not the Government who had thought of the citizens charter but Mr. Herbert Morrison reminded me that old habits die hard—in particular, the old habit, much beloved of socialist Governments everywhere, of rewriting history. I remember the marvellous Soviet history that concluded that the Soviet Union was responsible for the invention of television, computers and penicillin.

I would put Labour's commitment to a citizens charter roughly in that category. A citizens charter could only ever be a creature of a Conservative Government, for one cardinal and overriding reason—the Labour party is beholden, in terms of funding, finance and philosophy, to the producers, rather than the consumers, of services. That fundamental divide will put them at a permanent disadvantage in endeavours to provide quality services to the citizen.

Mr. Galloway: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Norris: I am already beset by offers to interrupt my pearls of wisdom and, in deference to my good friend, I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Galloway: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way so early in his speech. Does not the concept of a citizen imply the existence of a society? Did not the former Prime Minister memorably state that there was no such thing as society, only individuals?

Mr. Norris: Much as I would enjoy debating this matter with the hon. Gentleman, whom I might also call my hon. Friend, I do not wish to go down this path. I have always felt that the great truth of the words uttered by my right hon. Friend the former Prime Minister was that she had pierced the bubble of the omniscience of the social worker—the concept that every problem in society can be resolved by the intervention of a bureaucrat—and had identified the fact that the real core of social development is an individual's self-reliance and reliance upon the family. That was the virtue of my right hon. Friend's remark, which I wholeheartedly endorse. I am grateful to have the opportunity to do so.

Mr. Dicks: Does my hon. Friend agree that the very people of whom Labour Members complain, saying that they do not give a service in Government Departments, almost always belong to unions who support the Labour party? Why does not the Labour party tell union representatives to make sure that the staff who pay their union dues provide that service? The very supporters of the Labour party provide bad services to the ordinary people.

Mr. Norris: My hon. Friend anticipates what I am going to say. Those of us in public life are aware that, whenever complaints of poor service come before us, there are always Labout Members who will blame either the absence of public funds, although they never make any reference to where the money has to come from, or the Government. It is never—or perhaps only on occasion—the fault of an individual who has not done his job conscientiously or with an adequate standard of service.

It is not always true that deficiencies in service are to blame. Governments of every political persuasion wish to spend more on an almost limitless number of service areas, but far too often—infinitely more often than Labour Members care to admit—the fault lies in the simple failure of an individual to deliver a conscientious personal commitment.

This is nowhere better exemplified than in the treatment that some consultants in the NHS offered those who had to visit them as out-patients. It is now common knowledge that there were consultants—were, because the Government have done something about the problem—who simply said, "I am a very important man. My time is extremely valuable, and I am not going to be kept waiting here while people like patients take up five or 10 minutes when I shall not be earning at a rate that would put the salary of Members of Parliament to shame. Instead of inviting my patients to see me at 10-minute intervals—generally I offer them each 10 minutes of my time—I shall invite the lot to attend at 9 o'clock in the morning. When we get to 12 o'clock, some of them will have waited for three hours. That is their problem. I am a very busy man who has to go and earn a lot of money in the private hospital next door." That sort of personal approach to the individual citizen is, more than anything else, likely to outrage the individual citizen who is being treated by the national health service.

Where does the fault lie that produces that outrage? First, it is clear that putting the National Union of Public Employees, the National and Local Government Officers Association and the Confederation of Health Service Employees back in the driving seat will never solve the problem. The Labour party's reliance on producers rather than consumers will constantly bedevil its attempts to convince the British people that it is serious on these issues.

Differences in quality standards, to which my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary referred, involve issues that are too serious for us to ignore. There are palpable differences between the quality of service that is offered at individual hospitals. The same can be said of individual schools. Differences in the quality of service of local authorities is evident, and London is a marvellous example.

Let us take Lambeth and Wandsworth. I shall not embarrass Labour Members by reminding the House in detail that there is no community charge in Wandsworth because the authority is such a good manager of its moneys, while a huge charge is levied in Lambeth, which unfortunately I have to pay. The difference between the quality of service that is offered by the two authorities is obvious on reaching the boundary between the two. The black sacks full of fetid rubbish that are to be seen in Lambeth do not meet the eye on entering Wandsworth. That is despite the fact that I am paying hundreds of pounds a year for the privilege of a so-called collection service.

Mr. Tony Banks: I have ridden in the hon. Gentleman's car, which is so large that it enters Wandsworth as soon as it enters the boundary of Lambeth. I agree with the hon. Gentleman's remarks about consultants getting everyone to attend between 9 o'clock and 10 o'clock, for example, and then keeping them waiting. He is right when he says that that should be stopped. He then said that that system is created by the National Union of Public Employees and the Confederation of Health Service Employees. Of course, no consultants are members of organisations such as NUPE and COHSE, so the hon. Gentleman should not try to run the two things together.

Mr. Norris: I shall make some concessions to the hon. Gentleman. First, I concede that not many consultants are members of NUPE or COHSE. He is right about that. Secondly, I have an extremely large car. He is right about that as well. However, the hon. Gentleman has never shown any reluctance to enter my car. I happen to pass his house on the way to my own. I extend to the hon. Gentleman an open invitation to join me on any subsequent occasion. I promise him the same standard of service in my car as that which he would expect to be provided by a Conservative borough, or even a Conservative taxi service operated by myself.

When we talk about a citizens charter and standards of public service, we must decide whether they are merely advertising hype and a complete waste of public money, or whether they are worthwhile objectives. We often refer to our mail bags, and hon. Members sometimes comment that over the past six months they have received only one or two letters about Europe, a subject which consumes the House beyond any other. I imagine that, if we added up all the letters that set out complaints about individual examples of poor public service, the total would outnumber those that we receive on weightier national issues by tens or hundreds to one.

There are some items that I regard as headlines in the citizens charter and sadly I find myself in conflict with the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury. The hon. Gentleman suggests that the identification of public

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servants by means of name badges is merely a bit of show, an unimportant piece of advertising hype. I suggest that the reality is fundamentally different.

Over generations, it has been possible for public servants to hide behind the cloak of anonymity. They have been able to offer an utterly inadequate personal service to individual customers and clients of whichever agency they represent. I am surprised that Opposition Members are not prepared to be more open about this. There have been some in the public service who have refused to answer their telephones. There are those who turn files over and are not prepared to act upon them. There are some who give dismissive answers to those who are not good at writing or reading.

I welcome the appearance in the Chamber of my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office. I know that he was keen to listen to every word that I intended to say on these matters. My hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) and I "share" a Benefits Agency office at Wentworth house in Ilford, which is run by the excellent Miss Alice O'Carroll. I endorse entirely what my hon. Friend has said: Miss O'Carroll and her excellent staff have grasped wholeheartedly the idea of service delivery. They are now offering an infinitely higher standard of service in practical ways. For example, they have introduced a fast-track counter. It means that it is no longer necessary to stand in line for three quarters of an hour, for example, merely to ask which form should be completed. Simple reorganisation has eradicated delays of that sort.

It may be said that the example that I have given is extremely obvious, and that it is not necessary to introduce a citizens charter to make improvements of that sort. I doubt that. Without the impetus of the specific commitment of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to improving the quality of basic services, I doubt whether we would have seen simple but desperately important measures taken in the public service, at no cost to the public purse. Such actions have done so much to improve the standard of service that is offered to the individual citizen.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The new fast-track counter at Wentworth house has dramatically changed the lives of those who enter it. As my hon. Friend has said, they no longer have to queue with those who will take a great deal of time to collect their benefits or whatever. I am grateful to him for stressing that the improvement cost nothing. It is not right for those in the Labour party to say that an absence of funds is holding back the public service.

Mr. Norris: That is an extremely important point. I well remember, from spending years in local government, being a member of an education committee. The committee examined the way in which individual head teachers regarded the maintenance of standards in their schools. Some heads insisted that those standards should be maintained, and some did not. The evidence was before our eyes. The period between the cyclical redecoration of the school was not the only factor. The important factor was whether the head teacher and his staff were committed to maintaining the fabric of their school. There was no difference between the costs of individual schools, but the differences between the schools were obvious.

The citizens charter is a fundamental underpinning of commitment to quality of service. It is clear that quality of service does not necessarily depend on an open cheque book. The citizens charter is one of the most important contributions that we shall make to life in Britain in the 1990s and beyond.

I shall make some specific comments about the charter, and I hope that they will be of value and might be shared by some of my colleagues. First, I extend a considerable welcome to the steps that the charter envisages being taken to improve service on the railways in general, and specifically on the London underground.

I share with other hon. Members an interest in the operation of the London underground. The Central line is the artery that my constituents use to go to their businesses and it has offered an extremely inadequate service to the public over recent years. The inadequacy of the service has been very much in two parts. There has been historic under-investment in the London underground system, and there has been a poor quality of management of the service.

The Government have specifically resolved the first inadequacy. They are committed to, and have embarked upon, a programme in excess of £600 million to upgrade the fundamental infrastructure of the Central line. On behalf of my constituents, I am grateful for that. It cannot happen too soon.

So often, what rightly outrages my constituents has nothing to do with the age of the rolling stock, the adequacy of the staircase, the size of the signalling box, and so on; it has to do with simple discourtesies and inadequacies of communication. It has to do with simple management failures, often at station level, which are unforgiveable and which could be rectified without a single penny of additional funding. That is the key.

The citizens charter contains three proposals for London Underground. The first is the introduction of tough, new, quality-of-service targets for each station, with details of performance achieved available in the station foyer, and showing the comparisons between the targets for service and the number of targets that have actually been achieved.

Secondly, it proposes an acceleration of the contracting out of the cleaning and maintenance services. Anyone who knows the system knows that one of the major causes of disruption of service is suspected fires involving the ignition of pieces of litter on the railway system, which need to be taken away and dealt with quickly.

The third proposal is the introduction of performance-related pay for guards, drivers and signalling staff. I hope that that will especially relate to punctuality and absenteeism. We have all seen those marvellously short notices on the boards in stations that tell us that the reason for the failure of the 7·15 from Hainault is signal failure in Doncaster, when it is obvious to anyone who actually travels on the line that the real reason is that one of the staff failed to get out of bed on time.

I should prefer the system to concentrate on delivering that sort of quality of service and commitment in the most obvious way possible, which is quite simply to relate performance to pay. I assure the House that that will do more to improve the quality of service on London Underground than hundreds of millions of pounds expended by the Exchequer.

Mr. Dicks: With great respect to my hon. Friend, I must tell him that he made a slight error when he referred to funding. He said that London Regional Transport traditionally had been underfunded. In fact, in 1987, 1988 and 1989, LRT failed to spend an allocation of £120 million. When I raised that matter with its chairman during a Select Committee meeting, he said "Don't talk about the past; let us look ahead." I wanted my hon. Friend to know that LRT could have spent another £120 million on capital investment in the underground.

Mr. Norris: I defer to my hon. Friend's detailed knowledge of the subject. He is well known for having travelled some of the world's most exotic airlines and railways in his exhaustive endeavours to improve his expertise. The limits of my railway travel experience generally extend to going on to Lancaster Gate rather than getting off at Oxford Circus. I am sure that my hon. Friend is right in all that he says.

I consider the most crucial part of the citizens charter to be that which relates to performance-related pay. We need to be careful how we introduce that concept, because certain truths are self-evident. The first is that the concept of relating how people perform their duties to the remuneration that they receive must be fundamentlly correct, something of which we never lose sight, and something that we should promote wherever possible.

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Mr. Norris: I think that I can forestall the hon. Gentleman, who is passionate in his belief that Members of Parliament should also be subject to a performance-related pay system. I hope that it is no reflection on my performance, but I sincerely hope that that does not happen. It would greatly diminish the joy of being a Member of the House if my function in life were limited to adding to the intolerable burden on Ministers, which the Liberal Democrats appear quite content to do, by asking desperately irrelevant questions about minor personalities in parts of the world hundreds of miles away. In fact, the answer could be much more easily derived by writing to the local police station or the benefits office.

If we were to approach such a system, I should prefer to do so on the basis of rewarding hon. Members for the number of constructive ideas that they include in their speeches, and deducting £500 a time for the spurious points of order they make and the number of sedentary interventions that interrupt the Member who is speaking.

On that basis, there could be some merit in the hon. Gentleman's proposals. In fact, he may well be thinking along positive lines. For example, it would be grossly over-simplistic to imagine that performance-related pay for teachers should be limited to the simplistic criterion of examination results. I am glad that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science immediately made it clear that, while he is rightly wedded to the concept of performance-related pay, he recognises that there is a need for an extremely sophisticated assessment system if the relationship between remuneration and performance is to mean something.

Anyone in business knows that if, for example, a salesman is rewarded simply on the basis of the amount he sells, that could often be a desperate distortion of performance. This might appear to be frightfully obvious, but in a bull market it is easy to sell anything to anyone —*[Interruption.]* I will accept no intervention on that subject. Of course, the reverse position is also true—a salesman has to work hard to deliver the business in a tough market, and he needs to be supported by, for example, reference to other criteria in the performance of his duties, such as attendance, willingness to go the extra mile in the performance of his duties, and so on. Those factors are what really mark out the ability to relate performance to pay, and I welcome them.

Another point that has caused me concern arose when I visited my local Benefits Agency office at Harlow—not the one that I share with my hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford. It expressed the real concern that, if the Treasury is allowed to take efficiency savings produced by agencies and immediately consolidate them into the Exchequer's budget—that is, take the savings and then reduce the starting point for the next year—that could have two consequences.

First, it would demoralise the staff when they see savings that they have struggled to make disappear in that way. Secondly, and perhaps more damaging, it might encourage them not to seek the optimum saving available. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary is shrewd enough to know that. The staff want to ensure that they have a little put aside for next year; they do not want to give all the savings to the Exchequer, because they fear that the agency's global budget will be correspondingly reduced.

I urge my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to take a firm line on that matter even though his officials—in the interests of efficiency and cost-effectiveness—will urge him otherwise. We must always remember that the flip side of the coin that penalises poor performance is that we must be prepared to reward good performance. An agency that has carried out its job conscientiously will show an obvious difference in the standards offered—for example, better furniture, a better foyer area, larger offices, and better pay. That is as it should be, as that will offer an incentive to others in the same public service to do likewise.

One point which causes me exquisite agony was raised by the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury. Of course, I am referring to the question of freedom of information. This is probably my only opportunity as a Parliamentary Private Secretary in the Home Department to make this observation. If the Whip on duty will avert his gaze and ears, I must state that I believe that one of the fundamental underpinnings of citizens' rights to good quality service is information to know what is being done in his or her name.

This morning, my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary said that he strongly supported principles of openness. I welcome that. However, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury was sadly and dangerously misguided —I say "misguided", because I cannot believe that he wished to mislead the House—when he referred to the Labour Government's efforts in that regard. He should have allowed me to intervene, because he is such a fair chap. However, since he did not so, I am obliged to make my point now.

It is a matter of exquisite regret to me that the truth in these matters is that Oppositions love freedom of information and Governments hate it. The Wilson and Callaghan Governments hated it just as much——

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. At 11.30 am, we are expecting the latest inflation figures to be announced. Have you had a request for a statement, because many people hope that the figure will be below 4 per cent. this month?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I informed the House at three minutes past 11 that I have received no requests for permission to make statements.

Mr. Norris: Perhaps I should allow my observations on freedom of information to end at that point. However, I have always believed that the principle of freedom of information is a profoundly Tory principle. I have been saddened by the extent to which the arguments about it have been politicised so as to divide the parties on the issue.

I remind my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary that it was my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) who so trenchantly observed the virtues of freedom of information in the many years that she spent on the Opposition Benches. I urge my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary not to allow Sir Humphrey to win every time. I am aware of the tempting arguments placed before Ministers by permanent secretaries who perceive a problem in the area and who do not want to give away their most potent weapon in government. I urge my hon. Friend to put their blandishments in context.

As other hon. Members in this packed House are keen to contribute to the debate, I will make a final point about a matter which concerns me greatly because it relates to contracting out of services. I was involved in health authority management when the Conservative Government introduced the extremely welcome concept of contracting out. It is worth reminding the House that, in those early days when contracting out was introduced, those who wanted to tender or were successful in their tenders were subjected to vandalism, violence and the planting of incriminating evidence, an example of which was the deliberately fabricated evidence of dirty hospital theatres, where it was subsequently proved that the offending material had been planted by people who wanted to undermine the contractors.

Fortunately, all that is, I hope, long gone. The principles of contracting out remain, and the quality of care offered to a patient in a bed in a national health service hospital must be delivered at optimum value, to treat the greatest number of patients possible. If that means that we can achieve better value for money in laundry, cleaning and catering, then, regardless of our political aspirations, we should seek to achieve it.

I am also concerned about direct labour organisations. When we consider how some DLO contracts operate, I sometimes wonder whether the playing field is entirely level. Is my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary entirely satisfied that the same standards of rigid supervision applied by some local authorities to the performance of contractors are also applied when the contractor is a DLO or a former department of the local authority? I doubt whether that is the case.

Is my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary—I am sorry, my hon. Friend; I am anticipating the inevitable—entirely satisfied that performance-related conditions of contract are applied equally to those in the private sector and former council employees? Again, I doubt whether that is the case. There are legions of examples and I will not waste the time of the House by enumerating them, as they are well known to my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary.

I am very concerned about the dangerous concept of "cheapest is best". For all sorts of reasons, which all hon. Members understand, we must largely rest on the supposition that local authorities are obliged to take the lowest tender. I do not believe that any of us in our private lives ever adopts the principle behind that conclusion. We all want best value rather than the cheapest price when we purchase goods or services. There is a straightforward way around that. We need pre-qualification thresholds for companies, because that is what so often distinguishes tenderers.

Where there is an obnormally low tender which a local authority feels obliged to accept, and where the worst examples of contracts have invariably occurred, that has happened because there has been inadequate pre-qualification investigation of the ability of the organisation—occasionally a DLO—or company to deliver the service. Therefore, we must ensure that every council and authority contracting out a service has a very high pre-qualification threshold which only those who are competent to provide the right level of service can surmount.

I warmly welcome the White Paper, which concludes by stating:

> "Its themes of quality, choice, standards and value for money will be fundamental to public service throughout the 1990s.
>
> The Charter will bring for all those in public service new pride and satisfaction.
>
> For the public they serve, it will bring commitment to quality and a power to secure it, that will put Britain ahead of any country in the world."

I warmly endorse those sentiments and congratulate my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary and the Government team on the initiative, and I commend it warmly to the House.

Mr. Maude: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I believe that the House will want to know, following the point of order from my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell), that the annual retail prices index for October announced a few moments ago was 3·7 per cent.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is nearly an abuse of the procedures of the House; it is not a matter for me.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There was no point of order.

Mr. Skinner: What steps are you going to take to deal with that Government Front Bench yobbo?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I deprecate the use of that kind of language.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Would it be in order——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I thought that I had made it clear that there was no point of order.

11.38 am

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): The hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) made a lengthy speech in which he catalogued an array of shortcomings in public

services which he believes the citizens charter would address. He—or any other hon. Member—could have made that speech 10, 30 or 50 years ago and I have no doubt that it could be made in 10, 30 or 50 years' time. The citizens charter has been grossly oversold by the Government.

My earlier interventions were not designed to suggest that I do not believe that there is scope for machinery to improve public service. Some aspects of the charter can be welcomed and supported by hon. Members on both sides of the House. However, the title—citizens charter—is a gross, grand misnomer for what is nothing more than a public service consumers charter. It is worth while, valid and has merit, but it is not the great big idea that will save the Government from defeat at the next general election.

Mr. Dicks: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that an interest rate of 3·7 per cent., which has just been announced, would make more money available to implement the citizens charter?

Mr. Bruce: I should be delighted to find out where I can borrow money at 3·7 per cent.

The speeches of the Minister and the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) are good demonstrations of the motherhood and apple pie approach. Of course, things are wrong with public services which can be put right and mechanisms can be introduced. But the danger is in the Government's suggestion to people that there will be some great transformation. People will have unfulfilled expectations when they find that their ability to press complaints, obtain redress and have things sorted out is not as substantial as they had been led to believe.

One is also entitled to question why, if things are so appallingly bad and these measures are so urgently needed, the Government have taken 12 years and six months to come round to the idea of introducing them.

Mr. Norris: It is for a simple reason which the hon. Gentleman must appreciate. Every move that we have made during the past 12 years to introduce such measures has been bitterly resisted by both the Labour party and the hon. Gentleman's party. They now pray in aid their support for each of the measures, now that they see how valuable they are.

Mr. Bruce: I wish to make it clear that I do not pray in aid support for the way in which the Government have privatised the utilities. Indeed, the Competition and Service (Utilities) Bill, which will be debated on Monday, is a recognition of the Government's failure to create consumer protection at an adequate level before the utilities were privatised.

Before the hon. Member for Epping Forest intervened, I was about to make the second point that much of the citizens charter is a recognition of the Government's failures and mistakes over the past 12 years and six months and the need to introduce measures to ensure greater satisfaction. I have to concur with the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) that there is anxiety about the way in which the Government put more and more public services into the private sector and yet continue to claim that they will maintain satisfactory standards in services over which they have given up control and accountability for which this elected House of Parliament has lost. That was the point of my earlier intervention.

The Minister said—other hon. Members have commented on it—that he was in favour of greater openness in government. The hon. Member for Epping Forest is well known for his commitment to the cause of freedom of information and is respected by hon. Members on both sides of the House for it. I was glad that he managed to put his commitment on the record. But the Government have resisted measures to introduce genuine freedom of information.

Setting up agencies is not wrong in itself. It can lead to greater efficiency. Neither I nor my party fundamentally objects to the principle. However, we object to the practice of Ministers denying their responsibility and accountability to the elected House of Commons for those agencies. It worries me that Members of Parliament are finding it increasingly difficult to obtain replies from Ministers or access to information.

In addition, the Government and the Conservative party seem to run down and despise public servants and public service. It is perfectly reasonable to set standards for public service and targets which people should attain, but too often the Government imply that people who work in the public sector and public service are inferior to people who work in the private sector and private enterprise. That attitude demoralises people and causes resentment. It makes it more difficult for them to fulfil their role. Interestingly, it alienates former supporters of the Conservative party.

As the hon. Member for Gordon and a campaigner in the Kincardine and Deeside by-election, I can report to the House that the thousands of people in those constituencies who formerly voted Conservative and have defected to the Liberal Democrats should give considerable anxiety to the Conservative party. People do not trust the Government with public services. They no longer believe that the Government can be trusted to maintain standards in education and health.

The Government can say that publishing school league tables and information about the health service reforms are positive improvements, but there is an enormous credibility gap between the Government and voters, who simply do not believe or trust them. The voters have seen that the motivation in the past 12 years has been to introduce commercial practices and competition into public services, thereby undermining the basic public service ethic. People go into public service because they are committed to the community. They are not necessarily motivated by the standards and criteria of the private sector which the Government wish to apply to the public sector.

Mr. Maude: Do the Liberal Democrats oppose the introduction of competition into public services? Do they believe that public service organisations should not submit what they do in fair and open competition with what could be done by others?

Mr. Bruce: I oppose the idea that competition is the answer to delivery of good public services. It is not even relevant to the delivery of all services. Where it is relevant, we support it. We differ from the Government in their belief that only competition can determine the quality of service in the public sector.

The issue that was uppermost in the Kincardine and Deeside by-election was the opt-out of Foresterhill hospital, which also affects my constituency. Foresterhill is

[Mr. Bruce]

the only district general hospital serving the north-east of Scotland and, for some services, the entire north of Scotland. There is no competition and there can be no competition. Indeed, the health board and Ministers have said that there will be no competition, even if the hospital opts out. There is an inherent contradiction in the Government's argument. They say that competition is a good thing, yet they intend to create a free-standing hospital which will operate in a market where there is no market and no one even pretends that there could be competition. That is extremely inconsistent.

People will also look for what improvements in services they can reasonably expect. For example, during the eight years that I have been a Member of Parliament I have been approached by numerous people about no-fault compensation in services such as the NHS and the abolition of Crown immunity. I see nothing in the citizens charter to address those issues, which worry citizens.

Simply improving the delivery of service in the public sector, without providing the necessary resources or enabling facilities, will not create public satisfaction. I am sure that all hon. Members could give examples from their area, but in my local council, Gordon, a thorough review of how employees deal with the public has been carried out since the Liberal Democrats became the lead party in the administration. The council has imposed standards of which the Government would approve. However, it is no consolation to people who go to the housing department to be told politely, quickly, efficiently and courteously that there are no houses available and it is unlikely that there will be any available to meet their demands. That is where the citizens charter will, fundamentally, fall short. People want results and although it may be admirable to make the trains run on time, it did not make Mussolini one of the world's great political leaders. Nor will the Prime Minister's ambition to make Britain a cone-free society make him go down in history as a great Prime Minister.

As I was coming here this morning, I listened to a report of a speech of the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher). She was speaking, extraordinarily, to business men in Tennessee. It may be of great benefit to both the business men of Tenessee and the people of Britain that it is a long way from here. She was speaking against the move towards European political union, which seems to be causing considerable consternation on the Conservative Benches, even to the point of unseemly attempts to vote in committees of which no one had previously heard, in an attempt to alter the balance within the party. The right hon. Lady said that she would resist all further steps to European political union because they would remove the rights of voters in Britain. Two points spring to mind, First, it is extraordinary that the right hon. Lady did not think of that when she introduced the Single European Act in the House of Commons. Secondly, I am not sure that the rights of British citizens are inherently superior to those available to citizens in other member states of the European Community. Indeed, the reverse may be the case. Some of us believe that a move towards closer political union in Europe may help to drag this antiquated political system into the 20th century, never mind the 21st century, and that we may get some of the benefits that citizens in other European countries have, such as freedom of information, a Bill of rights, a democratic voting system and a division of power between central Government and regional and local government. One of the great concerns of the past 12 years has been the concentration of power in the hands of central Government and the inability of Members of Parliament, never mind individual citizens, to call the Government to account or to influence control of direct public policy. I shall illustrate that by reference to the one Department of State with which I must deal regularly, the Scottish Office.

The Scottish Office is the Lord High Everything north of the border. It covers a range of policies which in England and Wales are covered by many different Ministries. English Members can question Ministers on policy almost every day, but Scottish Members can do so only once every four weeks. Even then, we must compete with Englishmen who wander in at the end of Scottish questions, having taken no part in the proceedings, simply to fill up the time and prevent Opposition Members from calling Ministers to account by asking real questions. That is of genuine concern.

Every other Department of State is shadowed by a Select Committee which can cross-examine civil servants and Ministers about the direction and administration of policy. In defiance of the rules of the House, the Government have persistently refused to set up a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs. As a result, the Scottish Office is not effectively accountable either to the people whom it is supposed to serve or to the elected Members of the House who are supposed to call it to account. Those are the types of issues that concern citizens, but the Government fail to address them.

I cite another specific example. British Coal closed Monktonhall colliery. For two and a half years a consortium of local mineworkers has been competing to take over the licence and operate the mine as a free enterprise. They are not looking for public money. The Government have persistently refused to answer any questions about British Coal's conduct and attitude towards the consortium. They have refused all meetings with representatives of the consortium and with Members of Parliament. I understand that two days ago, on the instigation, interestingly, of a Conservative councillor in Lothian, a Minister agreed to meet the consortium.

Those examples show how our lousy, corrupt system works now. The Government are siphoning off their responsibility and refusing to answer questions in the House, yet they are trying to set up a citizens charter as though it were some sort of guarantee. Their record in office is of ducking their responsibility, of not answering questions, of not being called to account and of not being available to elected Members.

Mr. Maude: Does the hon. Gentleman contend, then, that public services can be provided for citizens only through directly employed, bureaucratic, pyramid structures accountable to Ministers through long lines of management? Is he now the only person left in the country and, probably, the world who believes that those means of management remain relevant?

Mr. Bruce: The Minister knows perfectly well that that is not what I am saying. I have made it clear that neither I nor my party objects to the creation of agencies per se. I am complaining about the Government's use of that structure to abdicate their responsibility ultimately to be answerable to the House. It is not a question of the

Minister being our direct line from a pyramid; it is that Ministers should accept that they are accountable to Parliament. Increasingly, they are ducking that responsibility.

Members and Select Committees are being treated dismissively and with contempt. The main function of Select Committees now is not to influence policy. The Government take not the slightest account of what they say. Their function is to call evidence in public. The witnessing and publication of that evidence is their most useful service. It is a valuable service, but it falls far short of what they were set up to do in the first place and what in a democratic House of Commons they should be able to do—to influence Government policy and call Ministers effectively to account.

Too often Ministers are engaged in almost nefarious activities. They have furthered their personal careers on the back of their ministerial office and lined their pockets on the basis of the merits that they have gained from their jobs. Yet, we have not been able to call them to account subsequently because they have moved out of the range of accountability.

I shall embellish that point. I notice that Conservatives are keen on talking about the sovereignty of Parliament. Personally, I find that concept rather obscene. I believe that Parliament should serve the people who it represents rather than be their master and that the people should retain the sovereignty. In Scotland we understand that concept.

None the less, the idea is that Parliament should be sovereign. Yet parliamentarians are denied the rights of effective access to information, of getting proper answers and of calling Ministers to account. That is a sign that the sovereignty of Parliament is not a great triumph for democracy but a means of concentrating power in the hands of an establishment that is not effectively accountable—it simply has to control the majority in Parliament and it can ignore the elected representatives of the majority of the people.

Mr. Dicks: Surely the hon. Gentleman's party is desperate to get us under the control of the unelected officials in Europe. That is his party's policy. He speaks with a forked tongue.

Mr. Bruce: That is not our policy. Our policy is to create a democratic Europe, a democratic Britain and, I hope, a democratic Scotland as well. That is fundamentally different. We wish not to put ourselves in the power of the bureaucrats of Europe, but to reform Europe in a truly democratic way. It is the obstinacy of the Conservative party, which is divided and incapable both of representing Britain's national interests and of leading the debate constructively, which is causing concern. This country needs a proper open, modern democracy. It needs a Bill of rights to enable citizens to challenge the Government—the Executive—when it abuses its power and a House of Commons which is genuinely representative of the way in which people vote and which can ensure that policy is directed according to the wishes of the people rather than those of a minority who, because of a distortion, happen to control Parliament at a given time. We need to decentralise power.

The Liberal Democratic party believes that Scottish and Welsh parliaments and regional assemblies would be a good thing not only because they would bring decisions closer to the people, but because they would divide power instead of concentrating it in the hands of the Government in Whitehall.

When the citizens charter was introduced the Government believed that it was the big idea that would temper Thatcherism and secure the present Prime Minister a new mandate. It falls far short of achieving that objective. The citizens charter is a modest gimmick, designed to paper over the cracks of a crumbling and decadent political system. The Conservative party is running away from the fact that it has power and that it has abused that power over the past 12 years and is treating the public with contempt. The public will not be conned any more. Until we have a society with genuine freedom of information, a Bill of rights, decentralisation of decision-making and a fair voting system, we cannot expect that the citizens of this country will have rights. This is not a citizens charter; it is a public service consumers charter. It is high time that the Conservative party recognised that if the citizens of Britain are to be treated as citizens they need rights that the Government have denied them.

11.57 pm

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling): It is most unusual for me to have the opportunity to attend a Friday debate. I cannot remember when I was last able to do so. About this time on a Friday, I am normally busy in my constituency, but when I saw that the Government had decided to spend a day discussing the citizens charter I knew that it was right for me to be here to listen to the Minister and to develop the excellent discussion that has already taken place on this important subject.

I decided to speak partly because I have had many letters from my constituents about the Prime Minister's idea of a citizens charter. The letters welcome and support the idea; above all, they show how the citizens, our constituents, want the ideas that we have already heard about this morning to be developed.

My second reason for contributing to the debate is that I have always taken a great interest in the Audit Commission, which is pivotal to the success of many of the reforms and ideas outlined by my hon. Friend the Minister.

The Opposition parties say that the citizens charter represents some sort of volte face from the changes made in the 1980s. On the contrary, it is a continuation of the theme pursued by the Government in the 1980s, which included the economic reforms, the supply side changes and the extension of competition through privatisation and competitive tendering of which my hon. Friend spoke.

The citizens charter is an authentic continuation of the reforms that we achieved in the 1980s. It will give citizens powers in those services where so far the reforms have had only a partial effect, if any. We have already extended choice and opportunity in education, health and in housing through the right-to-buy legislation. The citizens charter will extend that choice. It captivates our constituents and they look forward to further developments in the charter.

The other politicial parties are as lost on this issue as they were on the reforms of the 1980s. I listened with interest to the rather dyspeptic speech of the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce). On this matter, as on so many others, the Liberals cannot decide where they stand. I read

[Mr. Andrew Mitchell]

with great interest the recent article on the citizens charter that appeared in *The House Magazine* by the leader of the Liberal Democrats. At first the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) dismissed the charter by stating that it was

"a rag-bag of policy proposals, many of which were no doubt around in Whitehall in any case and would have surfaced in time."

Later on the right hon. Gentleman changed his mind and said:

"the Prime Minister is tapping into a strain of thinking that is, potentially, extremely powerful."

The right hon. Gentleman is obviously right about that. He also made another point with which we can all agree when he said:

"The country does not want to return to Labour, which speaks more often for the corporate interests of the public sector than for the citizen."

That is the critical point—the Labour party does pot believe in a citizens charter because it is in hock to large power groups.

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) has many redeeming features despite being an extremely dangerous left winger. During the week, when I am in London, I stay in the hon. Gentleman's constituency and the citizens charter will have a major effect on a number of areas in it. During the hon. Gentleman's speech we crossed swords briefly about the right to buy and I think that the hon. Gentleman managed to keep a straight face when he spoke about that.

The hon. Gentleman also spoke about the pamphlet published in 1921 by Herbert Morrison. He cited that pamphlet as evidence to prove that the citizens charter was an authentic Labour idea. However, since 1921 I calculate that there have been no fewer than six Labour Governments. Why did they not develop the idea when they had the opportunity? Why has it taken a Conservative Government and Prime Minister to implement ideas that the hon. Gentleman claims were originally proposed by that great former socialist? I cannot dispute that claim because I have never read the pamphlet.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned the Post Office. I believe strongly that that service should be opened to the type of competition that my hon. Friend the Minister outlined. There is no reason why the £1 rule should pertain. I believe that that sum should be lowered to 50p as that would allow the private sector—the operators in fringe services—to get involved and to offer a much better service to the consumer. That is what the citizens charter is all about.

The hon. Gentleman was wise to give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) about official secrets. Again, the hon. Gentleman just about managed to keep a straight face——

Mr. Arbuthnot: No, he did not.

Mr. Mitchell: I stand corrected.

Whether one is in opposition or in government makes a tremendous difference to the way in which one reacts to official secrets. I was new to the House when my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) introduced his Bill and I listened to his powerful argument carefully. I did not believe that there was a case, then, for doing what my hon. Friend wanted, and, despite my hon. Friend's powerful argument, I do not believe that that case has advanced since.

Mr. Chris Smith: I have considerable respect for the hon. Gentleman, but in one respect he is confusing official secrets and freedom of information. We need reform on both counts. Secondly, although we understand that traditionally Governments of any political colour have been reluctant to undertake freedom of information legislation, we are determined, when we are in government next year, to ensure that a freedom of information measure is put through the House.

Mr. Mitchell In the unlikely event of Labour being in power, we shall see whether such legislation is introduced in the way that the hon. Gentleman suggests. I remind him, to answer the first part of his intervention, that reform has already taken place. The Minister who introduced the Official Secrets Act 1989, when he was Home Secretary —he is now Foreign Secretary—could hardly be painted an anti-liberal right-wing member of the Government. It is generally accepted in the House that he is a reasonable person, and he piloted that measure through.

Mr. Chris Smith: The hon. Gentleman reveals his misunderstanding of the issue. I accept that the official secrets legislation was reformed, but that Act, designed supposedly to reform the legislation, was deeply inadequate. It removed a few items from the list of official secrets, but put a stronger fence around those it preserved. The hon. Gentleman is falling into the trap; simply because the Government introduce legislation that purports to reform the official secrets or freedom of information laws, or anything else, does not mean that such reform is achieved.

Mr. Mitchell: While I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's main point, I appreciate what he says about the difference between freedom of information and official secrets, and I shall explain the way in which the citizens charter does a great deal to assist the extending of freedom of information with the releasing of information that should rightly be in the public domain.

Opposition Members are impaled on a dilemma, because they cannot make up their minds whether to belittle the idea of a citizens charter or claim it for their own. We are intent on empowering individuals to get better and more accountable services and to enable them to seek and win redress. It is to enhance the right of the individual that we address the charter and Opposition Members have not dealt with that aspect of it.

The Minister praised East Midlands Electricity, which has its headquarters in my constituency, for having set up a fixed appointments and times system which provides compensation if times are not adhered to. I echo his comments about the work done by John Harris, the chairman of that company, which was the first of the distribution companies to have such a scheme. It is a great credit to him and East Midlands Electricity. By establishing those standards, the company has set an example to the other electricity companies which I hope will be widely followed.

The Minister also mentioned that benefit centres and jobcentres were increasingly being amalgamated to provide a better service for our constituents. I echo his remarks. I recently opened the new combined centre in

Netherfield in my constituency. It is doing an excellent job for my constituents in one of the poorer areas that I represent and he is right to say that that reform has had a significant impact on the ease with which people can use the service and the effectiveness of it.

Although I see some movement among Labour Members in respecting the work of the Audit Commission, I hope that they will think carefully about their quality commission proposals and in particular about their plans to neuter the Audit Commission by filling it with people who are public sector oriented or who have come directly from the public sector. Nothing would more effectively destroy the work of the Audit Commission, which has proved to be one of the most effective reforms of the machinery of government to be introduced in the last eight years. It has managed to tackle a central issue that should concern us. Although we are all obsessed with the amount of money that goes into public services, and are quick to seize upon inputs and to note the extent to which Government funding has or has not increased, we are much less able to monitor whether that money is spent effectively, the quality of that spending and the realities of the output from that spending. The Audit Commission has successfully addressed those issues.

The commission's value-for-money studies into improving existing services or releasing funds to be deployed in providing other, more valuable services are immensely important. I salute the skill and expertise of the commission's controller, Howard Davies, and of his predecessor, John Banham, who both made significant progress in achieving greater accountability from the public sector. If the citizens charter builds and expands on the work of the Audit Commission in the way that it should, it will be all the more successful.

Every year, the commission identifies where huge savings can be made. It has achieved savings of nearly £1 billion, which is a remarkable success. It lives up to its reputation as the enemy of waste and inefficiency and the best friend of the taxpayer. I hope that it will be used extensively in relation to the charter.

Mr. Summerson: Does my hon. Friend agree that Labour wants to abolish the Audit Commission because it fears that the commission will continue to expose inefficiency and uselessness in local authorities, and particularly those that are Labour controlled?

Mr. Mitchell: My hon. Friend puts his finger on an important point. Labour's quality commission would neutralise the effect of the Audit Commission. Because Labour is in hock to the public sector trade unions, who are its paymasters, its proposed commission could not function effectively or defend service quality for the citizen.

The work of the Audit Commission will be extremely important in four areas. There has been a huge increase in the resources that the Government have made available to the police, but many of us wonder to what extent they are used efficiently. I am pleased that the commission has been deployed in the police service, though not as yet in the Metropolitan police.

There is a strong argument for allowing the commission to do for the Metropolitan police what it does for every other force in the country, in demonstrating how efficient or inefficient the police services are, and what can be done to improve them.

That is very much a matter for the citizens charter. The four areas of police work perceived by the public as being of most importance would probably trip off our constituents' tongues. They are the response time to 999 and other calls, crime clear-up rates, the number of police on the street and their effective deployment, and control and management of parking.

The latter is a complex issue, because it concerns not only the number of parking tickets issued by the police and related services but enforcement, and whether the situation in a particular area is improving.

Those aspects are all of great importance to our constituents and we must devise ways of making the police even more efficient in dealing with those and other matters. Disparities exist throughout the country.

Considerable strides are being made. The inspectorate of constabularies has done a good job in developing a matrix of 450 indicators of police performance. Under the terms of the Local Government Bill the citizen will, for the first time, be able to compare police performance in different forces. The Audit Commission is considering how to produce comparative figures to enable the public to see how the police are performing. It is clearly important that the Audit Commission, not the inspectorate of constabularies, should be responsible for producing the comparative analysis of forces by the same logic that led to the provider-purchaser split that we have implemented in so many other public service sectors.

The key issue is that the Government have made great strides in the way that they monitor and supervise public services, but there has been less emphasis in the past on doing so in a way that citizens can easily understand. That is what the citizens charter is about; it shows citizens that the police service in their district is doing well in objective terms in some respects and perhaps not so well in others in comparison with other forces. The charter enables citizens to question and to see for themselves how services can be improved and how those improvements can be made.

The charter provides the opportunity to breathe new life into local government and help to rebuild local democracy in a number of sectors, including housing management. One need only consider the speech that the Secretary of State for the Environment made this week after visiting North Tyneside and seeing what was happening there. The charter will enable us to highlight those councils that manage housing stock badly and to see how long houses are left unoccupied and unrepaired. There are huge variations in housing management throughout the different authorities. I believe that in one metropolitan district, 9 per cent. of its accommodation stock was left empty, while in another comparable district, the figure was only 1 per cent. There are wide variations between the best housing authorities and the worst.

Housing management is important to many of our constituents. The Audit Commission recommend that out of London, a three-week period for repairs and for houses to be empty is probably long enough and, in London, a period of six weeks. But half of all local authorities cannot meet those reasonable limits. Citizens living in local authorities where they have to endure such housing conditions, need to know why their authorities perform less well than neighbouring ones, and the Bill will enable direct comparisons to be made.

Originally, the inclusion of the performance of the refuse services in the citizens charter was pooh-poohed as a subject that was beneath Parliament, which should not

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concern itself with such a matter. That is far from the truth; citizens want the best possible refuse collection as much as they want the best of any other service. The issue of "missed bins" an important one, and nothing is more infuriating to a constituent. The Bill will allow league tables of the effectiveness of refuse collection to be published.

The Litter Act 1983 was a great success and introduced many new techniques for monitoring litter and preventing it spreading. Nothing incenses our constituents more than litter and graffiti in the local environment. Some local authorities have introduced photographic monitoring. I think that the *Local Government Chronicle* was originally doubtful about whether the Litter Act would be successful. But only last week it made it clear in an article that it believes that it does work and is effective.

It is right that the citizens charter should cover environmental health departments and consider how often such departments in one district carry out inspections, what impact they have and how those services compare with those of neighbouring districts. As a Member of Parliament, I am conscious of the steep increase in citizens' complaints about noise and smells. There is a disparity in the way in which environmental health departments in different areas perform and we need to ensure that all perform at the standard of the best.

The effect of all these changes will be to breathe new life into local government and local democracy. They will ensure not only better service for the citizen but greater accountability, and far better morale in local government because the providers will be able to see how they are doing and take great pride in their success when they are doing well. Some services will always be in the public sector and we support those services. We want them to be truly excellent and we want to establish how they can be improved. There is no reason why those services should not have their standards set and their achievements published, and the role of the Audit Commission in that will be pivotal.

My third point concerns the health service and the patients charter. The monitoring needs to be very robust and, in the interests of public credibility, we must ensure that there is external scrutiny. I was slightly surprised to see, on page 19 of the copy of the patients charter that was put through my door, that complaints should be made to Duncan Nichol, the chief executive of the health service. That is all right as far as it goes, but the public need to be able to complain to a non-health service person who can adjudicate fairly—otherwise, I fear that they will not feel that they are receiving an impartial hearing.

Mr. Tony Banks: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman could help me. I thought that Duncan Nichol was leaving his post as chief executive of the health service in June.

Mr. Mitchell: I cannot help the hon. Gentleman on the departure of Duncan Nichol or on its date, but I can help him on the point that I sought to make. It is all right complaining under the charter to the person who runs the service about which one is complaining as long as there is a further port of call—a further person to whom one can complain.

There are wide discrepancies in the service that patients in different areas receive. The conclusion of a deep and extensive report on day-care surgery published a year ago by the Audit Commission was that waiting lists for day-care surgery could be cut by a third through the more efficient use of such surgery. In other words, if every health authority performed as well as the best in this important respect, there would be an immense increase in the amount of day-care surgery that could be undertaken. The Audit Commission focused on the 20 most common operations, which account for about 30 per cent. of all surgery conducted, and came up with a most impressive figure. If all the health authorities performed at the same rate as the top 25 per cent., an additional 186,000 patients could be treated at no extra cost. That will be a great prize if we can achieve it.

The parents charter will enhance parental choice and strengthen parents' rights and it will make far more information available to help parents to exercise those rights. They will receive written reports annually and their children's schools will be inspected every four years. Many of us may wonder why it has taken so long to achieve the last two objectives, but I am delighted that the proposal is now to go ahead. A number of my hon. Friends and I introduced a Bill earlier this year to oblige all schools to publish their public examination results in common form. Unfortunately, the Bill was vetoed by a Labour Whip although, since then, I note that, in *The Guardian*, the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), who speaks for the Labour party on education, said:

"Let a thousand league-tables bloom."

In the light of that, I am not clear where the Labour party will stand on this aspect of the Bill when we debate its Second Reading next Tuesday.

This is an important change and I am glad that we have got away from the odious and patronising attitude of so many local education authorities—particularly Labour local education authorities—that say that one cannot trust parents with objective information about how their children's schools are doing. The charter is a great step forward and the publication of objective results will be immensely valuable in increasing choice and improving standards. When the Prime Minister said in Blackpool recently that the trendy liberals in education

"have had their say and . . . had their day"

hundreds of thousands of parents all over the country let out a huge sigh of relief. That aspect of the parents charter will do a great deal to help. Parents do not want trendy socio-economic arguments about why their school is not as good as another. They want the best for their children and an assurance that the school will improve its perforance and give their children better opportunities.

We have made good progress on education. The pay review body with its commitment to performance-related pay is immensely important. There have been large funding increases for education, not least most recently in the autumn statement. Perhaps we could all agree that it is not only a question of money. I was interested to read that in Japan half of all 16-year-olds reach a standard in maths which is reached by only 2 per cent. of children of an equivalent age in Britain. Yet the Japanese spend less per head on education that we do. I hope that the education measures that are enshrined in the citizens charter will do a great deal to improve standards for our children.

It is a pity that there are not more hon. Members here to take part in the debate. The charter is immensely important and will be greatly welcomed by our constituents. In the 1980s much was achieved in the

economy and many essential and fundamental changes had to be made after the IMF was called in in the late 1970s when Labour was in power. I am sure that the citizens charter is the big idea for the 1990s. It will improve public services to the point of excellence, restore the morale of the people who deliver them and make them more efficient and capable of delivering good service to our constituents.

12.26 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I welcome the hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) to the Friday crowd. He will have noticed, as have those of us who are Friday habitués, that the Benches are sparsely populated. Perhaps performance-related pay for hon. Members could be debated by those of us who are here on Fridays for important debates such as this. Perhaps the 10 hon. Members who are in the Chamber could receive the pay of the other 640. That would be a nice little earner for us.

The hon. Gentleman does not have to worry about the normal courtesy of staying to listen to the next speaker. No doubt, in his constituency office and at his surgery at this very moment, impatient constituents are waving their charters and working out the waiting time that they have to put in while the hon. Gentleman is in London delivering a good speech. If the hon. Gentleman wants to be on his way, I would not wish to delay him for a moment.

I have always found it a great advantage to loathe my political opponents. It is not usually difficult, but the Prime Minister is certainly not one of those that I loathe. How could I? We both grew up in Brixton, we both support Chelsea and, oblivious of each other's existence, we travelled on the No. 45 bus from Brixton to Stamford bridge on Saturdays. We both support Surrey and watched the team through that glorious period when Surrey won the county championship six years in succession. We both served as Lambeth councillors. We both like beans on toast, although I like mine with liberal lashings of Worcester sauce, which I expect is far too exotic for the Prime Minister.

Where on this conjoined road of shared experiences did the Prime Minister go so badly wrong and become a Tory? I think that it was when he got turned down for the job of a bus conductor. He had set his heart on punching tickets and helping little old ladies on and off the bus, but he was spurned. At that point, he vowed hideous revenge on us all, but to be able to get it, he first had to push a little old lady from Finchley off the bus. Having achieved that, he has now turned his attention to the rest of us.

Our fate is to be even more horrible than to be frogmarched out of Downing street. We are to be buried alive under charters. I thought that the charter was just one document, and that after the press conference and the photographs it would go away. That does not appear to be the case, because there are more charters in store.

Mr. Dicks: Are not there fewer pages in our charter than there were in "Meet the Challenge: Make the Change", the document produced by the Labour party?

Mr. Banks: I have never actually read that document, but it was far too long. Its very length was designed to put off the rank and file member from reading it. It achieved its objective in my case.

I tried to ask the Prime Minister, in a parliamentary question, to give details of the additional charters in the various service areas which arise directly from his own citizens charter and to say when each of the new charters would be published. I should have thought that, in the new found spirit of glasnost in the Tory Government, with public officials being required to give direct answers, the Prime Minister would hasten to give me a reply. It was:

"I am asking the Table Office to make the necessary transfer arrangements to the Chancellor of the Exchequer."

The first offer that the Prime Minister gets to say something about his charter he shuffles the buck off to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Did I expect anything better of the Chancellor? I did not. I was right, as the answer was that I should get a reply "as soon as possible". I cannot even find out how many charters will flow from the original one.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Only two Fridays ago, the hon. Gentleman was berating Conservative Members for not having read "Meet the Challenge. Make the Change". When I said that I had read it, the hon. Gentleman said that he had also read it. May I now tear up my copy?

Mr. Banks: The hon. Gentleman must know that I am a liar. In those circumstances, if he believes that, he will believe anything. It is more important that Conservative Members read Labour party policy documents, because they might learn something. I do not have a great deal to learn from such policy documents.

If one reads the citizens charter, one realises that it will spawn more charters than the hydra could grow heads. I understand that we shall have charters for patients, tenants, parents and the taxpayer, charters to cover British Rail and London Underground, the post office, social security benefits agency, the police, local authorities—the list goes on. We shall have government by charter. I can imagine the Prime Minister responding to every new idea in Cabinet with the comment, "That's a most agreeable suggestion. Let's have a charter on it." He will inundate us with charters—and all because London Transport turned him down for a job.

We shall have charters to cover all manner of groups, but none to cover the Government—a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) from the Opposition Front Bench. There is no charter to give voters the right to claim compensation from the Government when they have pursued policies that have created unemployment, homelessness, high interest rates, social injustice and economic incompetence. There is no charter provision for a general election so that the people can have their say at the ballot box at a set time, rather than having to hang on until the Government can find the most appropriate time to make a rush to the polls.

The citizens charter is nothing more than a glossy confection. It is an epitaph to the accumulated failures of 12 years of Tory government. Having systematically run down and denigrated public services since 1979, they now expect the country to be grateful for being offered lower standards of service than we used to enjoy, and ones that are derisory in the light of what is enjoyed in many other European countries.

I shall take two examples of that and apply them to London. The first is housing. There were 37,240 households accepted as homeless by London councils last year—a rise of 12 per cent. on the previous year. There were 33,432 households in bed-and-breakfast accommodation, hostels and other temporary homes—an

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increase of 31 per cent. over the previous year. The comparable figure in 1979 was 2,750. Over 60,000 Londoners are more than three months in arrears with their mortgage repayments. For council tenants, London rents have more than trebled between 1979 and 1989. For example, in Conservative Ealing, tenants have had to face a 100 per cent. increase in their council rents since January this year.

We have people living rough in cardboard boxes in doorways in the streets of London. There is no local authority provision for young people who are homeless —that should be written into a charter. I hear young people ask why they cannot find homes. One of the reasons for their homelessness is that the Prime Minister, when he had ministerial responsibility for social security, changed the rules and regulations. The young people who sleep rough in the streets of London have the Prime Minister to thank for having only £31 a week income support. We all know that £31 buys next to nothing in London now.

Homelessness has more than doubled in London in the past decade. In 1979, London local authorities started more than 9,000 new homes in the capital. This year there were 363 starts, the fewest since the second world war. That has come about because of Government policies.

Capital spending by London councils fell by 85 per cent. between 1979-80 and 1989-90. The allocation for London in the current financial year 1991-92 has been cut by a further 8 per cent. This Conservative Government are spending £6 billion less on provision for housing than was provided in 1979. It is not necessary to have a doctorate in housing management to understand why there is a homelessness crisis in London and throughout the country: the answer lies with Government policies. The homeless and the badly housed of the capital do not want glossy charters waved under their noses. They want homes, but they will not get them until a Labour Government are elected.

The citizens charter brims with transport issues. I remind the House that traffic speeds in central London have fallen to 10 mph, which is no more than the speed of a horse and cart at the turn of the century. The Confederation of British Industry estimates that congestion costs its members in commerce and industry in London and the south-east £10 billion a year.

London passengers pay the highest charges in fares per mile for bus, tube and rail travel in the whole of the European Community. Indeed, they pay double the average fare in other European cities. Since London Transport was taken away from the Greater London council, fares have increased by 25 per cent. on average in real terms. Some fares have increased by much more. The fare for a short-hop bus journey in central London has increased by 61 per cent. since 1984.

Worse is to come: the Government are now demanding that Network SouthEast should break even and that London Underground should become operationally profitable by 1992-93. That is something which no other network in Europe has been made to do. The result is that jobs are being cut and the quality of service is being reduced.

The Government plan to deregulate London's bus routes. We say that that will leave the service in chaos and threaten the future of the travelcard. It must be obvious to anyone who has any understanding of how a city works that an inefficient transport system means an inefficient city. That is bad for residents, business and visitors.

It is no consolation to those who sit in traffic jams or on stations, or who are stuck in carriages in tunnels, to be told that they can use the time to read the various charters that are being printed by central Government. It is an absurdity.

I shall examine a couple of the transport issues within the charter in terms of the undertakings that are on offer. For all those who have their charters easily to hand, I refer to page 17 and punctuality on British Rail. We are told:

"92 per cent of trains are to arrive within five minutes of the published time all day (88 per cent. in the morning and evening peak)".

An individual passenger does not, of course, travel on 92 per cent. of all trains. He or she travels 100 per cent. on one train. It is no consolation to that one passenger to find that the train on which he or she is travelling 100 per cent. is late. It is no consolation to anyone to be told, "Don't worry, because 92 per cent. of all other trains are running on time today."

The next heading is "Reliability". We are told:

"99 per cent of trains should be run".

I say amen to that, but why 99 per cent? It seems rather a strange figure to choose. When we think about it, it is not far off 100 per cent. Surely 99 per cent. sounds like the election turnout in the old-style Nicolae Ceausescu elections in Romania. We know that that did not make a great deal of sense either. What does it mean? I hope that the Minister will deal with that because I, for one, am rather confused.

The charter says:

"100 per cent. of trains should be cleaned inside and out every day."

They certainly should be. I hope that extra staff will be taken on to pick up all the charters that were flung on the floor in anger and frustration by the travellers sitting on the train that was not one of the 92 per cent. that arrived on time that day.

On waiting time at booking offices, the charter says: "passengers should not wait for more than three minutes (five minutes in the peak)."

That sounds fairly straightforward, but on the next page —page 18 for those who are following this—it says of London Underground:

"no more than 2 per cent. of passengers will wait more than three minutes for their tickets."

Hon. Members should try to imagine that. If someone is standing in a queue, how on earth is he to work out whether he is part of the 2 per cent. of passengers who have waited more than three minutes for their tickets? It is a recipe for chaos. If I were standing in a queue at Stratford station, waiting for a ticket, once I had worked that I was actually within that 2 per cent. of people, I would push myself to the front, wave my copy of John Major's charter and insist on having my ticket, now. I would get my face filled in, and I would no doubt deserve it. My teeth would be knocked out.

What would happen to me then? As it happens, the charter is quite useful. Page 12 provides a dentists charter. It says:

"Dentists' patients are entitled to clear information . . . All patients are now entitled to a treatment plan setting out what is proposed."

Does that mean that if I can get into the dentist's waiting room, minus my front teeth that I have lost trying to enforce another part of the charter, I will have preferential

treatment from the dentist? That should be included in the charter, because it is clear that there is an awful lot of trouble ahead for people who try to implement the various statements in the charter.

I refer once again to page 18, and the question of reliability on the London Underground. It says:

"no more than 7 per cent. of passengers will wait more than one and a half times the scheduled interval."

That is a useful piece of information to have when one is sitting on the station in the rush hour wondering why the train has not turned up. How on earth do we work it out? Someone would have to be another Einstein to work out whether he had had a rum deal on the charter. It is certainly well beyond the capability of someone with three GCSEs at O-level.

I welcome notices in post offices about waiting time. On pension day, the post office in Forest Gate resembles a Moscow bread queue. I warn the Government that the charters on waiting times—in so far as anyone can understand them—are a prescription for public disorder. On railway stations, in DSS offices and in post offices, enraged individuals clutching their copy of Major's charter will quote abstract calculations about waiting times. It will be sheer chaos. What consolation will they have? It will be the consolation provided in the charter that those who are injured will have to wait for only two years for treatment in hospital.

The charters will not build homes, they will not provide jobs, they will not cut waiting lists at hospitals, and they will not get the trains running on time. Without adequate resources invested in public services, there is no real choice for the citizens of London or, indeed, throughout the country.

A Labour Government will make a genuine commitment to public services. The sooner a Labour Government are elected, the sooner we will get public services operating in the way they should. The sooner a Labour Government are elected, the sooner the Prime Minister can fulfil his lifetime ambition of becoming a bus conductor. One of the promises that the Labour Front Bench has made is that, when we are back in government, we will restore bus conductors to our London buses. That should encourage even the Prime Minister to vote for us.

12.44 pm

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): It is almost impossible to follow the speech of the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks). Perhaps he should consider applying for the job as manager of the England football team, who at the moment is cornered between two stools. He does not know whether to opt for style or to wellie the ball up field. We know that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West has style and does not wellie. It is a great pleasure to follow him in this debate.

I disagree with the hon. Member for Newham, North-West in some respects about the citizens charter. It is essential to lay down exactly what we would like to happen in public services. He said that things would not happen, but I believe that they will although it will take some time. The parameters and approaches in the charter will be effective.

I am a great believer in considering rights and responsibilities side by side. They are two sides of the same coin. Too often we hear, especially from Opposition Members, about rights for these people and rights for those people, but they rarely speak about the responsibility that accompanies those rights. The public have a right and it is the responsibility of public services to respond to that right. The charter begins to follow that course in a definite manner.

The charter refers to standards of service and the choice within and between services. It aims to open up to public scrutiny what is happening in local authorities and other public areas. It refers also to value-for-money tests.

I apologise to my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury because I missed the beginning of his speech. I was talking about the citizens charter on television in relation to British Rail. I am appalled at the service that BR provides. It is one of the most inefficient services and its nearest rival is London Regional Transport.

I want to clarify a point that I made in an intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris). Over the past 12 years, £12 billion of Government funding has been allocated to British Rail. It has received an additional £1·5 billion this year and £2 billion is laid aside for next year. It seems to be small-minded for Bob Reid to carp about investment when his organisation has had that kind of money to play with. His predecessor with the same name appeared before the Select Committee on Transport a couple of years ago and claimed that money was not a major issue in relation to improving the rail service.

Reference has been made to time-keeping and the hon. Member for Newham, North-West mentioned the 92 per cent. objective. It is nonsense to say that a train arrives on time if it is less than 10 minutes late. Either a train arrives on time or it is late. If I do not arrive at the Door of the Chamber before 2.25 pm on a day when there is Government business, I am too late to attend Prayers. I cannot turn to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, or to Mr. Speaker, and say, "Please, I was three minutes late, but technically that's on time." You would laugh at me, Madam Deputy Speaker, and rightly so. I cannot see how we can speak in those terms and make a meaningful contribution to what the commuter and traveller expects.

I hope that I can begin to rival the hon. Member for Newham, North-West when I refer to rolling stock. Perhaps the Opposition Whip will excuse me if I refer to the 158 train and an issue that is close to his heart and his area. I have redubbed the 158 train the 175. It was ordered by British Rail through British Rail Engineering Ltd. when it was still nationalised. That 18-month contract was delivered last October 18 months late with 175 faults. For example, the brakes did not work when it snowed. The two carriages that were linked together came unstuck when the train moved. The main shaft beneath the train came apart. A pump fell off and was found at 4.30 am on the Forth bridge. The toilets did not work and the seats wore out almost as soon as one sat on them. The tables in the carriages worked loose and allowed coffee to sink in because they were made of the wrong material.

I expect that a little deal will be done between ScotRail and BREL to smooth things over and fudge the issue of compensation. As a member of the Transport Select Committee, I promise the House that I will not allow that to happen. That is the kind of nonsense that is going on. As a result of those stupid arrangements and that chaos, commuters in Scotland are suffering. Had it not been for the efficiency of ScotRail's maintenance team in Scotland, passengers would have had no trains to ride on. The commuter is suffering from the incompetence of those

[Mr. Terry Dicks]

ordering the equipment and the people building it and we must do something about it. Perhaps, in a small way, the citizens charter has a role in achieving that end. When one speaks to the railway people they play it down and say, "Those are just teething problems". But it was a hands, arms and lungs job. It was a transplant job.

I remind the hon. Member for Newham, North-West of the point that I made earlier. For the three years from 1987 to 1989, London Transport underspent its capital allocation by £120 million. When I raised that with Mr. Newton recently in the Select Committee, he said, "Don't let's talk about the past." But in his beautiful multicoloured brochure, which cost a fortune to produce, he complained about lack of investment and said that it was the Government's fault that the underground service was not running properly. He deliberately ommitted the fact that he had underspent.

I do not have to tell the House about docklands light rail. It is one of the most inefficient operations that it has been my misfortune, or the misfortune of any London Member, to know about. If ever there was an area which needed an efficient transport system, it was docklands, especially with the City airport nearby. Yet the service has been abysmal from start to finish. Mr. Newton and his team have the audacity to complain about the Government's rightly deciding that London Transport is no longer competent to operate the service and taking the service away from it. In doing that, the Government have jumped ahead of the citizens charter. On behalf of the citizens, they have recognised a mistake and rectified it.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): My hon. Friend is covering the problems of transport in London. Most of my constituents commute into London and they, too, face problems on a daily basis. It is not simply leaves on the line, the wrong trains or all the rest of it. British Rail simply does not do the obvious things well. Does my hon. Friend agree that the citizens charter will assist commuters and show them how they can put pressure on British Rail, which for decades has ignored passengers in the interests of those who work for it? Let us have performance-related pay and get the staff working for the passengers. Then we might see a difference in attitude in favour of our constituents.

Mr. Dicks: My hon. Friend's point about the problems facing commuters from outside London is well made.

Last week, the chairman of British Rail went to meet the passengers of British Rail, whom he is supposed to serve. He had to take a minder with him because he was fearful of their reaction. That is ludicrous. If ever there were a case for saying, "I have failed. It is a waste of time because I have a great big chap beside me to thump you if you even speak aggressively to me," that is it. If that is not a resignation matter, I do not know what is.

The Southend to Fenchurch Street line is chaos. If Bob Reid was paid according to results he would be paying the commuter and taxpayer rather than taking money from them to meet his salary. My hon. Friend the Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) is right. The level of service in London is bad enough, not least because there is no cohesion between British Rail and London Transport. Nevertheless, it is just as bad, if not worse, in some places outside London.

The management of London Transport is ineffective and poor. Most of the time, it simply does not know whether it is Christmas, Easter or Shrove Tuesday. I have gone on record before saying that it could be no worse if we took the cleaners from Oxford Circus station, put them into management jobs on London Transport and put the managers to cleaning the station. We would probably find that the station was cleaned less well than before.

London Transport told the Select Committee that one reason why it increased fares was to keep people off the underground. In the next breath, it said that it did not have enough income. It does not persuade people to use the service, thereby improving the quality of the environment by reducing the chaos on the roads, to which the hon. Member for Newham, North-West referred. That is what it is there to do, yet it simply increases the prices to keep people off the underground.

I wish to refer to one aspect of the involvement of public sector trade unions. At a recent meeting of the Select Committee, I asked why travelcards could not be bought by members of the public in newsagents adjacent to stations. People go in to buy their newspapers, cigarettes and other odds and sods, so one would have thought that it was a logical plan for them to pick up their travelcards. I was told that London Transport does not allow that to happen and people have to buy their ticket at the booking office because the trade unions are worried about jobs. The unions view the sale of travelcards in nearby shops as a threat to jobs on the underground and in British Rail.

If that is the sort of narrow-minded approach that trade unions are taking and that London Underground and British Rail are accepting, what are we to think? Why should not a passenger have the right to buy a travelcard in the most convenient place? Again to use the example of the hon. Member for Newham, North-West—I am sorry to keep referring to him—the passenger would not have to join that queue and be in danger of having his teeth knocked out if he was allowed to buy his travelcard in the local newsagent. That might reduce the queue at the booking office.

Mr. Tony Banks: Surely the hon. Gentleman understands that we cannot expect people to vote to have their jobs liquidated. We have noticed that when the pressure is on, British Rail and London Underground reduce the level of station staffing, ticket staffing or ticket collecting, all of which result in fewer people being around to give the personal service that the travelling passenger wants. The hon. Gentleman knows a great deal about airlines. They do not run on the principle of one-person-operated jets. It is not suggested that the pilot should greet passengers as they climb the stairs, sit them down, give them a drink and then say, "Hang on. I've got to go and take the plane off now". The airlines operate with more staff, but the underground always operates with fewer. It does not make any sense.

Mr. Dicks: I could not agree more with the hon. Gentleman. He is absolutely right. I should like to see conductors back on buses. People do not realise that the one-man-operated buses cause traffic chaos. I have often made that case elsewhere.

I also agree with the hon. Gentleman that there should be an integrated traffic system for London. We cannot talk about the underground separately from BR, the buses and

the cabs. Anybody who tries to is making a mistake. However, we must understand that we are where we are because of what has happened in the past. We cannot change all that now. I hope that the pressure created by the citizens charter will lead people to believe that we should proceed in a more organised and less chaotic way.

Recently there was a crazy report about a British Rail porter standing outside a gents toilet on a station to allow ladies to go in first and then gents because only one loo was working. That is amazing. We need good, better-paid staff on the underground, British Rail and everywhere else, but they must be effective. They must represent value for money. We cannot get away from that concept. We cannot have the place flooded with people sitting round drinking tea. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we need more people to care for customers' needs.

Among all my criticisms of British Rail I make one plea: please make sure that the person who speaks into the tannoy can be understood. Nothing is worse than hearing, "Wah, wah, wah, wah." Everybody asks which station is meant and the next announcement is, "Wah, wah, wah, wah." I do not understand why somebody does not stand there, as the commuter has to, find out what is wrong and put it right.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I wonder whether my hon. Friend might care to translate what he has just said for the benefit of the *Hansard* reporters?

Mr. Dicks: That is difficult, but I think that there should be exclamation marks and four little dots. Perhaps the Australian expression of XXXX might be appropriate.

The citizens charter has a part to play in Europe. I do not agree with the Opposition that Europe is better at meeting consumer needs than we are. Perhaps when my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister goes to Maastricht he could suggest that the many benefits of the citizens charter are considered by his European colleagues for development in Europe. From Germany to Greece and France to Portugal there are weaknesses in all aspects of consumer choice and in the utilisation of services. My right hon. Friend should say that we need a citizens charter to put right what has gone wrong—of course, the changes will have to be made over time—and that Europeans can learn from us.

I noticed that when the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) started to speak there was a good attendance in the Press Gallery, but within a second of his standing up, the press had all gone. Perhaps because I followed him, they have stayed away.

The hon. Member for Gordon spoke about rights to elections and democracy, but his party did not complain at the turn of the century, when the Liberal party was the party of power. We never heard anything about proportional representation then. Many Labour Members do not want proportional representation because they see that the way in which we organise things is conducive to good, strong, sound government. We need only look across Europe to see the mixture of ways of electing representatives—a mishmash of different political views and parties.

Perhaps the Labour party has changed its mind and is now in favour of Europe because Labour Members see Europe as a socialist area in which to get closely involved. They see that the European Parliament and other organisations are basically alliances of the centre left—there are very few alliances of the centre right and those which exist are small. Perhaps that is one reason for the Labour party's conversion.

As for the Labour party's plans, criticism would be expected, would it not? I do not believe that the interpretation of history suggested by the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) is correct. The Labour party says that it will try to do something, but that it cannot promise. We say that we promise to do something and we shall do it.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned perception. I shall illustrate one aspect of perception. The shadow health spokesman said in April that the underfunding of the national health service could be put right with £3 billion spread over five years, if economic growth made that money available. Yet the Government have put in £2 billion every year for three years—that is £6 billion in all. I cannot understand why people do not realise that the certainty of £6 billion over three years is better than the possibility of £3 billion over five years. That is an aspect of perception. We may be at fault for not having made the position clear, but it is a matter of simple arithmetic. If the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) is not capable of working out that a possible £3 billion over five years is far worse than the certainty of £6 billion over three years, he needs a lesson in mathematics. We can guarantee that under the citizens charter he will be tested and his place in the table will be shown to everyone.

The citizens charter is a good move. It is the right start, but it will take some time. The people of this country have been looking for it for some time. Commuters are saying, "Thank God that people care about the situation" and they see that, despite the odd anomalies mentioned by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West, there is now a chance to get things done. The Government are moving away from the bureaucratic, "It's nothing to do with me, Jack" attitude and we are going to do something about the problems. I commend the citizens charter to the House and to the people of this country.

1.2 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): The speech of the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks) was mainly a blast against British Rail. As a former railway clerk, I feel rather defensive about British Rail. Members of Parliament tend to look back at the time before they entered the House—the time when they actually did some work—and they like to tell everybody about the significance of the areas in which they worked.

I spent many happy hours in the parcels office at Sunderland station breathing in the fumes coming up from the line below, so I look back to those days. One thing that I can say for British Rail is that it is infinitely superior to the Iraqi state railway. When I did my national service I was in rail transport and worked with the Iraqi state railway. Its trains were never on time—nowhere near the time record achieved by British Rail.

Mr. Tony Banks: They are much worse now.

Mr. Barnes: Yes, unfortunately they are in a terrible state, as are the Iraqi people, because of the Gulf war.

One aspect concerning British Rail that I would hope to see in a charter involves a gripe of my own. On the east Midlands line if a second class coach has to be taken off the train the coach for smokers is invariably chosen, so

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smokers with second class tickets have nowhere to go. I am not a smoker, but such citizens have a right to smoke if they wish. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) spoke about various charters being published for all kinds of things, so, who knows, we may require a charter for smokers.

It is not just the Government who produce charters. Charter 88 is a serious one which calls for a Bill of rights, proportional representation and other constitutional reforms. That charter apes perhaps the most important charter to be published, the people's charter of the 1830s and 1840s, which argued for the extension of the franchise. Although that charter was of crucial constitutional importance, the preamble referred to economic and social conditions and that helped to gain it support. In the 19th century, people believed that once they had the vote they would be able to use it for social and economic purposes. That can be done.

Another charter of great significance is the European social charter. Some of that charter may appear general and bland, but it contains a set of social affairs principles that are infinitely superior to anything in our citizens charter. The citizens charter has been produced by the same Government who block the development of the social charter. That charter calls for decent wages and equal treatment for people who take up jobs under contract in other countries, a decent general wage, vocational training and rights for disabled people. It would be far more significant and important if such measures were contained in the citizens charter.

The Labour party has also issued a charter, the citizen's charter, which was produced prior to the Government's charter. The Minister referred to our charter, which provides for consumer and citizen rights. Such rights do not figure much in the Government document.

Mr. Dicks: May I ask the hon. Gentleman to excuse me, but I must leave for a constituency engagement? I should not like the hon. Gentleman to think that I was being rude by leaving before the end of his speech.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you.

The Government's charter is a peculiar measure. It is like a collection of dead dogs' limbs put together in a bag and recycled to try to make them appealing to the public. The packaging of this document has also been peculiar. It first appeared as a White Paper—it now seems that, from now on, any White Paper will be called a charter. That White Paper has a red cover, which was thought to be a jolly good joke, because it is supposed to pinch something from the socialist tradition. It seems that the Conservatives want to take that colour. The very title of the Government document is similar to, and is pinched from, the people's charter of the 19th century and the word "citizens" brings to mind the French revolution and the common people.

At the bottom of the Government document is the slogan "Raising The Standard". That is a jolly good joke because it is not designed simply with the idea of raising standards generally. It is presented in the socialist tradition, as it were, of raising "the scarlet standard high", giving the impression that the citizens charter is being raised high, even though there is nothing in it of any significance.

The Minister said that the charter was built on 12 years of achievement—that it was to be like the fairy on top of the Christmas tree—and that it was revolutionary. I accept that the Conservatives have been revolutionary in the last 12 years. Indeed, when the poll tax was being debated in Standing Committee I said that we had had in power the most revolutionary Government since the days of Cromwell.

The Government are claiming to be building on the achievements of the past. In other words, they are building on the achievement of the poll tax, even though they are now opposed to it and are replacing it with the council tax. My hon. Friends and I have put forward many reasons why the poll tax should be scrubbed. The Government have offered no reasons why it should be abolished. They have simply said that it would have worked well but for the activities of nasty Labour-controlled councils. That is about the level of intellectual endeavour we have witnessed from the Government over a measure that has had massive revolutionary consequences that will take decades to remedy.

When Labour is elected, we shall replace the poll tax with a fair and sensible system of finance for local government, but the consequences in terms of the attack that poll tax has made on civil liberties and citizens rights will live on for a long time. We shall have our time cut out putting that right. Nowhere is that more serious than in the matter with which the people's chartists were concerned, which was the extension of the franchise.

The poll tax has undermined the electoral register by removing a million people from it. Putting that right will take a long time, and there is nothing in the Government's latest citizens charter to suggest how the damage done by the poll tax will be remedied. We shall probably need a charter for enfranchisement rights. If charters are to mean anything, they must be turned into legislation. Our representation of the people legislation has been undermined by the poll tax, which is still in existence. That has removed superior rights, for constitutional lawyers accept that those parts of our constitution that are in writing, in terms of legislation, include enfranchisement rights. That legislation determines who shall have those rights, and we have determined, on the basis of birthright, who shall be enfranchised. That right has been removed from a million people in Britain, so many are not included as citizens in the Government's new citizens charter.

We gather that bits of the charter will develop into legislation. Those items are summarised on page 5 of the charter, which lists nine major points. In other words, the great six points of the 19th century charter have become nine. The first, and presumably the most important, point in the new charter is covered by the words "more privatisation." Presumably the Government believe that that will be attractive to the British public. Given that more privatisation is at the forefront of the document, how are we to believe the Government when they say that the national health service will not be privatised? It seems that the Government have hit on the idea that, in the end, everything can be privatised so that public funding can pay for private bodies to run services. One could ultimately privatise the prisons, Army, and even Parliament—with agencies paying people to perform specific tasks determined by legislation.

The charter makes mention of wider competition, irrespective of the circumstances. It fails to recognise, as Alfred Marshall and other 19th century economists did,

that some services are natural monopolies. Marshall made particular reference to the railways and identified the fact that monopolies needed development, regional provisions and most of all regulations and controls. The truth of that can be seen when such functions are kept within the public sector. That has been seen in the case of the National Rivers Authority in performing its regulatory role, though it needs more funding. It would make more sense if the body with which the NRA has to deal was publicly owned. That would also allow regular parliamentary investigations and questions.

The charter also has other bits and pieces about redress for the citizen when services go badly wrong, but much of its content was aimed at attracting favourable publicity for the Government, who spent a vast amount of money to that end. The Minister denied that £8 million was spent on publicising the citizens charter, so perhaps he will tell the House the correct amount.

Mr. Maude: The figure of £8 million suggested by the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) was born of complete fantasy. The actual cost was less than £1 million.

Mr. Barnes: If my hon. Friend's figure was exaggerated tenfold, the true figure would be £800,000, which still compares badly with the £680,000 being spent on Government publicity encouraging the public to take up their electoral rights. If one compares that with the money spent per voter on the ridiculous Bill to encourage voting by expatriates, on which the Government worked very hard but for a poor response, one begins to see the truth of the matter.

A few years ago, Abbey National ran a publicity campaign to encourage its members to vote on plc status. The society could not tell them how to vote, but commissioned an extensive publicity campaign that cost £7 million. Instead of spending money on glossy documents such as the citizens charter, the Government should fund the promotion of a fundamental right on which all other rights are built. I refer to the electoral right to vote and to appear on the electoral register.

The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys says that 1 million names have disappeared from the electoral registers in recent years—first in Scotland, and then in England and Wales, but not in Northern Ireland. That all ties in with the poll tax. Worst affected are attainers—those young people nearing the age of 18 who have never previously appeared on a register. There should be legislation requiring the poll tax register, while it continues to exist, any successor to it, and the electoral register, to be kept entirely separate, and prohibiting any interface between them, of the kind that exists in district council offices at present. People understand that.

The Government introduced a measure on confidentiality in relation to the census to try to convince people that census forms would not be used for poll tax purposes. People did not accept the message and 1 million people disappeared from the electoral register. The number of people in this country and their ages are known because of the registration of deaths and births. Even in the past there have been problems with the electoral register for which there has been oversubscription due to people moving out of the district or dying and under-representation as it takes time for the register to catch up with people. Those discrepancies usually cancel themselves out, but an extra 1 million people have been missing from the register in recent years.

If we are worried about citizens' basic rights and matters concerning the chartists of the 19th century, we should have more charters. I suggested an enfranchisement charter, on which much advertising revenue would be spent and which would involve the superiority of the Representation of the People Acts.

I have also suggested that we should have a Members' charter, not for the benefits of Members, but for their constituents. It would allow us to ask questions about more, not fewer subjects. An hon. Member, for example my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn), would not have to publish a document of bits and pieces he had collected from the Library and answers obtained from various agencies. The information would be readily available in *Hansard*. Every bit of privatisation and agency work detracts form Members' rights to ask questions. It would be useful to have a little charter stating that any letter written by an hon. Member must be answered within a week or so. That would be a fantastic advantage, not least with Government Departments and agencies.

One advantage Members enjoy while Parliament is sitting is that they can table questions about when they will receive from a Department an anwer to a previous question. We are often told that the answer is in the post, but that does not apply when the House is in recess for 12 weeks in the summer when we do not enjoy those rights. I do not like the 12-week recess, but if it is to continue it would be nice to have a charter and legislation to ensure that we receive some response from Ministers. I was told that one Minister would be away during the recess, and for a while, until I started to make a fuss, it looked as though I would have to wait 13 weeks before receiving an answer. I am not talking about individual Members' rights, but of the rights of Members acting on behalf of their constituents and in response to complaints picked up in their advice surgeries.

We should also have a petitioners charter. Ancient and historical petitioners' rights operate in the House. Originally petitions were directed to the Crown, and parliamentary development was largely based on petitioning—legislation evolved through petitions from Members. Later, petitioning rights were extended to petitions to this House which, if organised in a certain way and presented by Members in respectable language, could be aired without duress being used against the petition's signatories. The names of those on the petitions are known only to Parliament, not to Government Departments, except those mentioned publicly when the petition is announced.

However, let us consider what the Government did in relation to poll tax. During the debate in the House on Scottish poll tax matters someone suggested that it would be a good idea if, when a petition against the poll tax was presented to poll tax registrars, it was checked against the poll tax register to see whether it contained the names of people who were not contained on the register, so that their names could be added to it. That is offensive and places under duress people who have the right to sign petitions. Any petition presented in due form to the Executive—the Prime Minister's office or whatever—should have the same protection as petitions presented to

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the House. That begins to have significance in an era during which civil liberties are under attack by the Government.

Now perhaps a relatively minor part of the British constitution, petitions are nevertheless the expression of citizens' traditional rights. At one time, the right to petition was the only right that citizens had. To some extent, the need to exercise the right had been superseded by the development of what was once the full franchise but I suggest that the Minister has a look at my Petitioners Rights Bill, which would overcome the present difficulties.

If we are concerned about citizens' rights, we need to consider matters far more serious than the ragbag of material thrown together in the citizens charter. The contents of the citizens charter are discussed as if they matter, but, in reality, there is nothing there, and certainly nothing as grand as is to be found in the peoples charter, Charter 88, or the social charter. The citizens charter is nothing but a cosmetic exercise and it should be seen for what it is. We should develop the limited parts of it of which some use can be made and see the rest as the continuation of the Government's ideological policy—dead dogmas as well as dead dogs' limbs.

1.26 pm

Mr. Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): I do not agree with much of what the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) said, but I do agree with him that, if we are to have a Members charter, it should contain something about constituents who visit us in this place and ensure the provision of reasonable facilities for them. It is really bad that queues of people have to stand outside in cold and wet weather. I have sometimes wondered whether we might consider building a long shelter at the very least for those who have to stand outside on the pavement. Alternatively, greater use could be made of Westminster Hall, which is a magnificent and historic building but which is also an enormous area of empty and cold open space that is put to very little use. Perhaps use might be made of it by members of the public who come here to visit us.

The hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East referred to the electoral register. I agree with him that, if we are to call ourselves a true democracy, it is very important that as many adult members of the public as possible have their names on the electoral register. The hon. Gentleman said that, as a result of the poll tax, fewer people were registering. I can only say to him that, after years of decline—to about 48,500 in 1987—the size of my electorate has increased to about 50,000, so I suspect that the poll tax has not had that effect on my constituents, even though, in its first year, the Labour council imposed a heavy poll tax of £438.

Over the past 12 years, the Government have consistently improved services to the public and raised standards—by privatising industries, introducing and extending competition and freeing the civil service at large from central bureaucratic control by setting up "next steps" agencies. Under the citizens charter, those policies will be developed further throughout the public sector.

Let me refer first to the tenants charter, which was first introduced by the Government in 1980 and which has been extremely effective. It is now to be reissued after consultation with local authorities, tenants and consumer groups. In its new streamlined form it will give guidance on the practice that local authorities should follow to ensure that tenants know their rights and how to use them.

The right to repairs will allow council tenants to have carried out most repairs costing up to £200 when their landlord has failed to do them. That will be reviewed to see how procedures can be simplified and strengthened so that urgent minor repairs can be done more swiftly.

In common with many hon. Members, I am sure, I get queues of people at my surgery complaining bitterly that the council has not carried out minor repairs. It may be a dripping tap, or perhaps someone has put his foot through a floor board six months ago, or a chimney flue is blocked. Naturally, people are worried about such matters and ask me to write to the council. With a weary sigh of resignation I say that of course I shall write and I take down the name and address. I write to the council to try to have the repair carried out. It would be much better if people could have the work carried out themselves and send the bill to the council. Such a procedure would save time, money and effort and I am sure that it would be of enormous benefit to tenants.

Under the tenants charter, more information provided directly to council tenants would deal with the efficiency of the council's housing management and with vital matters such as repair times and rent arrears. I am sure that council tenants and everybody else in the London borough of Waltham Forest, which is in my constituency, would be interested to know that the council there has rent arrears of about £2 million. That Labour-controlled council is always complaining about the way in which the Government cut its funding, but the Government have not cut the funding. They have given that council more and more money, even though the council could raise more from its own resources by collecting the rent arrears. A large amount of interest could have accrued on that money.

Housing Corporation tenants will also benefit from a stronger tenants' guarantee which, in its present form, seeks to ensure reasonable rents for those on low incomes and lays down minimum standards of management. Local authorities will be encouraged to impose financial penalties on contractors and direct labour organisations which fail to complete on time the renovation and refurbishment of council property.

The Government will legislate to introduce competitive tendering to certain aspects of local authority housing management. Final decisions will be taken after the completion of a detailed study commissioned by the Department of the Environment, but repairs, management, rent collection and security may be subject to competitive tendering. The new arrangements in the citizens charter will not just allow but positively encourage tenants to take part in the management of their property.

I have spoken about rent arrears and the money available to local authorities. Councils complain bitterly that the Government will not allow them to spend the money raised from right-to-buy sales. However, councils are permitted to spend 25 per cent. of that money per year. Many local authorities are making no effort to raise money in that way. In my area it takes, on average, 21 months to complete a right-to-buy sale. Much money could be raised if local authorities pushed such sales and the 25 per cent. of the proceeds that they are allowed to spend would enable them to provide more houses.

However, the problem with that is the serious difficulty in providing new housing in a mature city such as London. My area is very built up and has been since the turn of the century. There are few places in which it would be possible to provide more new housing. The Government take great pride in the fact that the green belt round Greater London has been doubled in their period of office. That is fine as far as it goes, but we have to bear in mind the fact that new housing must go somewhere. The Government must think about that point.

The citizens charter also covers public transport. At this time of year, there are problems with leaves on tracks. To the best of my knowledge, this was not a problem 100 or even 150, years ago. I bet that I. K. Brunel was never bothered by leaves on the line. To start with, his locomotives were not particularly aerodynamic, so they made a great draught in passing, which must have had some effect in clearing leaves off the lines. In addition, the locomotives were very heavy and some had 8 ft driving wheels. They must have been the most magnificent sight. It would have been awesome to see one of Brunel's flyers going down the Great Western line from Paddington to Bristol at getting on for 100 mph. The great advantage of such heavy, fast and unaerodynamic locomotives was that they either swept the leaves aside or crushed them beneath their wheels. Furthermore, the braking system, which operated directly on the wheels, would have burnt off all the scrub and residue picked up by crushing the leaves.

Let me move from the time of Brunel to the citizens charter. About British Rail, the charter states unequivocally:

"For all the efforts of staff and management, British Rail's performance too often falls short of what the public has a right to expect."

It is equally clear about the long-term solution. It says:

"Progress towards privatisation of the railway is integral to the Citizen's Charter."

The Government expect to set out detailed plans for the privatisation of British Rail in a White Paper before the end of this year. Its key features will be a presumption against a monopolistic structure, the lifting of BR's service monopoly and the appointment of an independent regulator to ensure fair competition and to protect the customer's interest. I am glad that there will be that presumption against the monopoly state structure.

It is fascinating to conjecture what structure a privatised British Rail might have. To return to the days of the old regions would not be in the best interests of the customer. Perhaps the best thing would be to have a track authority and to give people the right to run trains over those tracks.

More immediate improvements are foreshadowed in the citizens charter. British Rail will publish a passengers charter in the autumn setting out targets of performance, means of complaint and details about what forms of compensation are available. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) is no longer in the Chamber. He regaled the House with a story about having to stand in queues at Stratford station to buy his ticket, with the danger that, because some angry person had knocked out his teeth, he would have to visit his dentist. My advice to him is that he should pay a visit to the Fees Office, where he would be issued with a season ticket. He would then no longer have to stand in the queue at the risk of having his teeth knocked out.

An enlarged and more comprehensive compensation scheme has been agreed with British Rail. Under it, if trains are cancelled or unreasonably delayed, passengers can apply for refunds with claims assessed individually. What a good idea, but goodness knows how long it will take to assess the claim. If passengers decide not to travel because a train has been cancelled, they will receive a full refund. Perhaps we could go slightly further and state that those passengers will receive compensation for missing a meeting, for example. If we went that one step further, I could be compensated for missing a surgery. InterCity passengers with reserved seats will receive automatic compensation. Season ticket holders will receive compensation, mainly by extensions to their ticket for days when there is no effective service. Perhaps that will relate especially to this time of year. British Rail will take the initiative wherever practicable to offer compensation to passengers on badly delayed or cancelled services rather than waiting for them to claim.

I did not agree entirely with the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks). I believe that the management of London Transport is, on the whole, doing a good job in difficult circumstances. There is enormous pressure on public transport, particularly on the London underground system. I frequently pay visits to the Victoria line, which serves my constituency. I have complained, as have many of my constituents in the recent past, about escalators being out of service. The escalators have had to be repaired and they have been out of service for several months.

When I approached the management of London Underground to talk about the problems with escalators, I was asked whether I had any idea how many people passed through Walthamstow Central underground station every year. I hazarded a guess and said, "Perhaps 1 million." The answer was 10 million. If 10 million people are passing through one underground station every year, enormous pressure and strain is bound to be placed on the station's facilities. That applies throughout London.

As I have said, I believe that the management of London Transport is doing its best. It had the legacy of the Greater London council, which underfunded and mismanaged London Transport. The management is having to do a great deal of catching up and it is having to spend huge sums. The benefits of the expenditure are already starting to show through, but they will not become clearly apparent for a year or two yet.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I wish to clarify the interesting figure that my hon. Friend has presented to the House. I suspect that 5,000 or 6,000 people pass through Walthamstow Central underground station on quite a number of occasions, not that 10 million individuals pass through it.

Mr. Summerson: My hon. Friend is good at arithmetic. He would doubtless count the same people time and time again. I suspect that the management wishes to draw attention to the number of feet and bodies that pass through the station. Perhaps if I talked about passenger movements that would satisfy my hon. Friend.

There is a successful lane rental scheme, which has speeded motorway repairs by rewarding contracting firms that finish work early and penalising those that finish late. The scheme will be extended to all roadworks where there is a risk of significant delay to motorists. New regulations will specify the maximum length of carriageway that can

[Mr. Summerson]

be coned off at one time. Contractors will be fined if they cone off more of the motorway than is needed to carry out the repairs. It is an excellent idea. I am sure that on occasions all of us have driven along motorways, passing those wretched cones for mile after mile and observed that no repair works were being undertaken. In many such instances one lane is closed completely. This causes motorists great frustration. They might find that on a busy Friday evening, for example, three lanes of the motorway are merged into two. All the traffic has to squeeze into the two lanes that remain open and everything comes to a virtual standstill.

The taxpayers charter was launched on 13 August. It revised the previous charter, which was published in 1986. The new charter sets out the standard of service that people can expect to receive from Customs and Excise and the Inland Revenue. The latter undertakes to settle tax affairs impartially, to expect people to pay only what is due under the law and to treat everybody with equal fairness. Again, I am sure that we all have constituents who have complained to us about Customs and Excise and the Inland Revenue. I have a current case in my constituency of a company complaining about the treatment that it has received at the hands of Customs and Excise. I have to say that, so far, Customs and Excise is responding well to my inquiries and I hope that the case will soon come to a satisfactory conclusion.

Under the charter, people will be helped to sort out their tax affairs correctly and to understand their rights and obligations by the provision of clear leaflets and forms giving information and assistance at inquiry offices and by the showing of courtesy at all times. A little courtesy goes a long way, especially if people know to whom they are speaking. I hope that the requirement that those in official positions wear name tags will not be abused. People will not be amused if, on asking an official for his name, they are told, "Donald Duck".

There is more to come. In due course, Customs and Excise will spell out its duties and responsibilities even more fully in separate charters for VAT and excise duty traders and those involved in inland clearance of goods. In addition, there will be a special charter for travellers.

Both the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise are redesigning some of their main forms and other literature to make them easier for people to understand. There is no excuse for such official bodies not to set out matters clearly and simply in words that people can understand. The new series of leaflets will tell particular groups of people—for example, small business people, pensioners and school leavers—what sort of help and level of service each can expect from the Inland Revenue. Selected tax inquiry centres will experiment with more flexible opening hours to test public demand.

As I said earlier, a great deal of the citizens charter depends on further privatisation. It commits the Government to pave the way for further privatisations and contracting out by introducing legislation to clarify the right to redundancy compensation for all civil servants transferred to the private sector. Currently, separate legislation is required for each privatisation. More services will be contracted out and the Government will publish a White Paper later this year setting out detailed proposals to encourage more contracting out in local and central government and in the NHS. Competition within the NHS will be gradually extended to new distribution warehousing, non-emergency transport and management services.

What all that means is a new role for the citizen. I am delighted to know that local lay adjudicators will be introduced into many parts of the public sector. They will be well-known local people, well respected in their local communities. They will be appointed to help the citizen resolve minor, but irritating, complaints against public sector bodies. That lay adjudication system will not involve the legal system at any stage. Both sides will agree in advance to abide by the decision and participation in the adjudication scheme will be voluntary. The Government assume that most public services, including local authorities, will want to join the scheme to show commitment to the citizens charter.

My final point refers to the challenging of unlawful strikes. The citizens charter proposes the introduction of an entirely new legal right for the individual citizen. At the moment, unlawful industrial action in the public services such as an unballoted or political strike, can be challenged in the courts only by the employer or by a member of the union who has been called upon to take part in that unlawful action. In future, the citizen will have the right to bring legal proceedings to halt any unlawful industrial action affecting services covered by the citizens charter.

I was going to refer to the speech made earlier by the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), the Liberal Democrat spokesman. It is a great pity that he has left the Chamber and that his party's Bench is empty. I should have thought that on such an important occasion, the Liberal Democrats could at least have taken the trouble to stay for the entire debate and listen to contributions from other right hon. and hon. Members. If they had done that, they might have learnt a great deal.

1.50 pm

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): I am one of those who welcome without any reservation the citizens charter that has been brought forward by the Government. I was a little disappointed, although perhaps not surprised, at the grudging welcome for some of the suggestions from the Labour party. Many of the suggestions made by the Government in the citizens charter give us an opportunity to contribute our own ideas to what should go into the citizens charter and for those ideas to expand and to grow as a result of the kernel in the programme that the Government have produced.

The citizens charter is not only a programme of new suggestions; it is a framework under which we can produce further suggestions ourselves. I am sure that that is a process in which the Opposition would wish to take part. I suggest that it is a process in which the Opposition have tried to take part in their own citizens charter. I wish that I had found the Opposition's citizens charter a little more convincing, but half the ideas that they put forward in their citizens charter, as a spoiling exercise to the Government's, were already in operation and the other half were vague promises and side-stepping some of the problems that have been created by Labour-controlled local authorities up and down the country.

One important part of the citizens charter is not so much that it contains many individual ideas and proposals for change, but that it is intended to change the entire

attitude of public servants and the way in which citizens approach them. In other words, we now have a certain expectation of the sort of courtesy and level of service which we can receive from our public servants and that is something we have not had in the past. It is as a result of the citizens charter that we are able to have that expectation.

This is an opportunity not only for us, the politicians, to put in ideas for what could be included in further episodes of the citizens charter, but for the citizens themselves to put in ideas. It will prompt people to ask for improvements in their public services. So when it is called the citizens charter, it is not just a charter for the benefit of the citizens of this country, it is a charter which is owned by the citizens and to which they can contribute. I very much hope that they will feel free to contribute to the charter and to put forward their own ideas.

Therefore, I heard with great approval the comment from my hon. Friend the Minister that he is issuing a survey to ask what people want out of the citizens charter and what improvements they want in their public services. I think that that is a very important component of the citizens charter. We must not believe that the charter ends with the glossy document that we have seen and with the action set out in it. We must carry the citizens charter forward as an ongoing programme throughout the decade and build on it.

The private sector in Britain knows that the customer must come first. If the private sector or any components of it—any individual firm—begins to ignore the message that the customer must come first, it finds out pretty soon the hard way that if the customer does not come first, the firm may well go out of business. The public sector has not had that discipline. In one sense, the citizens charter is a method of bringing to the public sector the discipline of the private sector.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on not being daunted by the sheer scale of the task that he has undertaken. He deserves great credit for not finding the task so difficult that he does not know where to begin. He has undertaken a review of virtually the entire gamut of government services and he has approached it in a way that has been both orderly and comprehensive, yet still leaves room for further ideas to come forward. He has a tiny team of support staff. He must be congratulated on his restraint in expanding public expenditure as a result of the charter. The point about that is that the key to this programme is not that more money needs to be spent. The key to this programme, as he said, is not what one spends but what one buys. That is something which I hope that we can emphasise throughout the country.

There were various suggestions from the Labour and Liberal Benches that if these ideas were so good we should have introduced them 12 years ago. The answer is that, in many areas, we did. The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) suggested that there would be a reduction in the Post Office's monopoly and that things might therefore get worse. Let me remind the hon. Gentleman what happened over the privatisation of British Telecom.

Before the privatisation of British Telecom there were approximately 77,000 public telephone boxes. Many of them were out of order. Following the privatisation there are 97,000 public telephone boxes, of which 96 per cent. work on a day-to-day basis. Yet when we were privatising the telephone system, we were told by the Opposition that those public telephone boxes would go out of order completely because they would not be found to be economic. They told us that a private telephone service would drop public telephone boxes. That is only one example of the improvement that we have already seen under the Government's programme.

Several hon. Members mentioned London Underground. My hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson) mentioned the Central line. The line serves my constituency and he and I have spoken about it in the Chamber many a time on a Friday morning. It causes many of my constituents to arrive at work, if at all, late and absolutely furious because of the unreliability of the service and the delays that they have suffered on the way to work. On one occasion, some of them even had to walk along the track when the electricity had not been switched off.

The value of the citizens charter is that it will change the expectations of my constituents and my hon. Friend's constituents so that they will know the standard of service that they can expect, know to demand it and be able to point to a document and say, "This is what we are told we can expect. This is what we are not achieving. Please produce this service now." That will provide a real spur to London Underground to improve the standard.

However, one of the greatest causes of the unreliability of the underground service, particularly on the Central line, is the incidence of fires. One problem is that the money which is being spent by London Underground in terms of safety is being spent on the wrong things. It is being spent on relatively marginal improvements to safety in stations rather than on some of the new equipment that is needed for the tracks and tunnels to improve fire detection services.

I have said that one advantage of the citizens charter is that we can produce our ideas about what should be included in it. My hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow referred to the taxpayers charter. I welcome what is in it so far, but I have two extra suggestions. First, sometimes there are disputes between the taxpayer and the Inland Revenue. It must be accepted that, in terms of litigation, the Inland Revenue has huge financial muscle over the taxpayer. It can say to the taxpayer, "This is our position. If you don't like it, take us to court. We don't mind. We are backed by public money. You, unfortunately, are not. You will have to rely on your own purse." The effect of that is usually to make the taxpayer cave in, often where the law and right are on his side. He knows that he does not have the money to stand up against the Inland Revenue. There should be some method by which the Inland Revenue is forced to consider whether, in deciding disputes between itself and taxpayers, it should contribute to the taxpayers' costs—not necessarily wiping out those costs, because there must be some disincentive to litigation, but contributing to them. It is helpful to the Inland Revenue to clear up the effects of the tax law.

My second suggestion relates to a tax clearance procedure, about which I have written to my hon. Friend. It would be helpful mainly to companies. Before entering into a transaction companies wish to know what the tax consequences of that transaction are likely to be. All too often the Inland Revenue says either, "I am sorry, but you will have to find out when you've entered into that transaction what the tax consequences are"—that is no good—or, "We think that the tax consequences are such, but do not hold us to it because we may well change our

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minds later." There should be a tax clearance procedure for which the companies could pay. There is nothing to stop them paying for one. Nor is there anything to stop the Inland Revenue perhaps contracting out the advice that it would give to private firms of accountants. That would save any futher demand on its time.

I know that other right hon. and hon. Members want to speak, so I will simply say that I have raised that matter previously with my hon. Friend and I warn him that I shall return to it. He has the enormous task of looking after the Inland Revenue and the citizens charter. The charter gives us the opportunity to put forward this idea and to build on the ideas of my hon. Friend and it is welcome on that account.

2.3 pm

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): The phrase "citizens charter" attracts my interest, but those who advocate it do not have the slightest idea what they have started. We in this country are not citizens; we are subjects of the Crown.

An hon. Member cannot take his seat in the House of Commons without the famous declaration:

> "I swear by Almighty God that I will be faithful and bear true Allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, Her Heirs and Successors, according to Law."

An atheist may affirm. I affirm in honour of Charles Bradlaugh who won the case. Every Church of England minister, every officer and every judge has an oath of allegiance. Privy Councillors are subjected to an especially embarrassing procedure: a medieval oath is read out. When at the end of it I said that I had not agreed, I was told, "Don't worry, we've administered the oath". An oath is an injection. I never knew what the phrase "administration of oaths" meant until I became a Privy Councillor. We are not citizens at all.

I was reminded of that only this morning when I got an answer from the Prime Minister about Maastricht. He said:

> "Ratification of any Treaty is a prerogative act, exercised by the Government on behalf of the Crown."

One can complain if one's tap is not repaired by the local authority, but if the Crown decides to ratify the Maastricht treaty one has no rights at all.

Let us be clear—if we are talking about citizens we shall have to change the constitution. Whatever we may say about the mother of Parliaments—we have all that stuff that we tell schoolchildren when they come here—the British are subjects. We do not choose our head of state. Unlike the Americans, who elect a president, we shall have Prince Charles whether we like it or not. We do not elect the House of Lords, which exists through patronage. The past 10 Prime Ministers have appointed 837 Peers who are Members of Parliament. If we are talking about citizens the Government will have to consider constitutional reform. I presented a Commonwealth of Britain Bill in May, which would bring about a new charter of rights. We could consider that when I bring it back in the new Parliament.

Why should the citizen have rights only in relation to public services? What about the private sector? Indeed, I would go further. If a tap is leaking, the citzens charter will allow us to force the council to mend it, but if one is homeless there is nothing in the charter to say that one can force the local authority to give us a home. There is nothing to say that the unemployed can force people to give them a job. If someone cannot live on his benefit he cannot force the Benefits Agency to give him enough money to live on.

The citizens charter is nothing to do with people's real rights. It is an attempt to mobilise public opinion against the public services, which have deliberately been kept tight on cash and rate capped—the councillors who built houses in Liverpool have been disqualified and surcharged for "wilful misconduct" or some such phrase. If the Government are going to start the hare running, we shall follow it up.

I believe that there are human rights; they are very simple. Everybody is entitled to do useful work at a living wage. Everybody is entitled to free health care based on medical need, not on their wealth. Everybody is entitled to life-long education. I know that I am going an inch or two beyond Labour party policy, so I hope that nobody reports me to the leader of the party, but I favour raising the school leaving age to 95. Everybody should be able to go in and out of education, as and when they want, throughout their lives, just as people go into libraries to learn what they want to learn and come out when they have finished. That is a proper education policy. That is a citizen's right, but there is nothing about that in the citizens charter.

All pensioners are entitled to dignity when they get old. Why should people who bust a gut all their lives working to create wealth have to live on the poverty line when they retire? It is because the Government are not interested in giving people rights if that involves taxing the people whom they represent.

Those are some of the basic questions raised by the debate today. I apologise for not having been here for the whole debate, but I had another engagement to fulfil before coming to the House. Ministers have started something that they will live to regret—from their point of view, not from ours. People will ask a lot of questions, such as "Why cannot we be as democratic as the Russians? They can elect Yeltsin but we cannot elect our head of state.", and, "Why cannot we, like the Americans, have the right to examine judges before they are appointed?" People may laugh about Clarence Thomas, but not long ago a former member of the British Union of Fascists was appointed a judge in this country.

We should have more rights over those who govern us and over private industry. What use is the idea of "the customer is always right" to someone who is sacked by a multinational company? There is no protection of the citizen's right there.

I welcome the citizens charter, because the Government have opened a Pandora's box that will raise a lot of questions that they cannot answer with their market forces philosophy. I shall take it up.

I published a charter of rights, including the right to democracy in industry, in the Bill that I presented on 20 May. Why should people hang up their civil rights when they go to work? Why not have a ballot to deal with management, like the one that the Government introduced to deal with the trade unions? Why should a trade union not be allowed to spend money politically without a ballot when a company can do so? Why should a company be able to close a factory—far worse than any industrial action, because everyone in the factory is put out of work, without a ballot when a trade union cannot stop a factory for one day without a ballot?

The hierarchy of a feudal society is challenged by the use of the word "citizen". The discipline of market forces is challenged by the use of the word "citizen". By trying to move into the central area of politics in order, as they imagine, to win the election, the Government have started a discussion about human rights. Those rights have nothing to do with medieval hierarchy or market forces, they are inherent in people when they are born. To go back to the book of Genesis:

"Am I my brother's keeper?"

That is the question raised by having a serious debate about citizens' rights.

Dare I say it, but some of the speeches that I have heard today have been insignificant in the issues that they raised. However, this charter will open a debate that will excite the British people, but not in support of this Government.

2.10 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): It will be difficult to follow such an ingenious speech, but I shall try. It will probably come as no great surprise to the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) that I do not entirely share his views on the monarchy. However, democracy means that we are each entitled to our views. I apologise to the House for the fact that I have not been present throughout the debate, but I am glad to have the opportunity to speak in support of the citizens charter.

The citizens charter was the Prime Minister's idea and he has captured the mood of the nation. It would be churlish of the Opposition to delay its passage through the House. I have not been a Member of the House for the past two or three decades, but those who have been say that the role of the Member of Parliament has changed greatly. Some older Members believe that we have become glorified social workers. To be honest, much of our work concerns dealing with people's disappointments at the precise delivery of public services.

I have no doubt that if the charter is successful, and it will be, our role as Members of Parliament will return to that of the past and we shall debate the great affairs of the nation and decide overall policy. We will no longer be involved in the detail of why someone has not got satisfaction on housing from the council or why a hospital appointment was not kept on time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) mentioned the law and there is no doubt that the law is an expensive process. The small claims court has been extremely successful. However, I am sure that everyone would applaud the citizens charter if it meant that the ordinary citizen was able to gain redress from the public services for any disappointment.

I know that my hon. Friend the Minister and his team have worked hard on the proposals. I should be interested to learn what impact the citizens charter will have on our relationship with the European Community—I accept that my hon. Friend will not have time to consider that issue today. No doubt on Wednesday and Thursday of next week, hon. Members will discuss that relationship. It is relevant to ask how the citizens charter will be viewed by our European partners. I hope that they will not obstruct in any way its passage and successful implementation.

I greatly welcome the guarantee that parents will receive a report on their children's progress each year. Our postbags often include complaints about delays, for example, at the general practitioner's surgery or when waiting for an appointment with a consultant. I am an enthusiastic supporter of the Government and it seems to me that we get blamed for everything—the weather, delays in the shops—you name it. We accept responsibility for many things, but when it comes to queues of people waiting to see their general practitioners or to be examined by consultants, we must look elsewhere for the reasons. I accept that doctors must sometimes leave the surgery to attend an emergency and that people will be left waiting, but good practice should enable those arranging GPs' and consultants' bookings to make better arrangements.

For example, patients told to arrive at, say, 9 o'clock should be seen shortly after that time. It is unacceptable for many people to be told to turn up at the same time, with the result that there are enormous queues at the surgery. When patients grumble about such delays, it is easy to blame the Government, even though it is dishonest to do so.

I was glad to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson) refer to British Rail. I hope that I shall have an opportunity in the Adjournment debate to comment on the Fenchurch street line.

I am delighted that the Consumers Association has welcomed various aspects of the citizens charter. I hope that timeshare practices that have been the subject of abuse will be caught by the charter.

Basildon district council, which is socialist only with the casting vote of the chairman, has not welcomed the citizens charter, no doubt because the Government's initiative will result in the shortcomings of local authorities being brought to the fore. I welcome the charter and I have no doubt that it will be welcomed by the public in general when they cast their votes in the general election next year.

2.16 pm

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): I can, with justification, describe myself as a modest man. Accordingly, I can say, following the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), that compared with his aspirations, I have a modest desire in wishing to remove a minor carbuncle from the face of the constitution and I shall be delighted if the Minister will assure me that the citizens charter will achieve that.

We in West Glamorgan, in Swansea, have a local form of pestilence. It is a quango, one of those bodies which the Conservatives so detested when in opposition in the 1970s. But the one of which I speak was appointed by the Government. It is called the West Glamorgan health authority.

To everyone's surprise, even shock, that health authority, although short of cash, devoted a large section of one of its recent health journals to the citizens charter. That was a source of great wonderment to the people of Swansea. It represented a conversion on the road to Gower that overshadowed anything that happened on the road to Damascus.

It had consulted on the question of changing a casualty unit in my hospital from a full to a minor casualty unit. After years of consulting about that, it decided not to change it from a major to a minor unit but to close it. That decision was taken without any consultation. The quango, arbitrarily and unilaterally, closed the casualty unit.

Even the Secretary of State for Wales was furious that a quango should act in that way, so he instructed it to reopen the unit. It was reopened, but as a minor casualty unit. In addition, the authority took the view that the

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people of Swansea would not have accidents at night, so the unit was not opened at night. "Local people shall not have accidents at night", was apparently the thought behind that. Again the Welsh Office intervened. The quango was instructed to open the casualty unit on a 24-hour basis.

Now, almost at the end of 1991, that quango, much despised throughout West Glamorgan, is about once more to close my local casualty unit at night. It is going through a farcical, nonsensical and meaningless form of consultation. I say that not because the quango disagrees with me—although that is bound to weigh in my assessment of its competence—but because, by acting in a unilateral and arbitrary manner, it is ignoring the fact that 30,000 people have signed a petition saying that they want the unit to be open at night.

Right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House know how difficult it is to get 30,000 constituents to sign a petition. When the local newspaper conducted an opinion poll, 82 per cent. of those questioned said that they wanted the unit kept open at night. The health authority emblazoned the citizens charter—at the request of the Prime Minister, it was said—in its journal, but ignored a petition of 30,000 signatures and 82 per cent. of public opinion and did exactly what it wanted.

West Glamorgan will accept a simple indication of whether or not the charter is meaningful. One modest action would lead us to believe that it is something other than a con. All that Ministers must do is sack West Glamorgan health authority.

2.20 pm

Mr. Chris Smith: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The debate has been marked by several distinguished contributions from my right hon. and hon. Friends. None was more distinguished than the sparkling speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), who made the important fundamental point that charters do not build homes, invest in railways, put roofs on schools, or provide better pensions to people who have given their all to this country throughout their lives. Those are the real improvements that the public want. Charters are all very well, but the Government must realise that they are fundamentally inadequate in dealing with basic problems of under-provision and poor service.

Right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House want improved courtesy, the identification of individuals, better signposting in Government offices, and what have you. Those specific proposals are welcome, although one does not need a charter to achieve them. One needs the rigorous application of efficiency and value for money throughout the public and private sectors. Much of that is already being achieved by Labour-controlled authorities throughout the country. The pioneering work of the city of York, for example, is an example that Ministers would do well to applaud and to follow.

So much more needs to be done than the Government have even dreamt of in the citizens charter. We require freedom of information legislation, real regulation of the privatised utilities, proper independent procedures for dealing with complaints about police behaviour and from prisoners and a quality commission coupled with annual elections, to bring real accountability to local government administration.

Above all, we need a real commitment from the Government to high performance, good quality and value for money in public services. Health, education, transport and housing will form the centrepiece of the next general election campaign. Glossy charters will not save the Government from their record, the inadequacies of their present proposals or the verdict of the electorate.

2.24 pm

Mr. Maude: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This has been a good debate and I hope that it will be the first of many debates in years to come on the important Government initiative to improve public services. I thank my right hon. and hon. Friends who have participated in the debate for the high quality of their contributions and the seriousness with which they have tackled an extremely important subject. I am particularly grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) for his kind remarks to me. It is a big challenge to be looking after not only the Inland Revenue but the citizens charter, but I do not believe that there is any tension between the two activities. The high quality of the debate reflects the importance that Conservative Members attach to the steady improvement of public services over a period of years in the interests of the citizen—the user of the services.

I am disappointed that so many Opposition speeches did not deal with the programme to improve public services for our citizens but, for some reason difficult to understand, shied away from the subject. That is despite the fact that the Opposition claim that the issue is their territory and their carefully cultivated myth that public services are the province of the Labour party alone. The hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) made what can most kindly be described as ill-judged remarks about the charter's content.

There is nothing paper about the promises that we make in the charter and nothing gimmicky about saying to patients called to out-patient appointments that they should not have to wait all day to see a doctor, but 30 minutes. That may seem a trifling matter for Opposition Members, but for the patients who have to suffer the wait, it is very serious. The House owes it to those people to support them and the Government in their determination to eradicate those habits, which arise not from constraints on resources, but from poor management and an inconsiderate approach to the users of the services.

There is nothing gimmicky about creating league tables for schools and local authorities to give local residents, parents, taxpayers and users of services the chance to compare the performances of different organisations. There is nothing gimmicky about privatising British Rail and our presumption against monopolistic structures. The Government have said that they consider that to be the best way to improve the working of the railway for citizens. There is nothing gimmicky about reducing the Post Office's monopoly on mail, which would introduce real choice and competition for our citizens.

The Government, in introducing those policies, confront difficult issues and have to take on the big, vested interests in the interests of citizens. That is why the Labour party has dodged the big issues and sought to divert the

debate into matters that do not involve the citizens charter. The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) made a splendid and thoroughly enjoyable speech which produced a grand diversion. If we succeed in arousing a splendid and magnificent debate on the lines that he suggested, nobody will be happier than I, because the citizens charter is an important issue that will engage people's minds.

Public services exist for the public, not politicians. They are not our playthings, or those of councillors. They do not exist for the managers or staff of the services, although they depend on the work of the staff. They are brought into existence to serve citizens. It is our citizens who own and use the services and we should consult those citizens and give them choice. We should extend competition deep into public services, as the Government will propose in the White Paper to be published next week which I hope will command widespread support in the House.

At the beginning of the debate, I asked the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) a number of hard-edged questions about the Labour party's policies on some central issues concerning choice for the citizen. The hon. Gentleman refused to answer a single one of them. When it comes to the election, the British people will be asking him and his colleagues those questions and they had better have thought up some answers by then. The hon. Gentleman may be able to run, but he and his colleagues will not be able to hide. The British people will expect some answers and, if the Labour party cannot supply them, they will vote unequivocally to continue with the present Government in office.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Southend Railway Line

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

2.30 pm

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): Madam Deputy Speaker, I am going to tell you a horror story today which will wring your withers, which will make you very angry and which will make you understand the sense of frustration that has brought so many of my colleagues from south-east Essex here to support me. I am delighted that my right hon. Friends the Members for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine) and for Southend, West (Mr. Channon), and my hon. Friends the Members for Thurrock (Mr. Janman) and for Basildon (Mr. Amess) are here to back me up. Their presence will give the House a good idea of just how important we think the subject is.

We are here to talk about the Fenchurch Street line, which serves—if that is the right word—the people who live in our constituencies. It is easy to sum the line up: it is Britain's worst railway line. It is shabby, sloppy and slow. The carriages are shabby, the management is sloppy and the trains are slow. Half the trains now run at a quarter of their normal speed—if they run at all—because the electrical components have been allowed to deteriorate so badly.

More than 40,000 of our constituents use the line every day. It is not an option for them: this railway line is their lifeline to their jobs, connecting their homes to the places where they work. Our constituents are now discriminated against if it is known that they must travel to work on the Fenchurch Street line—yet, without the line, they cannot earn their living and they cannot be self-supporting.

British Rail admits that the rolling stock, the signalling and everything about the line is now 60 years out of date. We want to know why BR has done nothing about it. It is not as though our constituents have an alternative. They cannot go to work in their cars, because there is nowhere for them to park in central London and the main roads from our part of the world all badly need attention. The A13 and A127 are choked with lorries from Shell Haven, Fords in Dagenham and Tilbury docks in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock. The line is not an option for our people; it is the way in which they get to work.

As I waited on the station today, we were given three excuses over the loudspeaker, which broadcasts such excuses every day. Two trains were cancelled this morning. One, which had a defect and had been travelling at a quarter of its proper speed, had to be taken off the line. People are piled into the carriages. On each train, one carriage travels empty because the electrical components are worn out and out of date and it is apparently beyond the wit of British Rail to get new components manufactured. Of course BR cannot buy them off the peg any more, because, in most parts of the country, those railway lines went out of business 30-odd years ago, but that is still no excuse.

When we get off the train we line up in a pathetic queue at the station master's office to get an excuse card. There are eight excuses on the card, and the station master religiously ticks one of the boxes so that, when we get to work, we can explain to our employers why we are late again. The excuses are: points failure, train failure, staff failure, signal failure, vandalism, storm damage and

[Mrs. Teresa Gorman]

overhead power cable failure. Everything fails but the management of British Rail. Oh dear, no, it is nothing at all to do with them. We do not get just wet leaves on the line but dead sheep. That is not surprising, because the trains travel so slowly that the sheep feel that they have plenty of time to cross. However on one occasion, the signalman got the signal wrong and the train hit the sheep. On that day my constituents were turfed out at Purfleet and had to take taxis at a cost of £7. That is not rare; it is the sort of thing that people have to do all the time. They would much rather pay a bit more for a better service, but that option is not open to them.

Why is the line so neglected? Is it British Rail's biggest loss maker? No, it is not. It has a turnover of £62 million a year and is used by 40,000 people a day. It makes a profit and we should like to know where that profit has gone. It seems that it has been used to improve the lines in all parts of the region except ours.

Mr. Paul Channon (Southend, West): When I was in a position to look dispassionately at lines all over the country, it was universally agreed that this line was one of the worst two. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is essential to implement the massive programme put forward this year by British Rail to improve the infrastructure and renew the rolling stock? Will she press the Minister to make sure that the Government give the go-ahead this year for such a programme?

Mrs. Gorman: I agree with everything that my right hon. Friend says. Thanks to the efforts of my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon, we got Sir Bob Reid to experience what the rest of us have to experience, but British Rail could not even get the line right on Tuesday for Sir Bob's visit. A cancellation prevented my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point getting to Basildon on time. When we arrived our little cards were ticked to show that the 20-minute delay was due to a points failure. Even for the managing director of British Rail, BR could not get its act together.

I was delighted to see my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point giving Sir Bob Reid the biggest flea in his ear that he has ever had. It was a salutary lesson and gratifying for the passengers to see somebody was taking up their cause and letting British Rail know what we thought about it. My right hon. Friend expressed the frustration felt by our constituents who are always late for work. They also feel impotent because nothing is ever done about the line.

Long before I came to the House, my colleagues had been badgering about the line, but still nothing has been done. That is simply not good enough, and this time around we intend to get some action. I have sympathy for members of the staff because although they are totaliy disillusioned, they want to help. They dish out little cards, as if people who are late for work have nothing better to do than to read them. The cards state:

> If you need help or have any comments about our services, please contact our Customers Service Team.

Is not that wonderful? There is a customer service team but no solution for the prime need of customers, which is to get to work on time.

British Rail management is responsible for the line. As always, Sir Bob Reid tried to blame someone else—the Government. That is not good enough. He is paid to run British Rail and we want some action from him. The Government represent the people who use the line and they are the major shareholder. It is up to them to see that Sir Bob does the job for which he is paid. If he does not, they should sack him. At night, customers going to Fenchurch Street station find that they are locked out because of train delays and crowding on the platforms, which is almost lethal. Police outside the station—I almost said riot police—try to direct passengers to another method of getting home. My constituents tell me that they sometimes spend three hours on a journey that should take 45 minutes.

Furthermore, my constituents' democratic rights are threatened. During the May council elections last year, when the polls closed at 9 pm, my constituents were still coming off the trains and so were unable to vote. There were queues outside polling stations and the doors were shut in their faces. This is a disgrace because it takes the problem beyond that of being late for work.

We want action and we want it now and we have come here today in force to see that we have it. If I had my way, I would push on with privatising the whole of British Rail and make sure that this line was the first to go. It would be a real commercial proposition. Private management would not tolerate for one minute the level of service offered to our constituents.

Another option would be to allow British Rail to raise money in the ordinary commercial markets because, as the line makes a profit, it could pay for such borrowing. Under the present mandate, BR is not allowed to do this. Apparently, the line needs above £240 million invested in it, but right now it needs an immediate injection of £40 million to replace the signalling and the electrics so that the trains would at least run on time. Shabby old carriages that they are, at least they would reach their destination in the time that they are supposed to. Long term, we also want new carriages, which could be made available by leasing from the private sector. All these solutions are available and there is no reason why they should not be introduced.

My hon. Friend the Member for Basildon has a great deal of practical experience in this matter and he has done as much as any of us to highlight the problem so I should like him to have the opportunity to give the House his views.

2.42 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) on her magnificent speech. She is a woman of enormous energy and on this subject her energy has been deployed to good effect.

At the moment, there is much talk in the media about Essex man and Essex woman. They are rightly extremely angry about this service, just as Members of Parliament are. British Rail is not being blamed for this service. I and my parliamentary colleagues in Essex are being blamed. It is disgraceful that this is being allowed to happen. The general public are being given the impression, very quietly, that Members of Parliament are not being diligent in their duty in lobbying British Rail about its poor services. This is not the case.

I have not been a Member of Parliament for anywhere near as long as my right hon. Friends the Members for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine) and for Southend, West (Mr.

Channon) but during the time that I have been here, I have been inundated with complaints from constituents on these subjects. Three years ago, there was a public meeting in Basildon on the subject. At that meeting, British Rail representatives gave—over the weeks after the meeting, I went to three railway stations which served my constituency and this was repeated—categorical assurances that there would be improvements. Instead, the service is even worse.

I have in my hand a letter dated June 1989 from the management of British Rail, talking about a 16 per cent. increase in passenger journeys, the opening of three new lines and 10 new stations, the electrification of 11 lines and the rebuilding or modernisation of 295 stations on Network SouthEast. What about our line? The letter says at the end:

"I hope that the enclosures are useful, and that your constituents start to see the improvements we are seeking over the course of the next few months."

Here we are, on 15 November 1991. Why have not those promises been delivered? Why is BR allowing parliamentarians to be used as the fall guys?

Six weeks ago, spurred on by the Basildon commuter group—I pay tribute to Mr. Martin Rams and his hard-working committee—I participated with it on a public journey. I arrived at Basildon station, but the British Rail representatives did not turn up, and the train was 20 minutes late. When it pulled in two of the carriages were closed and only one fifth of my constituents could get on the train. When we arrived at Fenchurch street station the British Rail representative charged up to me. I said, "Unless there has been a death in the family, I do not wish to hear the excuse." At that point a card was thrust into my hand. A box on it was ticked "Staff shortages". I took a taxi and arrived at my office at the House. I insisted on speaking to the chairman of British Rail, Sir Robert Reid. When I eventually spoke to him, he agreed to join us on our journey. I was invited to travel on the 8.34 am train. I wrote to my colleagues, asking them to join me on that train.

There is no 8.34 train. It should have been the 8.24. That is the level of incompetence with which we are dealing.

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock): Is my hon. Friend aware that, although in a somewhat more incognito fashion than he and my right hon. and hon. Friends, I made two return journeys on the Fenchurch Street line on 12 November, one from London to Grays and back in the morning and one from London to Tilbury and back in the rush hour peak? I can tell him that I had the same problems with delayed trains and late running as those that he experienced. When I was coming into Fenchurch Street I met my hon. Friend coming out, with steam coming from his ears.

Mr. Amess: I appreciate the reinforcement that my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman) has given to my statement. I wonder sometimes whether there are certain people in society who think that we are exaggerating the difficulties that our constituents experience.

When my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay, my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point and I joined Sir Robert Reid on Tuesday, the journey was a fiasco. It was supposed to be a public relations exercise. It was an opportunity for my constituents, who are served at the stations of Laindon, Pitsea and Basildon, to see that British Rail was accepting responsibility. Unfortunately, that is not what happened. My right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point thought that he would be joining us from the 8.3 am train, but that train was cancelled.

I implore my hon. Friend the Minister to help my colleagues and myself in Essex. We need his help even more than we have before to ensure that British Rail takes our complaints seriously and to ensure that the railways service is improved dramatically.

2.47 pm

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): I shall be brief because I know that my hon. Friend the Minister wishes to reply.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) has said, my train was cancelled and Bod Reid's train out of Fenchurch Street station was jammed and accordingly was late. That is the way it goes. I support my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) for raising the matter. The line is a scandal and a disgrace. I would, as a start, sack the entire management. During a meeting with Bob Reid I asked for an explanation. He replied plaintively and said, "The signalling is 60 years old." He did not even know that the signalling was changed after the war when the line was electrified. Of course, if the signalling is defective that is a potent cause of delay and a reason why trains are cancelled. Apart from those consequences, it could be a recipe for disaster.

My hon. Friend the Minister must understand that we want action now. The line should be given complete priority. We know that British Rail has been receiving more money from the Government. Let some of it be devoted to ending the scandal to which my hon. Friends and I have referred.

2.48 pm

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock): I shall be extremely brief. As I have recently said, I travelled on the line, but in a somewhat more incognito fashion than my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) and others. I recommend that my hon. Friend the Minister also travels the line and that he speaks to the long suffering passengers and to ordinary station staff. He will learn that although the management that is responsible for the line is appalling, there are more than 90 members of it. We do not get very good results. Station staff, unless they are inspectors, are not allowed to stop passengers, even if they think that they are fiddling and travelling without a ticket. Accordingly, there is a massive loss of revenue. Money is also being wasted in employing various levels of management that are not needed.

Even in a period when British Rail has had the largest investment programme since the 1960s, since the change from steam to diesel, it seems that the line has been left permeditatively at the end of the queue by British Rail. The line is carrying an ever-increasing number of commuters. It is an important passenger and freight line serving south-west and south-east Essex and the east of London. Enough is enough is enough. The line needs to be rejuvenated, it needs investment, and we need that to start on Monday.

2.49 pm

The Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): I congratulate and pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) for the concise way in which she introduced the debate and then gave time for others of our hon. Friends to speak. They, too, have serious concerns and I was well and truly exercised by the way in which they made their effective case.

I assure my hon. Friends that the Government take their concerns seriously. We are all well aware of how important an efficient rail service is to the everyday lives of travellers, especially those who have to travel to work. Delays and cancellations, old and unreliable trains, signal and points failures and even leaves on the line are problems that most of us have encountered. I certainly have great sympathy with those who are affected by frequent disruption to their journeys. There is nothing more annoying, especially when people are working to a timetable.

In the short time available to me, I wish to reiterate the Government's commitment to British Rail. We want more traffic, both passenger and freight, carried by rail. That can be achieved only if rail travel is an attractive alternative. We fully appreciate that. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon) who was one Secretary of State for Transport who managed to secure significant investment funding for British Rail. He ensured that rather than over-subsidising British Rail, it received proper investment. He was responsible for important changes.

Our commitment to British Rail is undoubted. On InterCity, the electrification of the east coast main line and the provision of new InterCity 225 trains have just been completed at a cost of £450 million. On regional railways, the entire fleet of diesel trains is being renewed so that by the end of the next year all diesel vehicles will be under eight years old. In addition, more than 100 new stations have opened on those routes since 1982.

The south-east has the most intensively used urban rail network in Europe. It serves a catchment area with a population equal to that of the whole of Australia and it runs 93 million train miles every year. Network SouthEast is vital to London. It carries more than 40 per cent. of commuters into central London—almost half a million workers a day. Without it, road congestion would be intolerable and the environment and the economy of the city would suffer.

We all want Network SouthEast to provide a modern and efficient rail service and British Rail is committed to the progressive renewal of the system. More than 1,000 new vehicles have been introduced since 1986 and many improvements have been made to infrastructure. Network SouthEast is now pursuing a programme of total route modernisation to spread those benefits to the entire network.

I realise that that does not go very far in reassuring my hon. Friends' constituents and those who have to use the line. I am trying to show the Government's commitment to British Rail and to point out the important changes being made. Network SouthEast has to concentrate on a few routes at a time, modernising trains, tracks, stations and signals to gain the maximum benefits from investment.

The process of total route modernisation has already begun. The Chiltern line once suffered by far the worst service on Network SouthEast—although I am reluctant to say that, having heard my hon. Friends' complaints about their line. I understand that the Chiltern line was worse even than theirs.

Mrs. Gorman: Impossible.

Mr. McLoughlin: I said that I was reluctant to say that.

The Networker turbo diesel trains are now being delivered and will run to new, faster timetables in the new year. Every aspect of the service on the Chiltern line has been improved and performance has already shown significant improvements, even though the full fleet of trains has not yet entered service. The project cost more than £75 million.

Total route modernisation is also in progress on the busy Kent link lines, where almost 500 new Networker vehicles are on order. Old and unreliable slam-door trains need to be replaced when they reach the end of their useful life and associated fixed works will enable longer trains to run and so reduce overcrowding. The total cost of the Kent project is almost £700 million. All that adds up to a great deal of money—around £1 million a day over the past financial year for Network SouthEast alone. The Government are supporting the highest level of investment in the railways since the changeover from steam in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Much of the credit for that lies with my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West.

As part of our expenditure proposals this autumn, we were able to add nearly £1 billion to our existing plans for British Rail for 1992-93. British Rail's total external finances—including borrowing and grant—will amount to more than £2 billion next year. That is a substantial increase which will allow BR to proceed with investment despite the problems it faces in relation to forecasts for revenues and asset sales. That level of investment clearly shows our commitment to ensure that we improve the rail service for everyone and particularly people suffering on the worst lines.

Of course, not all those projects can be realised overnight; nor can they be realised everywhere at once. It is up to BR to set its priorities within the available resources. We give it the resources and it is right for BR to come to us and tell us where it believes those resources should be spent. We are doing what we can. There must be a rolling programme that will bring benefits of modernisation to the network as projects become necessary, worth while and affordable.

I want now to consider the specific points made by my colleagues about the London, Tilbury and Southend line. I acknowledge that the quality of the service on that line is quite unacceptable. I did not need to be convinced of that and the point has been endorsed today by the strong representations of my colleagues and by other colleagues who have not been present today for various reasons.

The poor service is due to the age of the equipment, not lack of will on BR's part. The staff are doing their utmost to provide the best possible service with the equipment. As has been said, one must have sympathy with the staff, particularly those who have to deal directly with the customers. It must be very frustrating for them. They try to do the best they can, but always meet a barrage of criticism.

The problem has recently been exacerbated by electrical faults on some trains. Immediate action was taken to ensure the safety of passengers, but regrettably that further

reduced the number of seats available. Assessment of all trains is continuing and those which do not show a deterioration will return to normal running as soon as possible. Where faults have been identified, they are being corrected, but that is taking longer than we and BR had hoped. Overcrowding has been minimised by the introduction of rolling stock from other lines and retention of units which were due to be transferred elsewhere.

British Rail is doing what it can to make the situation tolerable for passengers. I realise that in some cases passengers can become more annoyed when they receive explanatory cards, but that is an attempt to tell them about the problems. I accept that the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay probably do not find that reassuring.

Such action is, of course, only a short-term measure. The longer-term solution is re-equipment. The Department has recently received proposals from BR for the complete modernisation of the London, Tilbury and Southend line. Those proposals are being dealt with as a matter of the highest priority. Discussions have already begun between officials and BR with a view to decisions being taken very quickly.

The total cost of the project is about £260 million. It consists of the complete renewal of the signalling system; the introduction of modern trains; and various smaller improvements. It is a very large and complex project and parts of the appraisal have yet to be completed. However, Ministers are determined that the project should be taken forward as quickly as possible without any unnecessary delay. To this end, I am pleased to be able to tell the House that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has agreed that BR should go ahead with the renewal of the signalling system without waiting for the remainder of the project to be approved. I understand that Sir Bob Reid, the chairman of BR, is today announcing that £50 million will be allocated to the signalling work.

The signalling system is the most critical part of the project, as parts of the existing system are more than 40 years old. I accept the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine). It is an important element within the overall project and the Department is satisfied that it can proceed without prejudicing decisions that have yet to be taken on the rolling stock and other aspects of the project. The Government's decision to provide a substantial increase in funding for investment in the railways has enabled BR to allocate money to the project. Had it not been for the increases announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his autumn statement, that would not have happened. I hope that that shows our concern.

Mr. Channon: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's kind remarks. He has made a most encouraging statement this afternoon and my hon. Friends and I are very grateful. Will he press ahead with the rolling stock as soon as possible?

Mr. McLoughlin: We will be considering the rest of the appraisal as a matter of priority. Work will begin immediately on the specification for the design of the scheme with a view to placing contracts as soon as possible. Resignalling is awkward and trains must be kept running on time. Therefore, it will take some time for all the resignalling to be completed.

Work on the remainder of the project is continuing and it has a very high priority. I hope that it will not be too long before decisions can be taken on the remainder of the scheme and the appraisal and the investment needed to provide a modern and efficient network. We all want to see that and it will not be long delayed by the Department.

My right hon. and hon. Friends have today dramatically illustrated the way in which their constituents feel about the need for improvements. I hope that my announcement today and the announcement made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State before the appraisal, in very unusual terms, will go some way to help those people who use the line to understand that the Government are very committed and determined to——

The motion having been made at half-past Two o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 1 November 1991

HOME DEPARTMENT

West Midlands Serious Crimes Squad

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has received a report from the Police Complaints Authority on their supervision of the investigation of the West Midlands serious crimes squad; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I have received a report from the Police Complaints Authority made under section 97(2) of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 which I am required to lay before Parliament and publish under section 97(5) of the Act. Copies of this report have been placed in the Library and will be made available by my Department to anyone seeking a copy.

In August 1989 the chief constable of the West Midlands police disbanded the serious crimes squad and asked Mr. Shaw, an assistant chief constable of West Yorkshire police, to conduct an investigation into its activities. At the same time he invited the Police Complaints Authority to supervise the investigation under section 88 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. The Police Complaints Authority has issued a statement in accordance with section 89(10) of the Act confirming that the investigation has been conducted to its satisfaction.

The Police Complaints Authority report falls into two parts. The first part describes the investigation of complaints relating to cases handled by the serious crimes squad. The main investigation covered the period between 1 January 1986 and the disbandment of the squad. In that period 694 arrests were recorded in the serious crimes squad's arrest book. Seventy of the people arrested as well as 16 other people, made complaints to the investigating officer. Complaints from 11 people relating to the period between 29 April 1984 and 1 January 1986 were also investigated. One case was subsequently withdrawn.

The 1984 Act requires that the report on any complaint against a police officer where criminal behaviour may have taken place must be referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions. All the complaints just mentioned have therefore been so referred but the fact of referral does not imply that criminal offences have necessarily been committed. It is for the Director of Public Prosecutions to decide whether or not the evidence suggests that any criminal proceedings should be taken.

The second part of the PCA report describes management practices prevalent during the period in question which may have contributed to the problems described. I am glad to be able to report to the House that these management practices have already been addressed by the chief constable of the West Midlands, in consultation with the west midlands police authority. A copy of a report which he has sent to me describing the action which has already been taken has been placed in the Library with the report of the Police Complaints Authority for the information of hon. Members. Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary will be monitoring the action taken in respect of all the points raised.

Decisions as to whether any disciplinary action would be appropriate in respect of particular officers cannot be taken until the Crown Prosecution Service has completed its consideration of the possibility of criminal charges.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Indochina

Mr. Jim Lester: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on aid to Indochina.

Mrs. Chalker: On the occasion of the signing of the Cambodian peace settlement on 23 October we announced a number of new aid commitments for Indochina. These commitments are targeted on the needs of the countries concerned and take into account the changed circumstances in the region.

In Cambodia a key element in our aid strategy is to encourage a responsible and co-ordinated approach to the tasks of reconstruction and development, with due regard to local institutional, social and environmental factors. The success of the reconstruction and development effort will be critical to the economic progress and political stability of the country and therefore to the durability of the peace settlement. With these considerations in mind we intend to post an experienced aid administrator to our diplomatic mission in Phnom Penh as well as making available a senior medical adviser from the Overseas Development Administration to the World Health Organisation Office there. The main components in our aid programme to Cambodia will be:

English Language training for local administrators and others involved in the development process;

a continuation of the support we have already provided for programmes and projects directed to help vulnerable groups. This will include continued support for non-government organisations development and health projects, for volunteers and for a World Health Organisation anti-malaria programme;

support for economic development activities related to Cambodia sponsored by the Mekong committee.

For these purposes we are making an initial allocation of £3 million. We shall also be contributing £2 million to the appeal by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for financial support for the repatriation of the people in camps on the Thai/Cambodia border. We stand ready to consider, with other donors, provision of additional financial support.

For Vietnam, we shall be providing £3 million bilaterally towards the international reintegration programme for returned economic migrants. We are also contributing substantially to this programme through our share of the EC budget. We shall also offer a training project to support the economic reform process that is now under way in Vietnam. This project would involve training in such subjects as finance, banking, enterprise restructuring and environmental economics. British non-Government organisations working in Vietnam with Overseas Development Administration support have already put in place a number of sound development projects. We shall continue to support their activities through Overseas Development Administration's joint funding scheme.

I have also approved a small projects scheme for Laos to finance projects designed to help the poorer members of the community.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Tax Returns

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he can announce the figure below which from next April taxpayers will be able to submit simpler accounts to the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Maude: From next April a further half million people will be able to save themselves the time and expense of preparing detailed accounts for the Inland Revenue.

The level of business turnover or gross rental income below which taxpayers may submit three-line statements instead of full accounts is to be increased from £10,000 to £15,000. The new amount will apply to accounts received by the Inland Revenue on or after 6 April 1992.

This increase follows an announcement by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget, and reflects the Government's commitment to reduce taxpayers' costs by cutting down paper work where they can.

Official Report (Price)

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the price of the *Official Report*.

Mr. Maples: Following a review by Her Majesty's Stationery Office I have authorised increases of £1·50 in the prices of the Daily Parts and Standing Committee debates, with broadly proportionate increases in the prices of the Weekly Part, Bound Volumes and Indexes. Subscription rates will be adjusted accordingly and the scale of charges for reprints of Members' speeches appearing in the *Official Report* will also be raised. These increases, coupled with plans to enable the reports of proceedings to be "machine read" by the HMSO presses, should permit the final elimination of the revenue subsidy, which has been progressively reduced from £6·0 million in 1983-84.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Resettlement Units Executive Agency

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the annual report and accounts of the Resettlement Units Executive Agency for 1990-91 will be available.

Miss Widdecombe: Copies of the annual report and accounts for 1990-91 have today been placed in the Library.

Information Technology Services Executive Agency

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether the annual report and accounts of the Information Technology Services Executive Agency for 1990-91 are yet available.

Miss Widdecombe: The annual report and accounts have today been placed in the Library.

Child Support Act 1991

Mr. Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he plans to consult interested organisations about the content of the regulations to be made under the Child Support Act 1991.

Mr. Jack: The consultation document containing the Government's detailed proposals for the contents of the regulations arising from the Child Support Act 1991 has been published today. Copies have been placed in the Library of both Houses, and are available from the Vote Office and from the Department. Some 100 organisations with a particular interest in the subject will be sent a copy of the document and invited to submit their views by 16 December 1991.

HEALTH

NHS Trusts

Mr. Lee: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the names of those people appointed to be chairmen and non-executive directors of the second wave of national health service trusts.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I have today placed in the Library a list of those people appointed as chairmen and non-executive directors of the trusts established today.

Nursing and Midwifery Staff

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nursing and midwifery staff there were in each broad pay group in 1989 and 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information is shown in table 1.

The fall in the number of senior nurses is largely attributable to the voluntary transfer of more than 600 senior nurses to the senior manager pay structure.

The fall in the number of nurse learners is largely attributable to the cessation of enrolled nurse training and to the introduction of Project 2000. The estimated number of Project 2000 students in training in 1989 and 1990 is shown in table 2. Because of their supernumerary status, Project 2000 students are not included in statistics relating to staff in post.

Table 1
National Health Service hospital and community health services
Nursing and midwifery staff in post (excluding agency staff)
Whole-time equivalents at 30 September
England

	As at 30 September 1989 Whole-time equivalents	*As at 30 September 1990 Whole-time equivalents*
Senior nurses	3,010	2,350
Nurse educators	5,300	5,610
Qualified staff in clinical grades	246,850	247,520
Nurse learners	51,050	46,210
Other nursing staff (including unqualified)	91,860	93,670
TOTAL	398,060	395,360

Figures rounded to the nearest ten.
Source: Department of Health (SM13) Annual Census of National Health Service non-medical manpower.

Table 2
Estimated number of Project 2000 students in training

As at 30 September 1989 Number	*As at 30 September 1990* Number
200	4,700

Census (Confidentiality)

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether subsequent to its main review of confidentiality arrangements for the computer processing of 1991 census data, the British Computer Society has reported on the documents for later completion which it wished to scrutinise.

Mr. Dorrell: The British Computer Society has completed this work and reported its results in the document "report of the Supplementary Review". Copies of this Report were issued with an OPCS press notice on 16 September and a copy was placed in the Library. This supplements the society's main report, published in the White Paper "1991 Census of Population: Confidentiality and Computing" (Cm 447) and completes its review. The "Report of the Supplementary Review" records that the documents reviewed meet the society's objectives, and commends the care demonstrated by the census offices' staff with regard to confidentiality.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Foreign Affairs Council

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a statement on the outcome of the Foreign Affairs Council on 21 October.

Mr. Hurd: The Foreign Affairs Council met in Luxembourg on 21 October to pursue its negotiations on the European Economic Area (EEA). The EEA is intended to extend the single market to the seven countries of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) from 1 January 1992. My hon. Friends the Minister for Trade, the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, and the Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food represented the United Kingdom. Representatives of the EFTA countries were in Luxembourg. The two sides reached political agreement on all the key outstanding issues in the negotiations.

On fish, the two sides agreed that under the EEA the EFTA countries will remove all tariffs on imports from the EC of fish species and products. The Community will reduce or remove tariffs on imports from EFTA of most species and products. Full tariffs will remain on certain sensitive species such as salmon, mackerel and herring. The EFTA countries have also undertaken to adapt their national legislation to avoid distortion of competition in the fisheries sector.

Norway will guarantee the EC's share at north Norway of the total allowable catch for north east Arctic cod and increase it from its present level of 2·14 per cent. to 2·9 per cent. This will continue to be allocated within the Community in accordance with the present arrangements. The United Kingdom will thus receive around two thirds of this allocation. Norway will also make available to the Community a separate fixed quantity of north Norway cod: 6,000 tonnes in 1993, rising to 11,000 tonnes in 1997. The United Kingdom will not benefit from this. Iceland will make available to the Community a quantity of redfish or redfish equivalent as an exchange of fishing opportunities. The allocation of this within the Community will be decided later, though we have made clear that our historic rights in the area should be taken into account. The arrangements for allocation within the Community of fish obtained under the EEA will not prejudice the principle of relative stability or the 1992 review of the common fisheries policy.

The two sides reached agreement on the cohesion fund, through which EFTA will give financial support to less favoured regions of the Community. The fund will comprise 500 mecu in grants and 1·5 becu in soft loans. Northern Ireland will be eligible. The other recipients will be Spain, Portugal, Greece and the Republic of Ireland.

The Community also reached agreement in principle with Austria and Switzerland in the negotiations on Alpine transit. There will be a limited increase in the numbers of Community trucks permitted to pass through the two countries, in exchange for measures to reduce pollution and encourage the use of alternative means of transport.

The two sides will now aim to complete work rapidly on the text of the draft EEA agreement, with a view to signature later this year. A statement will be made to the House prior to signature.

This meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council has thus cleared the way for the conclusion of the EEA agreement. I warmly welcome this. The EEA will create the largest single market in the world and facilitate membership of the Community for those EFTA countries who wish to join. I believe that the EEA will be good for the United Kingdom, good for the Community, and good for the wider Europe.

Mr. Favell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a statement on forthcoming business in the EC Council of Ministers.

Mr. Garel Jones: The Telecommunications Council will meet on 4 November. Ministers will discuss the draft directive on high definition television; a proposal to harmonise radio frequency bands as from 1 January 1992 for the introduction of digital short range radio; the draft directive on the harmonisation of leased lines; and the harmonisation of the internal telephone access code to 00. Ministers will also discuss the satellite communications work programme, and will make a statement on the postal services Green Paper.

The Foreign Affairs Council will meet on 4 November. It will discuss EC/Jordan relations in preparation for the meeting of the EC/Jordan co-operation Council which will take place that evening. It will review the successful negotiations of the comprehensive settlement agreements signed by the Paris conference on Cambodia on 23 October. The Council will also discuss EC immigration issues possible measures against Yugoslavia and the GATT Uruguay round. Ministers will review progress in the Inter-Governmental Conference on Political Union. Ministers will also meet the Arab Maghreb Union.

The Labour and Social Affairs Council will meet on 6 November. Ministers may discuss the proposed directives on the protection of pregnant workers, and working time. Ministers may also discuss the Commission report on poverty.

The Internal Market Council will meet on 7 November and Ministers will discuss the proposed sweeteners directive. Ministers are also likely to discuss vehicle type approval, and the European company statute. Ministers may also discuss food irradiation; the pensions fund directive; trans European networks; and the Presidency situation report on the state of Internal Market Council work.

The Health Council will meet on 11 November. Ministers may discuss an amending proposal for a Council directive amending Directive 89/622 on the approximation of the laws, regulations and administrative provisions of the member states concerning the labelling of tobacco products, and on the prohibition of the marketing of certain types of tobacco for oral use; and a Commission draft directive for a ban on tobacco advertising. In the absense of opinions from the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Affairs Committee there will only be an "orientation" debate on this issue. Ministers are likely to discuss the link between health and the environment in the context of a draft resolution to request the Commission to draw up an inventory of initiatives in national and international forums. Ministers might also discuss the critical choices in health policy which face member states; needs of drug addicts in prison; and of proposals for an integrated system for future licensing of medicines for human veterinary use in the EC. Ministers may also discuss overall health policy concerning drug abuse; the Commission proposal that 1995 should be European Code on Doping in Sport Year. There will be a Commission presentation on measures to control AIDS.

The Economic and Finance Council will meet on 11 November and will consider member states' programmes for economic convergence as part of the Council's regular multilateral surveillance; the remaining tranches of the balance of payments loans to Bulgaria and Romania; the new 1·25 billion ecu food credit package for the Soviet Union; the Commission proposal for the revision of the financial perspective; and measures to reduce carbon dioxide emissions including a possible carbon/energy tax in the Community. Ministers will discuss the abolition of fiscal frontiers and hope to reach agreement on the legal text of the excise movements directive. Ministers may also discuss the investment services directive.

The Budget Council will meet on 12 November and Ministers may discuss the European Parliament's amendments and modifications as a result of their first reading of the draft budget for 1992.

The Justice Council will meet on 13 November. Ministers are likely to consider the results of work on the relationship between Community law and national criminal law, particularly in respect of fraud against the Community budget. Ministers may also consider data processing for legal purposes, and judicial training within the member states.

The Cultural Affairs Council will meet on 14 November. Ministers are likely to agree two Presidency resolutions promoting cooperation over cultural networks and conservation and access to archives. Ministers will also discuss the Commission's paper on future cultural priorities and an Italian paper on the promotion of theatrical events in 1993. Ministers may also consider the Commission's proposals on national art treasures. The Agriculture Council will meet on 18 and 19 November and Ministers will discuss reform of the common agricultural policy; the agricultural aspects of the GATT Uruguay round; welfare of pigs and calves, and the transitional reform of the oilseeds regime. Ministers may also discuss meat products; foot and mouth disease vaccine banks; a co-ordination centre for foot and mouth disease; classical swine fever and non-harmonised animals.

The Industry Council will meet on 18 November and Ministers will consider the Commission communications on biotechnology, textiles and maritime industries. Ministers will also discuss a draft resolution on the electronics and information technology industries; and state aids.

The Education Council will meet on 25 November and Ministers are likely to discuss the teaching profession and the Commission's memorandum on higher education, covering quality assessment and mobility. Ministers may also discuss the statute for the European Schools; and the European Dimension in education.

The Fisheries Council will meet on 26 November and Ministers will consider EC negotiations with third countries; and 1992 fish guide pricing. Ministers may also discuss technical conservation measures.

The Development Council will meet on 28 November and Ministers are likely to consider Presidency proposals for operational guide-lines on human rights and democracy for all EC aid; the Commission report on the progress of the programming of Lomé IV and on the evaluation of Community aid; the Presidency report on the fact finding missions to Ethiopia and Bangladesh; and the Commission proposals for the coordination and management of emergency aid. Ministers may discuss the EC aspects of the preparations for the 1992 United Nations conference on the environment and development; and the administration of the next five year programme for Asia and Latin America. Ministers may also discuss the rehabilitation plan for Angola; and the untying of aid. Ministers may consider Commission proposals for a new period of the programme for the stabilisation of export earnings; and a further pilot stage of the EC investment partners scheme.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Veterinary Medicines Directorate

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what change he is making to the framework document for the veterinary medicines directorate.

Mr. Gummer: As part of a recent reorganisation of the duties of senior officials in my Department, the responsibility of chairing the ownership board for the veterinary medicines directorate (VMD) has been transferred from the grade 2, food safety to the chief scientific adviser. This has necessitated a minor revision to paragraph 4.3 of the VMD framework document, copies of which amendment have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

ENVIRONMENT

Business and the Environment

Mr. Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has responded to the initial report of the Advisory Committee on Business and the Environment.

Mr. Heseltine: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and I have received a first report from the Advisory Committee on Business and the Environment, and we have today sent the chairman our response.

I shall place copies of both the report and our response in the Library of the House.

Buying Agency

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made towards establishing the Buying Agency as an executive agency.

Mr. Heseltine: I am pleased to announce that yesterday I established the Buying Agency as an executive agency within my Department. It is the fourth agency to be set up within the Department of the Environment under "next steps".

The Buying Agency—TBA for short—is a public sector procurement agency. Its primary purpose is to provide the means for Government departments to obtain a wide range of engineering, building, maintenance and domestic products and services under arrangements that provide quality assurance and value for money, and which comply with public purchasing policy and regulations. Other TBA customers include the national health service and other non-departmental public bodies.

Last year TBA became an independently accountable division of the Crown Suppliers, under whose wing it had operated for a number of years. Earlier this year, after the closure of its parent body, the House agreed that TBA should operate its business within its own trading fund. I am confident that the combination of this financial regime, the additional management freedoms resulting from TBA's new status as an executive agency and the scope it has to develop its business on sound commercial lines will enable the agency to deliver increasing improvements in its service to customers and better value for money to the taxpayer.

The agency is already well on the way to meeting the financial targets I have set to the end of 1991. These are:

—in respect of each financial year, to make a profit after interest in current cost terms of 1·5 per cent. of the total value of goods and services procured;

—to increase the total value of goods and services procured, in a customer driven away, from £97 million in 1990 to £111 million in 1991, and to progressively higher levels in successive years.

In addition, I also propose targets for improving the quality of service, in line with the aims of the citizens charter:

—to answer complaints on poor service/late delivery within three working days;

—to ensure quoted delivery times are met in 90 per cent. of cases.

I have appointed Mr. Roger Powell to be chief executive of TBA for the next three years. He will be directly accountable to me for the management and performance of the agency. I wish him and all the staff of The Buying Agency every success for the future.

The arrangements for the agency are described in full in its framework document, copies of which have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 4 November 1991

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Finance

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the estimated cost to local authorities of preparing for the council tax and the Government's plan for supporting this expenditure.

Mr. Portillo: We commissioned CSL management consultants to look into the likely costs of preparing for the council tax and they have advised that authorities in England will have to spend an estimated £156 million between now and 1 April 1993—mainly in 1992-93. I have placed a copy of the report in the Library. The Government have decided in 1992-93 to pay 75 per cent. grant, worth £86 million, in support of estimated revenue costs of £114·6 million and to issue supplementary credit approvals in support of capital expenditure of up to £41·2 million.

HEALTH

Office of Population Censuses and Surveys

Mr. Tracey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys is being considered for agency status.

Mr. Dorrell: The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys is now a candidate to become an agency under the Government's "next steps" policy during 1992-93.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Vietnamese Migrants

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Vietnamese migrants in Hong Kong.

Mr. Hurd: On 29 October, the British, Hong Kong and Vietnamese Governments signed a statement of understanding for the orderly repatriation from Hong Kong of Vietnamese illegal immigrants—that is, those who, having left Vietnam clandestinely, have been determined under the screening procedures monitored by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees not to be refugees.

The internationally agreed comprehensive plan of action provision that all those who are not refugees should return home will now be implemented in stages. Vietnamese who, having left Vietnam clandestinely, arrive in Hong Kong from 29 October, will be screened on arrival in accordance with the agreed UNHCR procedures and the provisions of the CPA and Hong Kong law. For those screened out, there will be a full appeals procedure conducted by an independent review board. The screening procedures will be monitored by the UNHCR who will have full access to the migrants throughout the process and will help asylum seekers to prepare appeals. Those migrants who are screened out and whose appeals fail or who decide not to appeal will be offered voluntary repatriation with a resettlement allowance. Only those who refuse this option will be returned under the new arrangement.

Now that the Government of Vietnam have accepted the principle of return of those who are not refugees to Vietnam under the CPA, we will be discussing with them the extension of the scheme to migrants who arrived in Hong Kong before 29 October.

The Vietnamese Government have guaranteed that no illegal immigrant who returns to Vietnam will face persecution. They will continue to facilitate the monitoring of all those who return, by the UNHCR and others, to ensure that these guarantees are fully respected. In the last two and a half years more than 11,000 Vietnamese migrants have returned voluntarily to Vietnam without a single substantiated case of persecution. We hope that in due course Members of Parliament will be able to visit Hong Kong and Vietnam to see how the return arrangements are working.

Aung San Suu Kyi

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has about Aung San Suu Kyi of the National League for Democracy in Burma and other detained leaders of the democratic movement in Burma.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: It is difficult to verify the number of political detainees in Burma held since the suppression of the democracy movement in 1988. Local estimates suggest the number may be around 2,000, including many hundreds of party workers from Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party. This total also includes at least 55 out of 485 Members of Parliament elected in the 1990 democratic elections, the results of which have been ignored. Of the leaders apart from Aung San Suu Kyi, the former NLD chairman U Tin U was sentenced to three years' hard labour in December 1989; U Kyi Maung, the former acting chairman, was initially given a three-year sentence in November 1990, subsequently extended a further 10 years; and U Nu, the former Prime Minister, remains under house arrest imposed in December 1989. We have repeatedly called in public statements for the release of all political detainees in Burma.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 5 November 1991

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the public opinion surveys carried out by, for, or on behalf of the Lord Chancellor's Department or the Law Officers since 11 July 1991.

The Attorney-General: One such survey has been carried out by the Lord Chancellor's Department since 11 July. This was an exit survey conducted in a sample of courts on the northern circuit by the north west legal services committee. It was commissioned in May 1991, and it was undertaken on various dates during the summer. In the survey the public were asked to answer a number of questions on the quality of the service and facilities that had been provided for them in the court.

No national public opinion survey has been conducted by any of the departments for which I am responsible since 11 July 1991. No records are held centrally of any local surveys that may have been conducted by area staff of the Crown prosecution service, and such information could be acquired only at disproportionate cost.

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Attorney-General if he will provide an up-to-date list of each television advertising campaign carried out, or to be carried out, by the Lord Chancellor's Department during 1991-92, and of each other publicity campaign costing more than £100,000, giving for each *(a)* the topic, *(b)* the commencement date, *(c)* the duration and *(d)* the advertising, promotional and public relations companies involved.

The Attorney-General: The Lord Chancellor's Department has no plans to carry out any television advertising campaigns during 1991-92, nor any individual publicity campaigns costing more than £100,000.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Attorney-General if he will give separate figures for spending by the Lord Chancellor's Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1991-92 and budgets for 1992-93.

The Attorney-General: The figures for the Lord Chancellor's Department, excluding staff costs, are as follows:

	1988-89 £	1989-90 £	1990-91 £	1991-92 £[1]
Television advertising	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Radio advertising	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Newspaper advertising	15,000	3,967	50,242	4,900
Other promotional material	32,500	31,208	77,968	69,550

[1] Estimated.

Figures for the budget for 1992-93 will not be available until after the autumn statement and after budgets have been finalised.

The breakdown of the amounts spent on respective areas and the amounts spent for the previous years can be obtained only at disproportionate cost, but the total expenditure, including staff costs, was:

	£
1984-85	135,730
1985-86	176,613
1986-87	148,020
1987-88	137,001

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Attorney-General whether the Lord Chancellor's Department has sent unsolicited direct mail as part of the distribution of publicity material.

The Attorney-General: The Lord Chancellor's Department has not sent unsolicited direct mail as part of the distribution of publicity material.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Attorney-General what was the total expenditure by the Lord Chancellor's Department on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1991-92 and budget for 1992-93.

The Attorney-General: Total expenditure on press and public relations excluding staff costs is as follows:

	£
1984-85	5,180
1985-86	13,253
1986-87	23,282
1987-88	34,500
1988-89	34,159
1989-90	33,616
1990-91	[1]36,960

[1] As revised

The revised 1990-91 figure was lower than anticipated because the Lord Chancellor's Department was not required to contribute to the Children Act publicity to the extent originally envisaged.

The amounts spent between 1979 and 1984 can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The estimate for 1991-92 is £63,450. This includes the Lord Chancellor's Department press office's additional responsibility for departmental leaflets, the increased cost of publicity to explain the role of the courts and the judiciary, to expand public understanding in areas where new legislation is proposed or implemented, or law reforms considered.

Figures for the budget for 1992-93 will not be available until after the autumn statement and after budgets have been finalised.

ENVIRONMENT

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the public opinion surveys carried out by his Department since 11 July.

Mr. Heseltine: The following surveys, carried out by my Department since 11 July 1991, include questions to individuals about their opinions:

Evaluation of the DOE "Wake-Up" leaflet.
Monitoring Housing Management Performance in Housing Associations and Local Authorities.
Survey of Household Budgets and Housing Costs.
Evaluation of Block Action.
Development Work for 1991 English House Condition Survey: *(a)* Dairy System *(b)* Pre-pilot.
National Survey on attitudes towards Environmental Noise (fieldwork in progress).
Energy Efficiency Campaign—Creative Development Research [Stage 1 and Stage 2] (jointly sponsored with the Department of Energy).
Evaluation of Energy Efficiency Campaign (jointly sponsored with the Department of Energy).

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what was the total expenditure by the Nature Conservancy Council on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1991-92 and budget for 1992-93;

(2) if he will give separate figures for spending by the Nature Conservancy Council on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1991-92 and budgets for 1992-93.

Mr. Heseltine: I have asked the chairman of the Nature Conservancy Council to write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) whether his Department has sent unsolicited direct mail as part of the distribution of publicity material;

(2) if he will give separate figures for spending by the Ordnance Survey on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1991-92 and budgets for 1992-93;

(3) what was the total expenditure by the Ordnance Survey on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1991-92 and budget for 1992-93.

Mr. Heseltine: I will ask the Director General of Ordnance Survey to reply to the hon. Member on behalf of his organisation.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide an up-to-date list of each television advertising campaign carried out, or to be carried out, by *(a)* the Department of the Environment, *(b)* Ordnance Survey, *(c)* the Nature Conservancy Council and *(d)* the Countryside Commission during 1991-92, and of each other publicity campaign costing more than £100,000, giving for each (i) the topic, (ii) the commencement date, (iii) the duration and (iv) the advertising, promotional and public relations companies involved.

Mr. Heseltine: My Department has carried out no television advertising during 1991-92 and has no plans to do so.

I gave the hon. Member information regarding my Department's expenditure on publicity campaigns costing more than £100,000 on 1 July 1991. The advertising company Collett, Dickenson, Pearce and Partners has been selected to undertake strategic and creative work for the joint campaign with the Department of Energy to promote home energy efficiency. The public relations firm Maxima has been selected to carry out promotional work for the campaign. The campaign begins today and is intended to run for at least three years.

I will ask the Director General of Ordnance Survey and the chairmen of the Nature Conservancy Council and the Countryside Commission to write to the hon. Member replying for their organisations.

Mr. Frank Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether his Department has sent unsolicited direct mail as part of the distribution of publicity material.

Mr. Heseltine: In May 1989, deliveries of a leaflet explaining the community charge were made to 19 million households in England. In January 1990, my Department sent leaflets to 1·6 million businesses giving details of the new business rate. In February 1991, a leaflet explaining the dangers of radon in houses and inviting householders to take advantage of free radon testing was delivered to 660,000 households in Devon and Cornwall.

From time to time, samples of the Department's publications are sent directly to interested bodies for information.

Local Authority Pension Scheme

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to equalise female contribution survivor benefits within the local authority superannuation pension scheme.

Mr. Heseltine: Regulations are being prepared to amend the local government superannuation scheme to provide equal survivor benefits. Subject to the necessary parliamentary procedures, the regulations will come into force as soon as possible.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the standard spending assessments for each education and social services authority for *(a)* education and *(b)* social services functions for the years 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92, together with a description of how those standard spending assessments were constructed.

Mr. Key: Standard spending assessments—SSAs—replaced grant-related expenditure assessments—GREs—in 1990-91. The education and social services SSAs for each relevant local authority in England are given in tables 2A, in £s million, and 2B, £s per adult, of the "Standard Spending Assessment Handbook 1990/91" and the "Standard Spending Assessment Handbook 1991/92".

The method used to calculate these SSAs is set out in "The Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England)" and "The Revenue Support Grant Distribution (Amendment) Report (England)". The 1989-90 GREs for education and social services are shown in table C.3.1 of "The Technical Handbook of Grant-Related Expenditure 1989-90" and the method of calculation is described in "The Rate Support Grant Report (England) 1989/90". All these documents are in the Library.

Press and Publicity Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether any member of his Department's press and publicity staff accompanied him in Blackpool during the Conservative party conference.

Mr. Heseltine: No.

Thames House, Millbank

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether planning consent was sought by his Department from Westminster council prior to building the eight-storey block between the arches of Thames House, Millbank.

Mr. Yeo: Planning consultation under DOE circular 18/84 took place between the Property Services Agency and Westminster city council between September 1989 and November 1989. On 9 November 1989, Westminster city council confirmed that it had decided to raise no objections to the proposals put forward, in respect of both listed building consent and planning consent.

Sports Clubs (Rates)

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many non-profit making sports clubs in England applied for rate relief for each of the financial years 1979-80 to 1991-92 and as a total over the same period; and how many of these clubs were granted rate relief of *(a)* 25 per cent. or under, *(b)* 25 to 50 per cent., *(c)* 50 to 65 per cent., *(d)* 65 to 90 per cent. and *(e)* 90 to 100 per cent.

Mr. Key: The information requested is not available. However, the results of a recent departmental survey, based on returns received from 81 per cent. of local authorities, reveal that more non-profit making recreational clubs received more relief in 1990-91 than in 1989-90, the last year of general rates. The table shows the number of properties occupied by non-profit making recreational clubs receiving relief in the two years and the percentage amounts of relief given.

Year	*Number of properties receiving relief*	*Number of properties granted relief of:*			
		less than 20 per cent.	*21-50 per cent.*	*51-80 per cent.*	*more than 80 per cent.*
1989-90	8,500	300	5,200	1,100	1,900
1990-91	10,200	700	3,900	2,800	2,900

Figures may not sum due to rounding.

Right to Buy

Sir William Shelton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he intends to take on the performance of Lambeth in processing right-to-buy applications.

Mr. Yeo: Lambeth is one of several London authorities where large numbers of tenants have experienced delays in the processing of their right-to-buy applications and who have thus been denied their statutory rights. The performance of all London authorities is monitored annually, and the poorest performers are required to submit monthly reports. In March 1989 the Government introduced procedures which enabled tenants to have rent counted as advance payments towards purchase of their home if sale was delayed. Through this measure, the tenant gains some recompense and the authority loses part of the receipt on sale.

Following these measures the number of delays in monitored authorities has fallen dramatically, from 15,457 in March 1989 to 3,712 in September 1990. Most London authorities now have only a handful of cases, if any, where tenants are being delayed in the exercise of their statutory right. Only two authorities are still subject to monthly monitoring—Lambeth and Hackney.

Lambeth accounted for 40 per cent. of the total cases delayed in London in September 1990. On the basis of the most recent return, Lambeth still has 843 cases out of time, which is three times as many as the next worst authority. Not only are right-to-buy applicants continuing to suffer, but Lambeth tenants and residents as a whole pay for this inefficiency through the receipts forgone on delayed sales. This is clearly unacceptable. On 29 October I therefore invited the leader of Lambeth council and his senior relevant officials to meet me to discuss this situation and what needs to be done to bring Lambeth's right-to-buy performance to an acceptable level.

Local Government (Competitive Tendering)

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will publish his proposals for extending the requirement for compulsory competitive tendering for local authority services.

Mr. Portillo: I am today publishing "Competing for Quality—Competition in the Provision of Local Services", in order to start the process of consulting widely on the Government's proposals for clarifying and extending the requirement for compulsory competitive tendering for local authority services. The citizens charter underlines our belief that the widest possible application of competition will bring benefits to the local taxpayer and the consumer. The consultation paper, therefore, seeks to tighten up on anti-competitive behaviour so that private firms have a fair chance to compete for local authority contracts, and explains how we propose to extend compulsory competitive tendering to a wide range of professional and technical activities. Copies are being placed in the Library.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total expenditure by the Countryside Commission on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1991-92 and budget for 1992-93.

Mr. Heseltine: I have asked the chairman of the Countryside Commission to write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

TRANSPORT

Transpennine Road Crossing

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he now proposes to publish the report on the consultation on a possible transpennine road crossing.

Mr. Chope: As soon as possible.

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give separate figures for the spending by his Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1991-92 and budgets for 1992-93.

Mr. McLoughlin: The spending by my Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year and the estimated spending in 1991-92 is as follows:

	Television £,000	*Radio* £,000	*Newspaper* £,000	*Other* £,000
1979-80	4,141	62	105	1,532
1980-81	3,502	336	129	1,737
1981-82	3,615	6	410	1,457
1982-83	2,319	98	816	1,415
1983-84	4,655	22	334	1,488
1984-85	1,723	207	476	2,873
1985-86	70	858	834	4,026
1986-87	72	520	738	4,489
1987-88	2,310	50	140	3,010
1988-89	1,867	110	365	3,367
1989-90	1,930	233	982	3,289
1990-91	3,122	145	833	3,962
1991-92	3,414	306	794	5,053

Detailed decisions have not yet been taken on expenditure by media for 1992-93, but the overall figure is expected to be approximately £9·5 million.

The increase in expenditure this year is largely due to the child road safety campaign; other major areas of expenditure include campaigns on drink driving and rear seat belts.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will provide an up-to-date list of each television advertising campaign carried out, or to be carried out, by his Department during 1991-92, and of each other publicity campaign costing more than £100,000, giving for each *(a)* the topic, *(b)* the commencement date, *(c)* the duration and *(d)* the advertising, promotional and public relations companies involved.

Mr. McLoughlin: The following television advertising campaigns have been carried out or are planned by my Department in 1991-92:

Topic	*Commencement date*	*Duration*	*Company*
Child road safety —cycle helmets	23 April	3 weeks	Miller and Leeves WAHT
—driving speeds	21 October	3 weeks	DMB and B
Drinking and driving	3 December	4 weeks	DMB and B

The following publicity campaigns costing more than £100,000 have been or are being carried out in 1991-92:

Topic	*Commencement date*	*Duration*	*Company*
New rear seat belt legislation	1 June	4 weeks	Miller and Leeves WAHT
Drinking and driving	1 July	4 weeks	Miller and Leeves WAHT
Coastal safety	—	Ongoing	None
Transport and the environment	6 July	Ongoing	None
Safety on the Move exhibition programme	—	Ongoing	None
Road Traffic Act	15 August	Ongoing	None

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the total expenditure by his Department on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1991-92 and budget for 1992-93.

Mr. McLoughlin: The total expenditure on the Department's press and public relations office since 1984-85 is as follows:

	£
1984-85	339,426
1985-86	354,393
1986-87	363,446
1987-88	389,473
1988-89	437,950
1989-90	451,214
1990-91	517,905
[1]1991-92	565,336
[2]1992-93	590,776

[1] Estimate.
[2] Budget.

These figures cover the overall costs of running the press office, calculated using the ready reckoner for staff-related costs.

Before 1984-85 the information division was a common service of the Departments of Transport and the Environment and the Property Services Agency.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether his Department has sent unsolicited direct mail as part of the distribution of publicity material.

Mr. McLoughlin: No.

A12

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement detailing his plans for the future of the A12 trunk road in Suffolk in respect of dualling and bypasses; and the latest timetable for each section.

Mr. Chope: The proposals to upgrade the A12 in Suffolk north of Ipswich to a two-lane dual carriageway have been split into five schemes. The latest timetables for each section are as follows. The whole programme of improvements should be completed by the end of the decade.

(1) Martlesham to Wickham Market:—Preferred route decision Autumn 1992.
(2) Wickham Market to Saxmundham Bypass:—Publication of draft orders Summer 1992.
(3) Saxmundham Bypass dualling:—Publication of draft orders Spring 1993.
(4) Saxmundham Bypass—South of Wrentham:—Preferred route decision late 1993.
(5) South of Wrentham-Kessingland:—Preferred route decision late 1992.

Barrow Crossings

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has had over the Health and Safety Executive decision to take away barrow crossings at stations.

Mr. Freeman: The Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate supports British Rail's decision to remove barrow crossings from locations where they are no longer needed because of the risk of unauthorised use which presents a safety hazard, particularly at unmanned stations and at those where there is third rail electrification. A few letters have been received from people who formerly used them.

Public Expenditure

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish an updated version of table 7.18 of chapter 7 of the 1990-91 to 1992-93 public expenditure White Paper, Cm. 1007, extending the series there up to date.

Mr. Chope: The figures are published in table 1 of "National road maintenance condition survey. Report on the 1990 survey". A copy is in the Library. Figures previously published in Cm. 1007 have been revised following a review of the way the index is calculated, carried out in particular to ensure that the cost weightings used take account of current maintenance practices.

Bypasses (Compensation)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give the number of claims for compensation for noise and disturbance arising from the construction of *(a)* the A696 Woolsington bypass and *(b)* the A1 Newcastle western bypass; and how many of those claims had been settled by 1 October.

Mr. Chope: The number of claims under part I of the Land Compensation Act 1973 received in respect of the A696 Woolsington bypass and A1 Newcastle western bypass are 104 and 550 respectively. None of these claims had been settled by 1 October.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the public opinion surveys carried out by his Department since 11 July 1991.

Mr. McLoughlin: My Department regularly commissions surveys. A list of all surveys is maintained, but it is not possible to identify easily from this list those surveys which include questions of opinion. The answer on 11 July 1991 to the hon. Member referred to 101 surveys of all types reported to the Department's survey control unit in 1990. A further 69 have been reported since and I am sending a list of these to the hon. Member.

Press and Publicity Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether any member of his Department's press and publicity staff accompanied him in Blackpool during the Conservative party conference.

Mr. McLoughlin: No. Some officials came to Blackpool to discuss departmental business and then left.

Channel Tunnel

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the estimated number of *(a)* private cars and *(b)* lorries entering and leaving the channel tunnel portal at Folkestone from the Eurotunnel shuttle service in (i) 1993, (ii) 1998 and (iii) 2003.

Mr. Freeman: The latest available figures are contained in a report published in August 1990 by the cross-channel traffic group. The report provides estimates of the total number of cars and goods vehicles using the tunnel on an average annual day. The table shows the figures multiplied by 365:

	Cars	*Goods vehicles*
1993	3,176,595	547,500
2003	4,352,990	888,045

No estimate was made for 1998.

Vehicle Air Bags

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what studies his Department has undertaken to examine the feasibility of introducing air bags into vehicles for safety purposes.

Mr. Chope: The Department is currently studying the experiences of USA and Canada in the application of air

bags, in both research conditions and production vehicles. Information from this study will be considered in the development of proposals for an improved European standard for vehicle occupant protection in frontal impacts.

There is no restriction on the introduction and use of air-bags in cars in the United Kingdom. It would not be sensible, however, to make fitment compulsory in the absence of an agreed European standard. Meanwhile, seat belts, which are both effective and cheaper to fit than air bags, will remain the main secondary safety feature in vehicles in the United Kingdom.

Disabled Rail Passengers

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it part of British Rail's quality of service objectives that all British Rail stations are fully accessible to disabled passengers.

Mr. McLoughlin: British Rail already does much to make its network accessible to those with disabilities. I expect BR's commitment to improving the existing arrangements to be set out in the forthcoming BR passengers charter.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultations he has had with British Rail over the funding of disabled access to stations.

Mr. McLoughlin: The funding of access to stations for disabled people is not considered as a separate issue. Rather, British Rail is expected to take account of the needs of people with disabilities whenever it plans the modification or refurbishment of stations.

Road Fatalities

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people were killed and how many people were injured in road accidents by age group and sex in *(a)* the Greater London area and *(b)* central London in each of the last 15 years.

Mr. Chope: The information requested is given in the tables. It is given for the years 1979 to 1990 only, as information for earlier years is not readily available. It is possible to break down the information only to the level of London boroughs. Data for the greater London area are for all the London boroughs, while figures for the cities of London and Westminster are given separately to cover central London.

Casualties killed in road accidents in London: By age and sex: 1979 to 1990

	Age 0-15			Age 16-59			Age 60 and over			All ages[2]		
	Male	Female	Total[1]	Male	Female	Total[1]	Male	Female	Total[1]	Male	Female	Total[1]
1979												
Greater London	37	18	55	260	71	331	113	100	213	410	192	602
Westminster/City of London	—	—	—	14	3	17	7	2	9	21	5	26
1980												
Greater London	41	16	57	234	59	293	110	95	205	388	170	558
Westminster/City of London	1	—	1	5	6	11	5	3	8	11	9	20
1981												
Greater London	30	14	44	235	60	295	104	88	192	374	163	537
Westminster/City of London	—	—	—	11	5	16	2	1	3	13	6	19
1982												
Greater London	39	14	53	240	74	314	87	80	167	377	176	553
Westminster/City of London	1	—	1	11	3	14	3	3	6	15	7	22
1983												
Greater London	38	14	52	219	61	280	100	97	197	366	175	541
Westminster/City of London	—	—	—	5	3	8	3	8	11	8	13	21
1984												
Greater London	32	15	47	237	54	291	93	104	197	390	181	571
Westminster/City of London	1	—	1	11	5	16	4	8	12	18	15	33
1985												
Greater London	31	5	36	218	60	278	100	76	176	351	142	493
Westminster/City of London	—	—	—	9	3	12	4	4	8	13	7	20
1986												
Greater London	20	8	28	238	62	300	106	78	184	372	148	520
Westminster/City of London	1	—	1	14	4	18	3	4	7	18	8	26
1987												
Greater London	23	10	33	207	52	259	86	74	160	319	137	456
Westminster/City of London	—	—	—	16	4	20	6	5	11	22	9	31
1988												
Greater London	30	13	43	188	55	243	77	60	137	310	136	446
Westminster/City of London	1	—	1	10	4	14	3	2	5	15	6	21
1989												
Greater London	34	9	43	196	46	242	77	74	151	328	132	460
Westminster/City of London	3	—	3	6	4	10	5	2	7	14	7	21

	Age 0-15			Age 16-59			Age 60 and over			All ages[2]		
	Male	Female	Total[1]	Male	Female	Total[1]	Male	Female	Total[1]	Male	Female	Total[1]
1990												
Greater London	20	7	27	176	39	215	83	56	139	300	108	408
Westminster/City of London	—	—	—	9	1	10	2	5	7	12	7	19

[1] Includes sex not reported.
[2] Includes age not recorded.

Casualties injured[1] in road accidents in London: By age and sex: 1979 to 1990

	Age 0-15			Age 16-59			Age 60 and over			All ages[3]		
	Male	Female	Total[2]	Male	Female	Total[2]	Male	Female	Total[2]	Male	Female	Total[2]
1979												
Greater London	5,069	3,061	8,170	26,449	12,563	39,067	2,753	3,171	5,935	37,183	20,594	58,076
Westminster/City of London	142	111	255	2,090	1,111	3,207	237	265	502	2,771	1,684	4,484
1980												
Greater London	4,764	2,666	7,480	25,274	11,967	37,320	2,806	3,091	5,917	35,451	19,411	55,238
Westminster/City of London	126	77	204	1,927	991	2,921	233	230	465	2,532	1,470	4,023
1981												
Greater London	4,580	2,548	7,193	24,555	12,112	36,738	2,597	2,976	5,589	34,226	19,220	53,837
Westminster/City of London	130	87	222	2,029	1,008	3,044	226	223	449	2,617	1,477	4,129
1982												
Greater London	4,711	2,667	7,378	27,527	13,486	41,013	2,813	3,172	5,985	36,884	20,424	57,308
Westminster/City of London	138	68	206	2,209	1,111	3,320	245	248	493	2,798	1,582	4,390
1983												
Greater London	4,574	2,486	7,060	24,537	12,651	37,188	2,657	2,989	5,646	33,514	19,149	52,663
Westminster/City of London	125	72	197	1,977	1,101	3,078	232	259	491	2,497	1,559	4,056
1984												
Greater London	4,597	2,567	7,164	24,524	12,724	37,248	2,613	3,129	5,742	33,659	19,641	53,300
Westminster/City of London	126	82	208	2,064	1,064	3,128	238	257	495	2,637	1,546	4,183
1985												
Greater London	4,145	2,357	6,502	23,206	12,306	35,512	2,459	2,923	5,382	32,050	18,926	50,976
Westminster/City of London	140	71	211	1,998	1,051	3,049	222	225	447	2,564	1,462	4,026
1986												
Greater London	3,943	2,323	6,266	23,257	12,738	35,995	2,381	2,859	5,240	31,774	19,316	51,090
Westminster/City of London	117	72	189	1,917	985	2,902	197	224	421	2,445	1,409	3,854
1987												
Greater London	3,581	2,240	5,821	22,475	12,749	35,224	2,182	2,593	4,775	30,140	18,858	48,998
Westminster/City of London	88	70	158	1,901	951	2,852	183	205	388	2,355	1,352	3,707
1988												
Greater London	3,631	2,330	5,961	22,628	13,016	35,644	2,243	2,695	4,938	30,400	19,268	49,668
Westminster/City of London	105	72	177	1,948	956	2,904	181	204	385	2,424	1,344	3,768
1989												
Greater London	3,850	2,422	6,272	23,895	13,748	37,643	2,286	2,699	4,985	32,045	20,274	52,319
Westminster/City of London	117	66	183	2,054	954	3,008	181	203	384	2,584	1,371	3,955
1990												
Greater London	3,864	2,408	6,272	23,273	13,598	36,871	2,284	2,686	4,970	31,399	20,064	51,463
Westminster/City of London	101	72	173	1,871	856	2,727	150	163	313	2,328	1,229	3,557

[1] Excludes those killed.
[2] Includes sex not reported.
[3] Includes age not recorded.

Crash Cushions

Mr. Day: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will adopt the draft CEN specification for the use of crash cushions in the United Kingdom as soon as possible.

Mr. Chope: Working group 1 of CEN technical committee TC226 is preparing draft standards covering terminology, performance classes, testing methods and test acceptance criteria for vehicle safety restraint systems, including crash cushions.

Further examination is taking place of the required testing criteria for crash cushions. This will delay the preparation of the draft standard covering performance classes for this type of device.

When these standards are agreed, the United Kingdom will consider their adoption.

Edinburgh-Aberdeen Line

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it the policy of Her Majesty's Government to electrify the Edinburgh-Aberdeen railway line.

Mr. Freeman: It is for the British Railways Board to determine investment priorities within the funds made available to it by the Government. It is not for Ministers to tell BR when a specific project should be brought forward.

CIVIL SERVICE

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he will list the public opinion surveys carried out by his Department since 15 July 1991.

Mr. Renton: No public opinion surveys have been carried out by my office since 15 July 1991.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Rights of the Child Convention

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made towards ratification of the United Nations convention on the rights of the child; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Considerable progress has been made towards ratification of the United Nations convention on the rights of the child. We hope to be in a position to ratify in the coming months.

Western Sahara

Sir Peter Blaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the latest position regarding the United Nations efforts to secure a solution to the problems of the western Sahara.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A ceasefire in the territory took effect on 6 September. A referendum on the future of the territory, envisaged in the United Nations Secretary General's plan, is scheduled for January 1992. The United Nations mission supervising the referendum—MINURSO—has been deployed. It is now drawing up a list of voters. The United Kingdom is contributing to the cost of MINURSO and has provided 15 military observers.

Press and Publicity Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether any member of his Department's press and publicity staff accompanied him in Blackpool during the Conservative party conference.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: No.

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether his Department has sent unsolicited direct mail as part of the distribution of publicity material.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: No.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will provide an up-to-date list of each television advertising campaign carried out, or to be carried out, by his Department during 1991-92, and of each other publicity campaign costing more than £100,000, giving for each *(a)* the topic, *(b)* the commencement date, *(c)* the duration and *(d)* the advertising, promotional and public relations companies involved.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I have nothing to add to the answers I gave to the hon. Member on 1 July at column *24* and 11 July at columns *421-22*.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give separate figures for the spending by his Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1991-92 and budgets for 1992-93.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Total expenditure by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on advertising and other promotional material for the years 1979-80 to 1990-91, latest estimates for 1991-92 and budget provisions for 1992-93 are:

	FCO Diplomatic wing £	*FCO ODA wing* £
1979-80	100,266	214,739
1980-81	116,532	145,697
1981-82	162,998	207,964
1982-83	229,711	135,506
1983-84	205,247	252,691
1984-85	149,932	234,050
1985-86	160,535	271,084
1986-87	335,754	228,347
1987-88	195,000	351,000
1988-89	289,184	689,631
1989-90	395,842	1,066,447
1990-91	926,610	902,000
1991-92	638,000	1,031,000
1992-93	1,063,000	1,057,000

These figures cannot be disaggregated to identify the medium used without incurring disproportionate cost.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total expenditure by his Department on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1991-92 and budget for 1992-93.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The information is as follows:

Total expenditure by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on press and public relations from 1983-84 to 1990-91, latest estimates for 1991-92 and budget provisions for 1992-93 are (£ million)

	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93
Payments to Central Office of Information for overseas information material and related activities	17·4	18·8	18·3	18·7	19·2	18·3	18·1	15·7	12·3	12·0
Other information services	0·9	0·8	0·9	0·7	0·9	0·9	3·3	5·8	4·8	4·9
Running costs of Diplomatic Wing Information/News Department	1·8	1·4	1·9	1·9	2·0	1·8	2·4	3·6	4·1	4·3
Running costs of ODA Wing Information Department	0·3	0·3	0·3	0·2	0·2	0·3	0·4	0·4	0·4	0·4
Costs of information staff at overseas posts	12·4	12·8	13·6	14·6	17·6	17·5	18·8	23·2	24·8	25·9
Total	32·8	34·1	35·0	36·1	39·9	38·8	43·0	48·7	46·4	47·5

Figures for the period before 1983-84 are not available on a comparable basis.

Vietnam

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have been held with the United States Government about joint efforts to promote and monitor observance of human rights in Vietnam and the implications for Her Majesty's Government's policy on repatriation of the boat people in Hong Kong.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We remain in close touch with the United States Government about the situation in Vietnam, and welcome the recent Vietnamese reaffirmation that no Vietnamese migrant returning to Vietnam will be persecuted. The Vietnamese have also agreed to continue to facilitate the monitoring of conditions of all returnees to Vietnam by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the public opinion surveys carried out by his Department since 11 July 1991.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: One such poll has been conducted.

Diplomatic Missions (Parking Fines)

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish up-to-date figures recording the number of unpaid parking fines incurred by each diplomatic mission in London in the first six months of the current year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The information requested by my hon. Friend is given in the table. The table also includes those international organisations which incurred unpaid fines. The figures may be reduced by late payments.

The total of 3,000 for the first six months of 1991 represents a 22 per cent. reduction from the figure of 3,842 for the same period in 1990. It compares with nearly 67,000 in the first six months of 1984 before publication of the 1985 White Paper. We welcome this further reduction in unpaid parking fines that has been achieved during 1991 and appreciate the co-operation of diplomatic missions since the introduction of the parking policy. We shall continue to monitor carefully the level of unpaid fines and bring pressure to bear on diplomatic missions to reduce this still further.

Unpaid Parking Fines

Diplomatic Mission	January-June 1991	January-June 1990
Saudi Arabia	194	176
Soviet Union	167	171
Kuwait	165	100
UAE	140	104
Poland	115	344
Cameroon	110	96
Israel	92	62
Greece	80	70
Pakistan	78	120
Morocco	78	87
Thailand	77	67
China	74	57
Turkey	73	49
Korea	71	74
France	69	53
Jordan	62	55
Bulgaria	61	52
Ghana	59	20
Sudan	51	110
Nigeria	47	29
Egypt	44	133
Oman	42	31
Cote d'Ivoire	41	105
Zambia	38	68
Canada	35	27
Brazil	33	27
Portugal	33	34
Iraq, Interests Sec.	32	77
FRG	30	41
Cyprus	30	60
Barbados	27	25
Yugoslavia	27	70
Guyana	26	11
Brunei	25	47
Tanzania	25	5
India	24	74
Gambia	23	24
Hungary	22	58
Spain	22	61
Guatemala	22	9
Gabon	22	13
Bahrain	21	7
Romania	20	31
Italy	20	21
Zimbabwe	19	20
Sierra Leone	18	30
Tunisia	18	13
Bangladesh	18	27
Uruguay	17	18
Jamaica	15	25
Algeria	15	21

Diplomatic Mission	January-June 1991	January-June 1990
Yemen	14	12
Ethiopia	14	12
Finland	13	9
Chile	12	10
Honduras	12	9
Malaysia	11	65
Venezuela	10	7
Malawi	10	5
Myanmar	10	7
Zaire	10	12
Liberia	10	18
Vietnam	9	12
Iran	9	0
Togo	8	5
Panama	8	2
Cuba	8	14
Japan	7	18
Czechoslovakia	7	16
Trinidad	7	5
Peru	7	1
Bolivia	7	2
Austria	6	9
USA	6	8
Uganda	5	5
Somalia	5	9
Mongolia	5	8
Mauritius	5	13
Lesotho	5	8
Eastern Caribbean States	5	2
Sweden	4	2
South Africa	4	1
Seychelles	4	25
Paraguay	4	7
Lebanon	4	5
Belgium	4	11
Australia	3	4
Syria	3	0
Singapore	3	4
Norway	3	9
Luxembourg	3	3
Indonesia	3	16
Fiji	3	0
Argentina	2	0
Mozambique	2	0
Philippines	2	19
Papua New Guinea	2	0
Netherlands	2	3
Iceland	2	8
Bahamas	2	0
Mexico	2	3
Swaziland	1	1
Sri Lanka	1	4
Nepal	1	1
Malta	1	0
Ireland	1	6
Ecuador	1	7
Costa Rica	1	0
Qatar	0	111
Angola	0	55
Denmark	0	2
Senegal	0	8
Antigua	0	0
Tonga	0	1
Afghanistan	0	2
Switzerland	0	0
Botswana	0	3
Belize	0	0
Nicaragua	0	11
New Zealand	0	0
Kenya	0	12
Grenada	0	0
El Salvador	0	0
Dominica	0	4
Colombia	0	0
Benin	0	0
International Organisations		
Commonwealth Secretariat	13	24
Cocoa	3	3
INMARSAT	1	0
IMO	1	0
EC	1	0
WEU	1	0
UN	0	0
Coffee	0	1
Sugar	0	0
	3,000	3,842

NATIONAL FINANCE

Private Health Insurance (Tax Relief)

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what is the estimated level of deadweight on tax relief for private health insurance;

(2) what is the total cumulative cost of the tax relief for private health insurance;

(3) for each year of the scheme's existence, what is *(a)* the number of people receiving tax relief for private health insurance, *(b)* the number of these that are pensioners and *(c)* the cost per pensioner for whom the tax relief has been claimed.

Mr. Maude: Of those cases benefiting from tax relief for private medical insurance in 1990-91, the proportion not previously covered by this form of insurance is not known, but is thought to be relatively small. The estimated cost of the relief in respect of 1990-91 was £55 million and for 1991-92 is expected to be about £60 million.

In 1990-91 relief was available in respect of about 330,000 contracts covering about 600,000 people aged over 60. The revenue cost per insured person was about £90.

Unemployment

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the full cost including revenues forgone to the Exchequer of every extra 100,000 unemployed people in *(a)* 1991-92 and *(b)* 1992-93.

Mr. Meller: A rise of 100,000 in unemployment is estimated directly to add around £305 million to benefit expenditure in 1991-92 and £325 million to benefit expenditure in 1992-93 as shown in table 24 of the DSS Departmental Report, Cm 1514. Estimates of the effects on tax receipts and public finances as a whole would depend on the assumptions made.

Public Expenditure

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will publish the figures in table 7.3 in Cm. 1520, including the latest estimated outturn for 1990-91, *(a)* in cash prices, *(b)* in 1990-91 prices and *(c)* as a percentage of gross domestic product;

(2) if he will publish the figures in table 7.2 in Cm. 1520, including the latest estimated outturn for 1990-91, with a back series to 1978-79 *(a)* in cash prices, *(b)* in 1990-91 prices and *(c)* as a percentage of gross domestic product.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested is not currently available. Updated versions of the two tables will be included in the "Statistical Supplement to the 1991 Autumn Statement" which is due to be published at the end of January 1992. Figures for the years 1978-79 to 1984-85 on a basis consistent with the figures given in table 7.2 of the "Statistical Supplement to the 1990 Autumn Statement", Cm. 1520, could be provided only at disproportionate costs.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the figures for the public sector borrowing requirement/public sector debt repayment for each year back to 1978-79, *(a)* including privatisation proceeds, *(b)* excluding privatisation proceeds and *(c)* both of these as a percentage of gross domestic product.

Mr. Mellor: The figures are in the table.

	PSBR		*PSBR excluding privatisation proceeds*	
	£ million	*as percentage of GDP*[1]	*£ million*	*as percentage of GDP*[1]
1978-79	9,174	5·4	9,174	5·4
1979-80	9,926	4·9	10,303	5·0
1980-81	12,519	5·4	12,729	5·5
1981-82	8,631	3·4	9,124	3·6
1982-83	8,904	3·2	9,359	3·3
1983-84	9,678	3·2	10,817	3·6
1984-85	10,134	3·1	12,184	3·7
1985-86	5,622	1·6	8,329	2·3
1986-87	3,559	0·9	8,019	2·1
1987-88	−3,406	−0·8	1,734	0·4
1988-89	−14,657	−3·1	−7,584	−1·6
1989-90	−7,932	−1·6	−3,777	−0·7
1990-91	−472	−0·1	4,837	0·9

(negative numbers indicate debt repayment).
[1] Adjusted for the abolition of domestic rates.

Books (VAT)

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent proposals have been made by the European Commission concerning the rate of value added tax levied on books; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: At the 24 June meeting of ECOFIN, agreement was reached that member states which apply zero rates of VAT will be able to retain them, during a transitional period to December 1996, provided that they were in force on 1 January 1991 and are in accordance with Community law. The current zero rating of books is, therefore, safeguarded until at least December 1996, without prejudice to the position thereafter.

Incomes

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table giving the percentage increase in real terms in *(a)* income from employment, *(b)* income from self-employment, *(c)* rent, dividends, interest, *(d)* social security benefits and *(e)* personal disposable income after deduction of taxes and interest between1978-79 and 1990-91 giving the contribution of each towards personal disposable income in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maude: There are no official estimates of individual components of personal disposable income measured at constant prices. Between financial years 1978-79 and 1990-91 real personal disposable income as a whole increased by 41·6 per cent. Estimates of the various components expressed as percentages of personal disposable income, measured at current prices, are given in the table.

	As percentage of real personal disposable income	
	1978-79	*1990-91*
Income from employment	86·6	82·5
Income from self-employment	12·0	14·8
Rent, dividends and interest (net)	11·1	14·7
Social security benefits	13·7	12·8

Parent-Teacher Associations

Mr. Paice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer under what circumstances fund- raising by parent-teacher associations and similar bodies for use by schools would become liable to VAT.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Only those organisations whose turnover is in excess of £35,000 per annum are required to register and account for tax on their activities.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Vertebrate Animals

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to sign the European convention for the protection of vertebrate animals; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: We have signed the convention and hope to ratify it shortly. The Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 fully complies with the convention and in a number of ways exceeds its requirements.

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give separate figures for spending by the office of the Data Protection Registrar on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1991-92 and budgets for 1992-93.

Mrs. Rumbold: For the years up to 1991-92, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend on 8 May 1991 at columns *483-84*, save that the newspaper advertisting budget for this financial year has been revised from £50,000 to £195,000. I understand that the budgets for 1992-93 have not yet been determined.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide an up-to-date list of each television advertising campaign carried out, or to be carried out, by *(a)* the Home Office and *(b)* the Metropolitan police during 1991-92, and of each other publicity campaign costing more than £100,000, giving for each (i) the topic, (ii) the commencement date, (iii) the duration and (iv) the advertising, promotional and public relations companies involved.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Details of Home Office television campaigns and each other publicity campaign costing more than £100,000 during 1991-92 are as follows.

Television advertising

	Start date	Duration	Companies involved
Crime Prevention (General Awareness)	1 April 1991	19 days	Collett Dickenson Pearce Advertising; Clarke Hooper Consulting Promotions
Crime Prevention (Car Security)	12 January 1992	N.A. Media plan not yet devised	League Shafron Davis Chick Advertising; Clarke Hooper Consulting Promotions
Fire Safety (Smoke Alarms ownership)	January or February 1992	6 weeks	FCO Advertising
Absent Voting Rights	When a General Election is announced	2-3 days	FCO Advertising

Non-Television publicity campaigns costing more than £100,000

		Start date	Duration	Companies involved
Electoral Registration		Mid-September 1991	1 month	FCO Advertising
Civil Protection Magazine		N.A.	Every quarter	N.A. (Home Office/COI publication)
Police Recruitment	Graduate:	1 September 1991	4 months	Riley Advertising
	Ethnic:	1 April 1991	3 weeks	Riley Advertising
Police (Special Constable Recruitment)		31 July 1991	3 months	Riley Advertising
Crime Prevention (General Awareness, Press, Poster and Radio Advertising)		1 April 1991	19 days	Collett Dickenson Pearce Advertising; Clarke Hooper Consulting Promotions
Crime Prevention (Car Security, Press, Poster and Radio Advertising)		12 February 1992	N.A. Media plan not yet devised	League Shafron Davis Chick Advertising; Clarke Hooper Consulting Promotions
Fire Prevention and Safety		A range of publicity material is available all year round		None
Passport renewal		October 1991	6 weeks	FCO Advertising
Prison Service Recruitment		January 1992	3 months	Riley Advertising

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether his Department has sent unsolicited direct mail as part of the distribution of publicity material.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: My Department has not sent unsolicited direct mail as part of the distribution of publicity material.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total expenditure by his Department on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1991-92 and budget for 1992-93.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The full cost of staff, accommodation and administration for the Home Office press office from 1979-80 to 1990-91 was:

	£
1979-80	283,140
1980-81	392,532
1981-82	381,799
1982-83	424,290
1983-84	516,362
1984-85	560,512
1985-86	606,996
1986-87	548,136
1987-88	599,282
1988-89	674,945
1989-90	715,646
1990-91	786,519

Notes:

1. Figures supplied before 1986-87 were the costs estimated by the Treasury. After devolved budgets the estimates are based on Home Office costs.
2. Press Office figures include the costs for staff, accommodation and administration costs.

The estimated cost for 1991-92 is £800,275.

The budget for 1992-93 has not been confirmed but the estimate is for the same amount of staff and the projected figure is £832,285.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give separate figures for the spending by his Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1991-92 and budgets for 1992-93.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Figures for expenditure on advertising and other promotional material for the years from 1986-87 to 1990-91 are as follows:

Year	TV advertising £ million	Radio advertising £ million	Newspaper advertising £ million	Other promotional material £ million	Total £ million
1986-87	Total advertising = 5·0			1·40	6·40
1987-88	Total advertising = 4·7			2·10	6·80
1988-89	Total advertising = 5·4			2·80	8·20
1989-90	Total advertising = 5·5			3·70	9·20
1990-91	2·024	0·109	3·595	6·75	12·47
1991-92 estimate	1·131	0·236	2·172	6·46	11·89

Note: £1·9 million for crime prevention remains to be committed. 1992-93 cannot yet estimate

It would not be possible to provide more detailed information on advertising except at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total expenditure by the office of the Data Protection Registrar on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1991-92 and budget for 1992-93.

Mrs. Rumbold: For the years up to 1991-92, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend on 3 May 1991 at column *339*. I understand that the budget for 1992-93 has not yet been determined.

Murderers

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his general policy to release the relevant medical records of convicted murderers prior to their release.

Mrs. Rumbold: No.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all those convicted murderers since 1979 who have been released from prison and subsequently were convicted for another murder.

Mrs. Rumbold: I assume that the question relates to convicted murderers released since 1979. There have been five: J. W. Charlton; K. Pollard; J. Johnson; M. N. Robinson; and M. J. Green.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what factors were considered in the decision to release convicted murderers from prison after serving sentence for a first murder.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend may release a life sentence prisoner only if recommended to do so by the Parole Board and after consultation with the Lord Chief Justice and the trial judge if available. The main factors which are taken into account are whether the prisoner has been detained long enough to satisfy the requirements of retribution and deterrence for the offence, and whether it is considered safe to release him to the community.

Party Conferences

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a table showing the cost of policing the party conferences for *(a)* the Labour party, *(b)* the Conservative party and *(c)* the Liberal Democrats, for each year from 1987 to 1991, giving the percentage increase in costs between each year and the percentage increase between 1987 to 1991; and if he will give an estimate of the full economic cost of policing each conference.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the chief officers of the forces concerned that the additional costs of policing the party conferences for the Labour party, the Conservative party and the Liberal Democrats for each year from 1987 to 1991 were estimated as follows:

Year	Force	Additional cost £	Percentage increase in costs between each year
(a) Labour			
1987	Sussex	23,000	—
1988	Lancashire	61,000	+ 165
1989	Sussex	4,000	− 93
1990	Lancashire	97,545	+ 2,339
1991	Sussex	10,000	− 90
Percentage change between 1987 and 1991 = −57 per cent			
(b) Conservative			
1987	Lancashire	829,000	—
1988	Sussex	1,400,000	+ 69
1989	Lancashire	1,080,000	− 23
1990	Dorset	2,000,000	+ 85
1991	Lancashire	1,379,000	− 31
Percentage change between 1987 and 1991 = +66 per cent			
(c) Liberal Democrats			
1987	N.A.	No identifiable policing costs	—
1988	Lancashire	No identifiable policing costs	—
1989	Sussex	No identifiable policing costs	—

Year	Force	Additional cost £	Percentage increase in costs between each year
1990	Lancashire	No identifiable policing costs	—
1991	Dorset	No identifiable policing costs	—

Information about full economic costs is not available.

Press and Publicity Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether any member of his Department's press and publicity staff accompanied him in Blackpool during the Conservative party conference.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: No.

Betting Shops

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has had any approaches from members of the public or punters' associations in favour of evening opening of betting shops.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: In the year ending 30 September 1991, we received no direct representations in favour of evening opening of licensed betting offices from members of the public or any association representing punters.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations he has had in favour of the evening opening of betting offices; and what interests they represent.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: In the year ending 30 September 1991, we received one direct representation from an independent bookmaker in favour of evening opening of licensed betting offices. We are also aware that a number of organisations expressed their support for evening opening in the course of the Home Affairs Committee's recent inquiries into the levy on horseracing.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will extend the consultative period over the evening opening of betting offices.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We should be willing to arrange for written comments to be received after 29 November if any organisations are unable to submit them by that date. Until all written comments have been received, it is not possible to predict what further consultations may be necessary nor how long they may take to complete.

Horse Racing

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many evening horse racing meetings took place during the last 12-month period when figures were available; and what estimate he has of the annual attendance at these evening meetings, and at all horserace meetings during that year.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: There were 134 evening horserace meetings in 1990 attended by 654,302 racegoers. The total attendance for all horserace meetings in 1990 was 4,901,515.

Asylum

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for asylum as listed in his answer of 21 October, *Official Report*, column *338*, were *(a)* in country and *(b)* at port of entry on entry in each quarter of 1990 and 1991.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is given in the table. The figures are for principal applicants excluding dependants. The 1990 figures for after-entry applications understate because of delays in recording, particularly for the fourth quarter.

Applications received[1] [2] for asylum in the United Kingdom, by location of application, 1990-91

	At port of entry	After entry[3] [4]	Total[3] [4]
1990[2]			
Quarter 1	1,450	1,910	3,360
Quarter 2	1,615	2,000	3,615
Quarter 3	2,580	4,220	6,800
Quarter 4	3,550	3,995	7,545
1991			
Quarter 1	3,520	8,180	11,700
Quarter 2	2,040	10,030	12,070
Quarter 3	1,970	8,630	10,600

[1] Excluding dependants.
[2] Provisional figures, rounded to the nearest 5.
[3] The after-entry, and total, figures for 1990 understate because of delays in recording, particularly for the fourth quarter. In total, applications in 1990, excluding dependants, are estimated at over 22,000 (over 30,000 including dependants).
[4] Includes also the small number of principal applications made from overseas.

Young Prisoners

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to achieve his commitment to end the practice of holding young people in prison accommodation.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has established a national steering group to plan and take forward the work needed to give effect to the juvenile remand provisons of the Criminal Justice Act 1991, including the abolition of prison remands for 15 and 16-year-old boys.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the public opinion surveys carried out by his Department since 11 July.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: My Department's public relations branch has commissioned three market research surveys since 11 July:

Pre-campaign research for smoke alarms maintenance advertising.

Qualitative research among samples of the target audience for Special Constables recruitment advertising.

Post-campaign research for electoral registration advertising.

Greyhound Tracks

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many greyhound tracks operate throughout England, Scotland and Wales in the evening for the last year when figures were available; and what information he has as to the approximate annual attendance at greyhound evening meetings.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: On the basis of figures provided by the joint standing committee of the British Greyhound Racing Board and the National Greyhound Racing Club to the Home Affairs Committee inquiry into the financing of greyhound racing, I understand that there were about 87 greyhound tracks operating in the evening in 1990 with annual attendance estimated at about 5 million.

Residential Psychiatric Patients

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many former residential psychiatric patients were prosecuted for offences in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. John Patten: Information on the number of former residential patients who have been prosecuted for offences is not collected centrally.

Adoption

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has as to the number of children brought into the United Kingdom for the purpose of adoption each year since 1979.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information held centrally relates to Romanian children during the last two years only. In 1990 the issue of 114 entry clearances was authorised to Romanian children with a view to adoption by British couples. To date the corresponding figure for 1991 is 212. In 1990, a total of 80 and in 1991 to date seven Romanian children have been brought to the United Kingdom without entry clearance with a view to adoption. In addition I understand that in 1990 our High Commission in Sri Lanka issued 54 entry clearances to Sri Lankan children with a view to adoption by British couples.

PRIME MINISTER

Terrorist Offences

Mr. Stanbrook: To ask the Prime Minister in how many cases since 1975, excepting those initiated under the Criminal Jurisdiction Act 1975, British courts have exercised extra-territorial jurisdiction conferred upon them by anti-terrorism legislation in compliance with mulilateral conventions for the suppression of hijacking, hostage-taking and similar terrorist offences.

The Prime Minister: The information requested is not available.

Separation of Powers

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister if he will bring forward proposals to ensure a constitutional separation of powers and to enhance the powers of the elected representatives vis-à-vis those of the Government.

The Prime Minister: No.

Political Advisers

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister how many political advisers are in post in Her Majesty's Government; in which Departments they are in post; what is the salary in each case; and what is the total salary bill of such posts.

The Prime Minister: There are currently 34 political advisers to Ministers employed in the civil service. The number in each Department is as follows:

	Number
Cabinet Office (including No. 10)	8
Defence	1
Department of the Environment	3
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	2
Department of Health	3
Her Majesty's Treasury	3
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	1
Department of Education and Science	2
Department of Energy	1
Department of Employment	1
Home Office	2
Lord President of the Council	1
Lord Privy Seal	1
Scottish Office	1
Department of Social Security	1
Department of Trade and Industry	2
Department of Transport	1

It is not our practice to reveal the salary of any advisor as it is negotiated individually in relation to previous earnings and is therefore confidential. They are, however, normally paid on a special advisers' salary spine comprising 30 points, as follows:

Scale Point	*Salary (Inclusive)* £
30	57,706
29	55,486
28	53,352
27	52,104
26	50,861
25	49,271
24	47,681
23	45,509
22	43,818
21	42,135
20	40,372
19	38,595
18	36,818
17	35,048
16	32,937
15	31,595
14	30,527
13	29,464
12	28,347
11	27,328
10	26,490
9	25,316
8	24,422
7	23,627
6	22,843
5	22,042
4	20,869
3	20,155
2	19,546
1	18,403

The two most senior special advisers are paid personal salaries above the spine limit of £57,706. The current total salary bill, excluding one adviser who is paid a daily rate, is £1,249,970.

Nuclear Weapons Tests

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister what changes he plans to announce in the programme of testing British nuclear weapons.

The Prime Minister: None.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister what representation he has received from the Government of Australia or the representatives of the Maralinga aboriginal people to fund a clean-up of the British nuclear bomb test site at Maralinga, Australia.

The Prime Minister: I have received a letter from the Australian Prime Minister on the question of a further clean-up at the former nuclear weapon test sites at Maralinga and Emu field, and requesting discussions between Ministers and officials from both countries. We are considering the points raised by Mr. Hawke and have agreed to meet the relevant Australian Minister and officials later this year. In addition, a delegation representing the Maralinga aborigines called on my noble Friend the Earl of Arran, Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces, and senior officials on 30 October to present their views on the same topic.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister what response he has made to representations from the Shoshone nation against the continuation of the British nuclear bomb test site in Nevada.

The Prime Minister: I have asked Her Majesty's ambassador in Washington to reply on my behalf.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the compatibility of the Dutch Presidency's proposals for economic and monetary union with his own call for an EC of 30 states; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The question of enlargement will be high on the European Community's agenda in the coming years; we must ensure that decisions taken in the intergovernmental conferences do not pose a barrier to the accession of applicants who wish to join and meet all the conditions of membership.

The text produced by the Dutch Presidency is a useful basis for further negotiation towards an agreement. But the United Kingdom and other member states are not committed to any particular part of its contents. The Government have plenty to say about it in the intergovernmental conference and we will make our views clear to the other member states. I remain confident that it will be possible to reach an agreement on economic and monetary union. Such an agreement should not hinder the enlargement of the Community.

Pensioners

Mr. Battle: To ask the Prime Minister how many letters he has received from pensioners about the level of their pension increase.

The Prime Minister: I have received many representations on this topic.

Ukraine

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister what impact the declaration of independence for the Ukraine has had upon Her Majesty's Government's policy.

The Prime Minister: We are naturally paying close attention to developments in the Ukraine and intend to build on the good contacts we have established there. Questions of recognition and our future policy towards the Ukraine will largely depend on the outcome of discussions which are still going on between the Ukraine, the centre and other republics on the form of its future relationships. The Ukrainian people will vote on their Supreme Soviet's declaration of independence on 1 December.

Paid Public Appointments

Mr. Warren: To ask the Prime Minister if he will publish an up-to-date directory of paid public appointments made by Ministers; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: A list of public bodies by Departments, with the number of paid and unpaid appointments, is now given in "Public Bodies", published annually by the Cabinet Office (OMCS). The 1990 edition is available from the House of Commons Library; the 1991 edition will be published in December.

World Development

Mr. Lester: To ask the Prime Minister what interdepartmental meetings are held to discuss how world development issues can be covered within British schools.

The Prime Minister: As a result of the introduction of the national curriculum world development issues will be firmly established in school timetables. Government Departments worked together on the formulation of the national curriculum.

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Prime Minister what was the total expenditure by the Cabinet Office on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1991-92 and budget for 1992-93.

The Prime Minister: Expenditure on press and public relations by the Cabinet Office was:

	£
1984-85	247,495
1985-86	232,980
1986-87	224,813
1987-88	215,925
1988-89	201,837
1989-90	205,650
1990-91	165,601

The latest estimate for 1991-92 is £1,005,000 and the provisional budget for 1992-93 is £508,000.

Similar information is not available for the years prior to 1984-85.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Prime Minister if he will give separate figures for spending by his office on *(a)* television

advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1991-92 and budgets for 1992-93.

The Prime Minister: My office has incurred no expenditure on advertising or promotional material and there are no plans for any such expenditure in 1991-92.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Prime Minister whether *(a)* the Prime Minister's office or *(b)* the Cabinet Office have sent unsolicited direct mail as part of the distribution of publicity material.

The Prime Minister: My office has not sent any unsolicited direct mail. The Cabinet Office, as part of its central civil service function, has sent the following publicity material:

An approach has been made to heads of universities and local authority chief executives advising them of European Community recruitment competitions as part of the ongoing initiative to improve United Kingdom representation in EC institutions.

Each year we inform certain private sector companies of the date by which the Cabinet Office needs to receive applications for the top management programme in the forthcoming cycle.

The public appointments unit approaches individuals, in respect of whom they have received a recommendation, seeking their willingness to be considered for senior appointments.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Prime Minister what was the total expenditure by his office on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1991-92 and budget for 1992-93.

The Prime Minister: Expenditure by my office on press and public relations was not recorded separately before 1987-88. The total expenditure for each year since then is as follows; the budget for 1992-93 has not yet been finalised.

	£
1987-88	377,987
1988-89	419,326
1989-90	427,802
1990-91	553,068
1991-92	[1]560,750

[1] Estimate.

Note: The figures for 1990-91 and 1991-92 include notional superannuation costs which are excluded from the figures for earlier years.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Prime Minister if he will provide an up-to-date list of each television advertising campaign carried out, or to be carried out, by *(a)* the Prime Minister's Office and *(b)* the Cabinet Office during 1991-92, and of each other publicity campaign costing more than £100,000, giving for each (i) the topic, (ii) the commencement date, (iii) the duration and (iv) the advertising, promotional and public relations companies involved.

The Prime Minister: My office has not undertaken any advertising campaigns in 1991-92; nor has the Cabinet Office undertaken any television advertising during 1991-92.

Details of the only advertising campaign costing over £100,000 carried out by the Cabinet Office in this period are as follows:

(i) Citizen's Charter White Paper
(ii) 22 July 1991
(iii) 7 weeks
(iv) the campaign was managed by the Central Office of Information

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Prime Minister if he will give separate figures for spending by the Cabinet Office on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1991-92 and budgets for 1992-93.

The Prime Minister: The Cabinet Office has not incurred and does not expect to incur any expenditure on promotional advertising on television or radio in the years 1979 to 1993. Expenditure in this period on promotional advertising in newspapers is estimated at £585,000 in 1991-92 and £300,000 in 1992-93.

Information on other promotional material is not available for the years 1979 to 1987. Expenditure on such material from 1987-88 was:

	£
1987-88	19,306
1988-89	9,500
1989-90	14,833
1990-91	876

The Cabinet Office does not expect to incur any expenditure on other promotional material in 1991-92 or 1992-93.

Sunday Trading

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Prime Minister if he will issue guidance to local authorities on the kind of shops and markets and the goods which may legally be offered for sale to the public on the Sundays between 10 November and Christmas in England.

The Prime Minister: No.

Private Health Insurance

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on tax relief on private health insurance for the elderly.

The Prime Minister: The Government intend neither to abolish the existing relief nor to extend it to the under-60s.

Press and Publicity Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Prime Minister whether any member of *(a)* the Prime Minister's Office's or *(b)* the Cabinet Office's press and publicity staff accompanied him in Blackpool during the Conservative party conference.

The Prime Minister: One private secretary and one secretary were available to assist me in my official duties. Three members of my policy unit were also in attendance.

Interned Soldiers

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he or his predecessors have made and what efforts he is currently making on behalf of civilians of Dutch, British and Commonwealth citizenship interned by invading and occupying forces in Indonesia and other Asian countries in the years 1942 to 1945 to secure adequate and meaningful compensation.

The Prime Minister: Successive Governments have taken the view that the question of compensation for former prisoners of war and civilian internees of the Japanese was settled in the 1951 treaty of peace with Japan.

Cabinet Committees

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will now give details of the name, composition and remit of each Cabinet committee and sub-committee.

The Prime Minister: No. I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him of 6 June 1991 at column *280*.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for 5 November.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the public opinion surveys carried out by his Department since 15 July 1991.

Dr. Mawhinney: Two surveys have been carried out since 15 July: one, a survey of customer attitudes towards the service provided by the Social Security Agency with relation to national insurance contributions, the other a survey examining employment and possible improvements in services and the general environment in the Rathcoole/Bawnmore/Longlands area.

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give separate figures for the spending by his Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1991-92 and budgets for 1992-93.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information could be obtained in the form requested only at disproportionate cost; the total figures for spending on all advertising and other promotional material are, however, set out in the table.

	£
1979-80	468,972
1980-81	487,393
1981-82	613,464
1982-83	1,550,896
1983-84	2,853,451
1984-85	2,699,659
1985-86	3,916,824
1986-87	3,787,628
1987-88	4,028,259
1988-89	4,606,655
1989-90	5,227,759
1990-91	5,886,796
1991-92	[1]5,970,883
1992-93	[2]4,845,837

[1] (Estimate)
[2] (Budget)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide an up-to-date list of each television advertising campaign carried out, or to be carried out, by his Department during 1991-92, and of each other publicity campaign costing more than £100,000, giving for each *(a)* the topic, *(b)* the commencement date, *(c)* the duration and *(d)* the advertising, promotional and public relations companies involved.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is as follows.

Campaign	*Commencement Date*	*Duration*	*Company*
Pedestrian Safety	26 June 1991	1 month	A V Browne Advertising Ltd
	16 September 1991	1 month	
Environmental Awareness and Energy Efficiency	22 August 1991	3 months	Chrysalis TV
Crime prevention	2 September 1991	3 years	Cannot be disclosed on security grounds
Confidential Telephone	Mid-December 1991	4 months	Cannot be disclosed on security grounds

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total expenditure by his Department on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1991-92 and budget for 1992-93.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested is as follows:

Year	£
1979-80	281,641
1980-81	344,596
1981-82	393,239
1982-83	519,912
1983-84	482,188
1984-85	528,666
1985-86	701,685
1986-87	684,727
1987-88	783,771
1988-89	3,622,972
1989-90	4,226,581
1990-91	5,699,510
1991-92	[1]5,502,537
1992-93	[2]5,800,516

[1] Estimate.
[2] Budget.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether his Department has sent unsolicited direct mail as part of the distribution of publicity material.

Dr. Mawhinney: Yes.

Police Custody (Injuries)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many payments of compensation for injuries suffered in police custody have been made in each year since 1987; and if he will list the amounts paid in each case.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Press and Publicity Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether any member of his Department's press and publicity staff accompanied him in Blackpool during the Conservative party conference.

Dr. Mawhinney: No.

Sports Clubs (Rate Relief)

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many non-profit making sports clubs in Northern Ireland applied for rate relief for each of the financial years 1979-80 to 1991-92 and as a total over the same period; and how many of these clubs were granted rate relief of *(a)* 25 per cent. or under *(b)* 25 to 50 per cent., *(c)* 50 to 65 per cent., *(d)* 65 to 90 per cent. and *(e)* 90 to 100 per cent.

Dr. Mawhinney: Rate relief for non-profit making sports clubs is a mandatory 65 per cent., but is restricted to those parts of the premises used solely for sporting purposes. This is administered by the Commissioner of Valuation who is responsible for the maintenance of the valuation list.

Relief is granted as of right to these clubs and there is no need for them to apply.

The application of sports and recreational relief is governed by article 31 of the Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977, and the Rates (Recreational Hereditaments) (Northern Ireland) Order 1979.

Hospital Trusts

Mr. Knapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he has reached a decision on the Royal group of hospitals' application for health and social services trust status; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: I have decided to establish the Royal group of hospitals as a health and social services trust to become operational on 1 April 1993.

In making my decision I considered carefully the Royal group of hospitals' application and the comments made on it during consultation.

As a trust, the Royal group of hospitals will continue to be a regional centre of excellence with a commitment to the provision of services to its local community and to teaching and research. The trust will remain firmly within the Northern Ireland health and personal social services and will continue to be financed from public funds. However, it will have new freedoms and I am confident that the trust will use these to benefit patients and improve its quality of service while giving greater job satisfaction to its employees. I am also confident that the trust will build on the existing involvement of senior professional staff in the management of the unit.

Consultation on the application revealed a number of problems which need to be resolved concerning the future of the Royal group of hospitals. In order to give time for these matters to be addressed I have decided to delay the operational date of the trust for one year. In the meantime the Eastern health and social services board will retain overall managerial responsibility for the unit. A shadow board for the trust will be appointed which will take over full responsibility for the Royal group of hospitals from April 1993.

Stillbirths

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what will be *(a)* the initial costs and *(b)* the annual running costs of confidential inquiries into stillbirths and infant deaths in Northern Ireland; and what additional funds he is making available to (i) the Northern Ireland Office, (ii) the General Register Office and (iii) health and social services boards to (a) set up and (b) run the inquiries.

Mr. Hanley: Resources will be made available to allow Northern Ireland to participate fully in the national confidential inquiry. It will not be possible, however, to provide detailed information about the funding and costs of the inquiry in Northern Ireland until expert advice on its design and content has been formulated by the national advisory board which is being set up to guide and oversee the work throughout the United Kingdom.

WALES

Publicity

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list, in declining order of size of print run, all leaflets and circulars printed by him for general or mass circulation distribution in the past two years on education, health, and other topics relating to his departmental responsibilities, and their cost in each case.

Mr. David Hunt: The information requested by the hon. Gentleman is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give separate figures for the spending by his Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1991-92 and budgets for 1992-93.

Mr. David Hunt: A breakdown of annual expenditure by the Welsh Office in advertising and other publicity from 1979-80 to 1990-91 is set out in the following table.

Publicity expenditure in 1991-92 is planned to be about £2,000,000. It is not possible to provide a breakdown of this under each heading because in many cases decisions

about the extent to which different media will be used are taken as projects develop. Budgets for 1992-93 have yet to be finalised.

Welsh Office Publicity Spend

Year	Radio Advertising (£,000)	Television Advertising (£,000)	[1]Joint Press and Television Advertising (£,000)	Press Advertising (£,000)	Other Promotional Material (£,000)
1979-80	Nil		61		24
1980-81	Nil		62		22
1981-82	Nil		100		44
1982-83	Nil		99		28
1983-84	Nil		108		34
1984-85	Nil		66		100
1985-86	Nil	Nil		31	92
1986-87	Nil	27		49	331
1987-88	Nil	39		191	615
1988-89	Nil	64		112	1,105
1989-90	Nil	57		354	1,758
1990-91	Nil	17		251	1,161

[1] Television and Press advertising for the years 1979-85 cannot be readily separated.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total expenditure by his Department on press and public relations in 1979-80, and each following year; and what is his estimate for 1991-92 and budget for 1992-93.

Mr. David Hunt: Figures for expenditure by the Department's information division, including staff and press cutting service, but excluding media advertising and promotional material, cannot readily be disaggregated for the years 1979-80 to 1987-88.

Figures for the succeeding years are:

	£
1988-89	469,000
1989-90	487,000
1990-91	481,000

Estimated expenditure for 1991-92 is in the region of £530,000. Budgets for 1992-93 have yet to be finalised.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will provide an up-to-date list of each television advertising campaign carried out, or to be carried out, by his Department during 1991-92, and for each other publicity campaign costing more than £100,000, giving for each *(a)* the topic, *(b)* the commencement date, *(c)* the duration and *(d)* the advertising, promotional and public relations companies involved.

Mr. David Hunt: The Welsh Office does not plan to run any television campaigns.

The Department will run five publicity campaigns in 1991-92 costing more than £100,000.

Campaign	Timing	Companies
Enterprise Wales	Ongoing	McCann Erickson Payne Golley/ Hall Harrison Cowley
Road Safety	Ongoing	Dragon Advertising/Hall Harrison Cowley
Drug and Alcohol Misuse	Ongoing	Hall Harrison Cowley
Parents Charter	Commenced 27 September 1991	None commissioned by Welsh Office
Patients Charter	Commenced 28 October 1991	None commissioned by Welsh Office

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether his Department has sent unsolicited direct mail as part of the distribution of publicity material.

Mr. David Hunt: Yes. Such direct marketing to date includes distribution of agricultural information to farmers, valleys promotional literature, community charge information and promotional material for the Enterprise Wales scheme.

Infant Deaths

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what will be *(a)* the initial costs and *(b)* the annual running costs of confidential inquiries into stillbirths and infant deaths in Wales; and what additional funds he is making available to (i) the Welsh Office and (ii) health authorities to *(a)* set up and *(b)* run the inquiries.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The confidential enquiry into stillbirths and infant deaths was announced by my hon. Friend the Minister for Health on 2 July 1991. Wales will take a full part in the enquiry.

Heart Specialists

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will indicate where in the health authorities of Wales there is a shortage of consultant heart specialists;

(2) what steps he will take to eliminate the shortage of consultant heart specialists in order to reduce waiting lists; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The Welsh Medical and Dental Manpower Committee advises the Department on the relative priority of consultant appointments and reflects in its recommendations any shortages identified by district health authorities.

The latest information shows no shortage in this speciality.

Sports Clubs

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many non-profit making sports clubs in Wales applied for rate relief for each of the financial years 1979-80 to 1991-92 and as a total over the same period; and how many of these clubs were granted rate relief of *(a)* 25 per cent. or under, *(b)* 25 to 50 per cent., *(c)* 50 to 65 per cent., *(d)* 65 to 90 per cent. and *(e)* 90 to 100 per cent.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information requested for the years 1979-80 to 1988-89 is not available. Information relating to discretionary rate relief for non-profit making clubs used for recreational purposes, including sporting organisations, for 1989-90 and 1990-91 is shown in the following table:

	Number of applications	*Total number awarded relief*	*Number of properties granted relief of up to:*			
			20 per cent.	*21-50 per cent.*	*51-80 per cent.*	*Over 80 per cent.*
1989-90	Not known	744	19	408	156	161
1990-91	756	673	105	297	80	191

Information for 1991-92 will not be available before September 1992.

Press and Publicity Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether any member of his Department's press and publicity staff accompanied him in Blackpool during the Conservative party conference.

Mr. David Hunt: No.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Teachers (Pension Scheme)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has any plans to equalise female contributor survivor benefits within the teachers' superannuation pension scheme.

Mr. Fallon: With effect from 6 April 1988 widowers' pension benefits and associated benefits for children are payable in every case, subject to completion of the necessary qualifying period. Individual female teachers had the option at the time to elect to purchase service before 1988 for benefits if they so wished.

Manchester Schools (Repairs)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what further recent representations he has had about the urgency of the need for additional funding for repairs to Manchester's school buildings; what response he has made; what action he is taking; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: I recently met an all-party delegation from Manchester city council to discuss its capital programme for 1992-93.

I was able to allocate funds through the issue of a supplementary credit approval over and above Manchester's existing capital allocation for this year, to enable the LEA to start urgently needed work in two of its primary schools—Chapel Street and Charlestown. This will entail a total government commitment of some £6 million for an immediate start in 1991-92.

Manchester's bid for 1992-93 is being considered in the normal way. Its allocation will be announced in December.

Press and Publicity Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether any member of his Department's press and publicity staff accompanied him in Blackpool during the Conservative party conference.

Mr. Eggar: No.

Adult Education

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what consultation he has undertaken with those directly involved in educating adults, in relation to his White Paper proposals on adult education; and how many meetings have been held with adult educators.

Mr. Eggar: Among those my right hon. and learned Friend and I have met in this context are the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education, the National Federation of Women's Institutes, the Pre-Retirement Association, and the principals of Devon community colleges and Richmond adult and community college.

School Inspectors

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the procedure for the appointment of each of Her Majesty's inspectors of schools; what is the role of the Privy Council in such appointments; and by what procedure inspectors may be made redundant or otherwise have their employment terminated.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Her Majesty's inspectors are recruited by open competition after advertisements in the national and education press. The holder of my office recommends the names of prospective HMI through the Privy Council to Her Majesty the Queen. Any terminations of employment would be made in accordance with central guidance currently operating within the civil service.

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the total expenditure by his Department on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1991-92 and budget for 1992-93.

Mr. Eggar: The expenditure figures for press and publicity by this Department for the financial years

1984-85 to 1991-92 are given in the table. Figures for 1979-80 to 1983-84 are not available on a comparable basis. The figure for 1991-92 is estimated expenditure. The Government's expenditure plans for 1992-93 will be announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his autumn statement. The Department does not incur expenditure on public relations.

Year	*£000*
1984-85	788·8
1985-86	1,026·3
1986-87	1,937·8
1987-88	2,313·6
1988-89	2,336·2
1989-90	2,596·0
1990-91	2,106·5
[1]1991-92	4,881·0

[1] Estimated.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will provide an up-to-date list of each television advertising campaign carried out, or to be carried out, by his Department during 1991-92, and of each other publicity campaign costing more than £100,000, giving for each *(a)* the topic, *(b)* the commencement date, *(c)* the duration and *(d)* the advertising, promotional and public relations companies involved.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend launched a teacher recruitment campaign on 1 July which included advertising on television for a period of three weeks and advertisements in the national press for four weeks. The second phase of this campaign began on 27 September and included advertisements in the national press for four weeks and in cinemas in selected towns for six alternating weeks. The campaign has been designed by Saatchi and Saatchi Advertising Ltd.

The parents charter was launched on 27 September. Advertisements were scheduled to appear in national newspapers and women's magazines from 27 September until 31 October. In addition, it is planned to place some advertisements in the ethnic minority community press. The company involved is BMP DDB Needham.

An exhibition to provide parents with information about recent changes in education will also be launched in the current financial year. HP:ICM has been commissioned to mount the exhibition which will visit a number of venues across the country. The timing and duration of this campaign has yet to be finalised.

The professional, industrial and commercial updating (PICKUP) programme continues to support and encourage colleges, polytechnics and universities to improve and increase their provision to meet the training needs of employers and their employees. The Services to Business campaign, run as part of the PICKUP programme, is managed by Quadrangle Communications Ltd.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether his Department has sent unsolicited direct mail as part of the distribution of publicity material.

Mr. Eggar: The Department has not sent unsolicited mail direct to members of the public. It is the practice of the Department, however, to send sample copies of publicity material for parents to libraries and to schools, offering the latter the opportunity to order additional stocks to distribute to pupils to give to their parents.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give separate figures for the spending by his Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1991-92 and budgets for 1992-93.

Mr. Eggar: The expenditure figures for advertising and other promotional materials by this Department for the financial years 1979-80 to 1991-92 are given in the table. The figure for 1991-92 is estimated expenditure. The Government's expenditure plans for 1992-93 will be announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his autumn statement. The rise in expenditure since 1989-90 is the result of the teachers recruitment campaign and the parents charter.

Year	*Television £000*	*Radio £000*	*Newspaper £000*	*Other £000*
1979-80	—	—	91·6	12·2
1980-81	—	—	8·9	58·3
1981-82	—	—	86·9	49·9
1982-83	—	—	6·0	33·7
1983-84	—	—	9·6	74·9
1984-85	—	—	18·5	150·6
1985-86	—	—	14·8	184·1
1986-87	—	—	532·0	533·0
1987-88	—	—	280·0	1,459·0
1988-89	—	40·0	475·0	1,156·0
1989-90	—	11·8	238·0	1,150·0
1990-91	1,100·0	97·0	1,407·0	1,916·0
[1]1991-92	812·0	—	2,049·0	4,081·0

[1] Estimated

Education Spending

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a series going back to 1978-79 in *(a)* cash prices, *(b)* 1990-91 prices and *(c)* as a proportion of GDP, Government spending on education, sub-divided into primary, secondary and others both in total and divided into (i) capital spending, net and gross of receipts, and (ii) current.

Mr. Fallon: The available information on actual expenditure by the Department of Education and Science is shown in the tables. The records do not show a breakdown of expenditure between the primary and secondary schools sector. The figures for receipts appropriated in aid are aggregated for schools and other education and do not distinguish between capital and recurrent receipts.

Department of Education and Science: Expenditure

£ million

	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91
Cash													
Schools													
capital	16	20	22	24	22	19	25	31	27	32	57	82	115
current	24	27	26	29	29	26	44	56	62	74	84	[1]102	[1]128
Other													
capital	82	108	116	121	124	122	126	138	152	151	166	[2]254	[2]292
current	1,120	1,360	1,731	1,900	2,016	2,151	2,191	2,217	2,294	2,606	2,818	[2]4,074	[2]4,725
Total	1,242	1,515	1,895	2,074	2,191	2,318	2,386	2,442	2,535	2,863	3,125	4,512	5,260
Receipts appropriated in aid	9	14	2	4	4	8	9	8	10	11	12	[1]12	[1]15
1990-91 prices													
Schools													
capital	40	43	40	40	34	28	35	42	35	39	65	88	115
current	61	58	48	48	45	27	62	75	80	91	96	110	128
Other													
capital	207	234	212	202	193	181	178	185	197	186	190	274	292
current	2,825	2,941	3,163	3,166	3,136	3,199	3,101	2,976	2,976	3,209	3,230	4,390	4,725
Total	3,133	3,277	3,462	3,456	3,409	3,447	3,376	3,278	3,288	3,526	3,582	4,862	5,260
Receipts	23	30	4	7	6	12	13	11	13	14	14	13	15
As a proportion of GDP													
Schools													
capital	0·009	0·010	0·009	0·009	0·008	0·006	0·008	0·009	0·007	0·008	0·012	0·016	0·021
current	0·014	0·013	0·011	0·011	0·010	0·009	0·014	0·016	0·016	0·017	0·018	0·020	0·023
Other													
capital	0·048	0·053	0·050	0·047	0·044	0·040	0·039	0·039	0·040	0·036	0·035	0·050	0·053
current	0·656	0·664	0·741	0·741	0·719	0·707	0·672	0·622	0·598	0·614	0·597	0·799	0·864
Total	0·728	0·739	0·811	0·809	0·781	0·762	0·732	0·685	0·661	0·675	0·662	0·885	0·962

[1] Figures do not include annual maintenance grant to GM schools, recouped from LEAs. The cash figures for this were £15 million for 1989-90 and £59 million for 1990-91.
[2]Includes institutions transferred from LEA sector.

Devonport Schools

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will approve immediately the proposal by Devon county council to reorganise Devonport schools in Plymouth by closing St. Peter's and designating Devonport secondary school as a Church-aided four-form entry comprehensive school for 11 to 16-year-olds.

Mr. Fallon: The proposals under sections 12 and 13 of the Education Act 1980 to which my hon. Friend refers were published on 5 July and are currently before the Secretary of State. My right hon. Friend aims to reach decisions on such proposals within five months from the date of publication if possible.

St. Anne's School, Rock Ferry

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he will approve plans for St. Anne's primary school, Rock Ferry, Birkenhead, which are now lodged with his Department.

Mr. Fallon: The capital plans put forward by local education authorities for 1992-93 are still under consideration and decisions will be announced in December.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the public opinion surveys carried out by his Department since 11 July 1991.

Mr. Eggar: Since 11 July, the Department has not conducted any widespread public opinion surveys but has undertaken some market research.

Reading Standards

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he intends to respond to the third report, Session 1990-91, of the Education, Science and Arts Committee on standards of reading in primary schools.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have written today to the Chairman of the Select Committee, setting out the Government's response.

The report is an important timely contribution to the current debate on reading standards in schools. Its conclusion that a fall in reading standards has not been proved beyond reasonable doubt provides no grounds for complacency. Rather it highlights the inadequacies of our present data, and the need for a reliable and consistent basis for the measurement of pupils' attainments. This is just what the national curriculum and the associated testing arrangements will provide.

Reading is the most fundamental of skills and the Government are determined to ensure that standards are

improved in line with society's ever-more demanding needs for literacy. My response to the Select Committee sets out the steps we are taking to secure such improvements, notably through the implementation of the national curriculum which establishes clear national targets for pupils' reading across the full age range for compulsory education. Pupils' progress will be measured against those targets at the ages of seven, 11, 14 and 16. The results will help teachers to build up a detailed picture of each pupil's strengths and weaknesses to inform their teaching. They will also give parents the accurate information about their children's progress to which they are entitled under the parents charter. In aggregate they will in due course enable comparisons to be made of pupils' performance, for example, between the sexes, between local education authorities and between schools. I shall shortly publish an analysis of the results of the first tests of the performance of pupils at the age of seven.

The recent changes that I have announced to the system of testing of seven-year olds will give more detailed information to parents and the public next year. Teachers will be required to make a more precise grading of the reading attainments of those seven-year olds—roughly half the age group in 1991—who were assessed as of average ability for their age. We shall also be introducing for the first time in 1992 an optional written test of reading comprehension which will likewise be aimed at pupils of average ability and yield a finer grading of their attainments.

All schools should strive to match the standards of the best. The Government have taken a number of measures to promote good practice in the teaching of reading. HMI's findings on good practice based on a report produced last January have been circulated to schools, and discussed at regional conferences for LEA inspectors and advisers. HMI has also provided guidance for schools on how to improve their libraries. Substantial resources have been made available for books related to the national curriculum and the training of school library staff, as well as for in-service teacher training.

Local education authorities should ensure that reading standards in their area are kept under review. The Government have urged all education committees to take an active and critical interest in this. The report rightly emphasises the importance of the active engagement of parents. Schools will be required to include in all reports the name of a contact with whom parents can discuss their children's progress. The Government are also supporting projects designed to strengthen home-school links, particularly in inner-city areas.

Copies of the Government's response are being placed in the Library of the House.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Nursery

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will list the dates during last Session on which the hon. Members' staff's union, the Transport and General Workers Union parliamentary branch, has been consulted about establishment of a nursery for their children; and if he has any plans to consult their union in the coming parliamentary year.

Mr. MacGregor: In accordance with a decision on the Services Committee, no survey of potential demand will be undertaken until detailed advice is received on the feasibility of establishing a child care facility in the parliamentary estate.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Lord President of the Council what progress has been made in the last Session towards establishment of a nursery for the children of hon. Members' staff.

Mr. MacGregor: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my reply of 22 July 1991, *Hansard*, column *386*. Possible suitable accommodation for a child care facility in advance of phase 2 is still being sought. This will be an early matter for consideration by the Accommodation and Works Committee as soon as it is established.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Hind: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the number of applications received from businesses in the north-west region for regional selective assistance in 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Mr. Leigh: In the financial year 1990-91 my Department received 354 applications for assistance from businesses in the north-west region under the regional selective assistance scheme. Between 1 April 1991 and 31 October 1991 a further 280 applications were received from businesses in that region.

Note: The north-west region includes the counties of Cheshire, Cumbria, Lancashire, Greater Manchester and Merseyside and the High Peak district of Derbyshire.

Computers

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will summarise the findings of his review of trade in computers; and what is his estimate of the percentage of exports imported in (i) the same form and (ii) after further processing in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Sainsbury: This review has now been published and is available in the House of Commons Library, entitled "Broad Balance of Trade of Major Companies in the Electronics and Information Technology Sector". The further detailed information requested is not available, although the above review contains a reference to entrepot trade.

Mountain Rescue Teams

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to clarify and safeguard the position of volunteer mountain rescue teams under the European Community draft directive on the liability of suppliers of services; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: The present draft of the services liability directive excludes public safety services, and we are seeking to have this exemption extended to private sector safety services run on a voluntary basis.

Post Office

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any plans to remove the statutory exemption from liability for negligence from the Post Office.

Mr. Leigh: We have no present plans to do so. However, as we said in the citizens charter, we have asked the Post Office to carry out an urgent review of its redress schemes with POUNC, the statutory body representing the interests of all Post Office users. The review is looking at the scope of current compensation arrangements as well as at the levels of compensation offered.

As also set out in the charter, it is our intention that in future the Secretary of State will have powers to approve the arrangements for redress where service fails to meet the reasonable expectations of the Post Office's customers.

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will specify those transactions which are permitted in Post Office Counters Crown offices but not in privately owned sub-post offices or franchised outlets.

Mr. Leigh: The range of business transacted at Crown post offices and sub-post office agencies is an operational matter determined in negotiations between Post Office Counters Ltd. and each individual client.

I understand that, with the exception of those located at international airports, sub-post office agencies do not issue British visitors passports; and that the issue of motor vehicle licences is carried out by 2,825 offices, both Crown and agency, at the request of DVLA. Other transactions available in Crown offices and some but not all agency offices are acceptance of datapost and the re-setting of franking machines. There is no change in the range of transactions carried out by Crown offices which have been converted to sub-post offices.

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many Post Office Crown branch offices in *(a)* Britain and *(b)* south Wales are in each of the three categories A, B and C specified by Post Office Counters for (i) 1989 and (ii) projected by management for the end of 1992; and what is the proposed percentage change in each category.

Mr. Leigh: The numbers of Crown post offices in categories A, B, and C in *(a)* Britain and *(b)* south Wales counters district (B and C not separately identified) at 31 March 1989 were as follows:

	A	*B*	*C*
Britain	498	552	443
South Wales	20	—35—	

An effect of the Crown conversion programme may be to change the percentage distribution of offices between these categories; in addition, the precise effect in any area will depend on negotiations with potential agency operators and the outcome of the local consultation procedure. It is therefore not possible to project numbers for the end of 1992.

Fireworks

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his Department issues advice on care for domestic pets where fireworks are used; what information his Department has on the law relating to the sale of fireworks in other countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: I have been asked to reply.

The main thrust of the Government's annual firework safety campaign is to publicise the firework code, which urges the public to keep pets indoors. The law on fireworks varies greatly in other countries.

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the total expenditure by his Department on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1991-92 and budget for 1992-93.

Mr. Leigh: I refer to the answers given to the hon. Member on 13 March 1990 (*Official Report*, column *172*) and 30 April 1991 (column *127*).

The final outturn for 1990-91 and estimated expenditure in the current year are as follows:

	£000
1990-91	2,383
1991-92	2,410

The figures include regional press officer and other support services. The budget for 1992-93 is not yet finalised.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will provide an up-to-date list of each television advertising campaign carried out, or to be carried out, by *(a)* the Department of Trade and Industry and *(b)* the Export Credits Guarantee Department, during 1991-92, and of each other publicity campaign costing more than £100,000, giving for each (i) the topic, (ii) the commencement date, (iii) the duration and (iv) the advertising, promotional and public relations companies involved.

Mr. Leigh: The information is as follows:

(a) Department of Trade and Industry

I refer to the answers given to the hon. Member on 1 July (*Official Report*, column *20*), 12 July (column *523*) and 17 July (column *180-81*). The Department continues to have no plans for television advertising in the current year.

(b) Export Credits Guarantee Department

Television advertising campaigns in 1991-92: None.

Other campaign:

(i) Topic: ECGD's strength in Europe.
(ii) Commenced: 22 April 1991.
(iii) Duration: four weeks.
(iv) Advertising agency: Leo Burnett.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the total expenditure by the ECGD on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1991-92 and budget for 1992-93.

Mr. Sainsbury: The response for the years 1979-80 to 1989-90 is contained in the *Official Report* for 3 May 1991, columns *364-65*. The figures for 1990-91 and 1991-92 are as follows:

Year	£000
1990-91	1,067
[1]1991-92	1,326

[1] Latest estimate.

The budget for 1992-93 has still to be prepared.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether his Department has sent unsolicited direct mail as part of the distribution of publicity material.

Mr. Leigh: My Department uses carefully targeted direct mail in support of a number of its objectives, including the stimulation of innovation, the promotion of exports and the provision of information to business about new methods, opportunities and management skills.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give separate figures for spending by the ECGD on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1991-92 and budgets for 1992-93.

Mr. Sainsbury: The response for the years 1979-80 to 1989-90 is contained in the *Official Report* for 8 May 1991, column *502*. The figures for 1990-91 and 1991-92 are as follows:

	Total	Press advertising	Other
	£000	£000	£000
1990-91	1,067	692	375
[1]1991-92	1,326	875	451

[1] Latest estimate.

No expenditure has been incurred on TV and radio advertising. The budget for 1992-93 has still to be prepared.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give separate figures for the spending by his Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1991-92 and budgets for 1992-93.

Mr. Leigh: I refer to the answers given to the hon. Member on 13 March 1990 (*Official Report*, columns *173-74*) and 29 April 1991 (column *55-56*). Final outturn figures for expenditure from the Department's central publicity during 1990-91 were as follows:

	£000
Television advertising	3,938
Radio advertising	141
Press advertising	1,905
Other promotional materials[1]	3,778

[1] Publications, audio-visual materials and posters.

I expect expenditure on such activities this year to be well within last year's total. Media allocations are made according to need during the course of the year, but the Department has no plans for television advertising this year.

South Sefton Business Centre

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make an official visit to South Sefton business centre.

Mr. Leigh: I do not at present have any plans to visit the South Sefton business centre.

Thomson Consumer Electronics

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assistance his Department will offer to promote industrial activity *(a)* in the Gosport area in general and *(b)* at the Ferguson plant in particular in the light of the announcement by Thomson Consumer Electronics that it intends to close the Ferguson factory.

Mr. Leigh: The best way for the Government to support firms in the Gosport area is through its policies aimed at controlling inflation and encouraging sustained economic growth. Eligible firms there benefit from access to DTI schemes aimed at helping them to become more efficient, encouraging innovation and promoting exports. DTI's Invest in Britain Bureau and the English unit promote new direct investment by overseas firms to the United Kingdom. IBB can give individual inward investors information about locations where sites, premises and labour are readily available to meet their particular needs.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the public opinion surveys carried out by his Department since 12 July 1991.

Mr. Leigh: The Department has carried out no general public opinion surveys in this period.

Exports

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will state the value and volume of exports in each year of the 1980's of *(a)* beryllium, *(b)* polonium and *(c)* bismuth, specifying in each case the countries stated as the destinations of the exports.

Mr. Sainsbury: Information is given in the table. Information on polonium is not available as it is not separately identified in the overseas trade statistics. To provide country details would involve disproportionate cost.

United Kingdom Exports 1980-89

	Beryllium [1]			Bismuth [2]		
	Volume (kg)	Value (£k) Total	of which to EC	Volume (MT)	Value (£k) Total	of which to EC
1980	0	0	0	289	1,469	...
1981	1,100	11	0	298	945	...
1982	603	3	1	292	1,140	...

	Beryllium [1]			Bismuth [2]		
	Volume (kg)	Value (£k) Total	of which to EC	Volume (MT)	Value (£k) Total	of which to EC
1983	17,898	23	0	310	1,343	...
1984	452	33	2	292	1,881	...
1985	725	44	0	...	...	...
1986	0	0	0	...	...	...
1987	13	4	3	...	...	...
1988	6	3	3	566	4,270	2,109
1989	0	0	0	413	3,419	2,135

[1] As defined by code 689.91 of the Standard International Trade Classification (SITC).
[2] As defined by SITC Code 689.92 for 1988-89 and Combined Nomenclature Code 810411 (part of SITC 689.99) for 1980-87.
... = not available.
Source: Overseas Trade Statistics

Businesses, North-West

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentages of businesses in the north-west have reported a decline in sales over the last six months.

Mr. Leigh: Statistical information of this nature is not collected by my Department.

Manufacturing Standards

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on his policy for assisting British trade and professional organisations with travel and administration costs for meetings in connection with achieving Europeanwide standards of manufacture for 1993 onwards.

Mr. Leigh: We continue to make available through the British Standards Institution substantial financial support towards the travel costs of leaders of BSI delegations and of principal experts and other selected personnel attending standards meetings overseas.

Press and Publicity Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether any member of his Department's press and publicity staff accompanied him in Blackpool during the Conservative party conference.

Mr. Leigh: No.

British Shipbuilders

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on British Shipbuilders' external financing limit for 1991-92.

Mr. Leigh: British Shipbuilders' external financing limit for 1991-92 was set at £5·8 million as recorded in the Government's expenditure plans 1991-92 to 1993-94 published in February 1991. I am now able to announce a reduced EFL for 1991-92 of £3·6 million which amounts to a net improvement of £9·4 million. This is principally due to the release of the provision of legal fees totalling £6 million following the out-of-court settlement of the Scott Lithgow dispute in March 1991 and the deferred receipt of asset sales at North East Shipbuilders Ltd. (NESL) which included £2·075 million from the sale of Pallion, the only remaining NESL yard.

Telecommunications Council

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Telecommunications Council held in Brussels on Monday 4 November.

Mr. Redwood: The main item was a further discussion on the European Commission plans to apply "MAC" standards to direct-to-house satellite broadcasting. I continued to argue strongly for service provider freedom to follow their commercial judgment. Consumers should not have imposed on them the costs of these changes, especially where they do not derive benefits from new services on offer. I am pleased to say that opinion among EC states does seem to have shifted in this direction to some extent and I hope that the Commission's revised proposals, expected later this year, will show considerable improvement.

The Council reached political agreement on a resolution on satellite communications, which envisages future liberalisation of that sector. A common position was reached on a Council directive on the application of open network provision to leased lines, which will facilitate future liberalisation of the European telecommunication services market. Agreement was also reached on a Council decision on the harmonisation of the international access code, subject to approval by the United Kingdom parliamentary scrutiny committees and the availability of the opinion by the European Parliament.

The Commission announced that it hoped to produce a Green Paper on postal services for discussion at the next Telecommunications Council on 5 December 1991. The Commission also announced its intention to produce a Communication on a co-ordinated EC position for the world administrative radio conference (WARC), in February 1992. All member states agreed with the United Kingdom that CEPT should remain the principal European body dealing with international radio frequencies and that member states should where possible support the common CEPT proposals at WARC.

ENERGY

Press and Publicity Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether any member of his Department's press and publicity staff accompanied him in Blackpool during the Conservative party conference.

Mr. Wakeham: No.

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will give separate figures for the spending by his Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1991-92 and budgets for 1992-93.

Mr. Wakeham: The information requested for 1989-90 and earlier years was contained in my reply to the hon. Member on 25 April, *Official Report*, col. *500*. Expenditure in 1990-91, and estimated expenditure in 1991-92, is as follows:

		£'000
	1991-92	*1990-91*[1]
Television Advertising	—	—
Newspaper Advertising	606	559
Radio Advertising	—	—
Other Promotional Material	900	1,074

[1] Does not include expenditure on the privatisation of the Electricity Supply Industry.

Decisions on expenditure by media in 1992-93 have not yet been taken.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether his Department has sent unsolicited direct mail as part of the distribution of publicity material.

Mr. Wakeham: Unsolicited direct mail has been used from time to time when it has been considered the best method of disseminating advice or information to specific audiences. A recent example was a mailing to head teachers of a booklet entitled "Energy Efficiency in Buildings—Schools".

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will provide an up-to-date list of each television advertising campaign carried out, or to be carried out, by his Department during 1991-92, and of each other publicity campaign costing more than £100,000, giving for each *(a)* the topic, *(b)* the commencement date, *(c)* the duration and *(d)* the advertising, promotional and public relations companies involved.

Mr. Wakeham: My Department has a continuing programme of publicity to promote energy efficiency, including a joint campaign with the Department of the Environment on the environment and home energy efficiency and the "Making a Corporate Commitment" campaign, the United Kingdom offshore supplies industry and renewable sources of energy. None of these campaigns will involve television advertising in the current year.

The joint campaign which was launched on Monday 4 November and will run for three years is being handled by Collett, Dickenson, Pearce and Partners Ltd., and Maxima. The purpose of the campaign is to encourage householders to make their homes more energy efficient.

The "Making a Corporate Commitment" campaign was launched on 16 October 1991 and will run until 1992-93. The aim of the campaign is to encourage top management to make a corporate commitment to energy efficiency. The campaign is being handled by Laing Henry Ltd. and Network Ltd.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the total expenditure by his Department on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1991-92 and budget for 1992-93.

Mr. Wakeham: The estimated expenditure in 1991-92 is £675,000. This figure includes:

(i) forecast expenditure by the Press Office;

(ii) staff costs (salaries, accommodation and common services) for all the permanent information service and support staff in the Press Office (including the Speech Writing Unit), at 1 November 1991.

The corresponding expenditure for previous years was set out in my reply to the hon. Member on 30 April, *Official Report*, c. *107-8*.

Details of proposed expenditure for 1992-93 are not available.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the public opinion surveys carried out by his Department since 11 July.

Mr. Wakeham: I shall write to the hon. Member.

Trawsfynydd Power Station

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the problems being encountered at Trawsfynydd nuclear power station and its future life expectancy.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I refer the hon. Member to the answer which I gave to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) on 14 October, (col. 6). I understand that Nuclear Electric plc's interim safety case for the restart of Trawsfynydd remains the subject of discussions between it and the Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate.

Nuclear Material (Reprocessing)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement outlining the sequence of events leading to Her Majesty's Government offering to accept nuclear material from Iraq for reprocessing in Scotland; what offers of assistance in dealing with the material have been forthcoming from other countries; and what is the current position regarding the possible importation of the materials.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Following an approach from the International Atomic Energy Agency, the Government indicated that facilities at Dounreay would be available if required for making safe certain nuclear materials which will be removed from Iraq in accordance with Security Council resolution 687. The IAEA requested tenders for this work and an alliance of British and French companies submitted bids. It will be for the agency to assess these and any other offers received on technical and economic grounds.

EMPLOYMENT

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give separate figures for spending by the Training Agency or Manpower Services Commission

on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1991-92 and budgets for 1992-93.

Mr. Forth: (a) The information requested is given in the table:

	TV (£)	*Radio (£)*	*Press (£)*	*Other (£)*	*Total (£)*
Actual					
1979-80	N.A.	N.A.	—	—	—
1980-81	424,102	4,127	2,496,440	2,588,540	5,513,209
1981-82	—	62,896	1,814,935	2,784,279	4,662,110
1982-83	—	89,654	2,984,230	3,222,031	6,295,915
1983-84	1,479,748	17,434	764,409	2,670,666	4,932,257
1984-85	944,975	3,477	717,057	4,473,283	6,138,792
1985-86	9,676,257	311,537	1,867,286	5,111,180	16,966,260
1986-87	15,624,000	258,631	6,927,370	12,124,000	34,934,001
1987-88	17,321,000	26,841	6,950,159	11,647,000	35,945,000
1988-89	12,569,000	—	5,502,000	12,449,000	30,520,000
1989-90	8,610,000	56,000	6,164,000	12,485,000	27,315,000
1990-91	6,115,000	—	3,803,000	9,912,000	19,830,000

All the figures refer only to expenditure by the former Manpower Services Commission, Training Commission and Training Agency. Following the abolition of the Training Agency, from 1991-92 the Department's advertising and publicity budget is held centrally.

(b) The total budget for 1991-92 (excluding HSE and ACAS) is £18·41 million. Estimate of the breakdown by media is as follows:

TV (£)	*Press (£)*	*Others (£)*	*Total (£)*
8,594,000	1,166,000	8,650,000	18,410,000

(c) Expenditure levels for 1992-93 are in the process of being set.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give separate figures for the spending by his Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1991-92 and budgets for 1992-93.

Mr. Forth: *(a)* Expenditure on advertising and promotional material by the Department of Employment from 1979-80 to 1985-86 was as follows:

	£
1979-80	70,000
1980-81	320,000
1981-82	400,000
1982-83	360,000
1983-84	500,000
1984-85	320,000
1985-86	1,220,000

Figures for television, radio and newspaper advertising and other promotional material are not available separately.

The figures for 1986-87, 1987-88, 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91 are as follows:

	Television (£ million)	*Press/Radio (£ million)*	*Other promotional (£ million)*
1986-87	9·3	3·0	4·1
1987-88	3·3	0·8	2·8
1988-89	2·1	2·3	1·3
1989-90	0·9	0·9	1·2
1990-91	n/a	0·5	2·4

(b) From 1991-92 the Department's advertising and publicity budget has been held centrally. Details of expenditure for 1991-92 and budget for 1992-93 are being provided for the hon. Member in a reply to a separate question.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total expenditure by his Department on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1991-92 and budget for 1992-93.

Mr. Forth: The information requested is given in the table:

Year	*Expenditure £ million*
Actual	
1979-80 to 1985-86	n/a
1986-87	1·080
1987-88	1·014
1988-89	3·185
1989-90	3·331
1990-91	3·507
Estimated	
1991-92	3·870

Figures for 1986-87 and 1987-88 are for Department of Employment information division only. Figures for TA are not available.

Figures for 1988-89 represent total expenditure separately incurred by DE information division and TA information services branch; the two merged to form DE information branch in November 1989. Figures for 1990-91 onwards represent expenditure by the DE information branch.

Expenditure levels for 1992-93 are in the process of being set.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will provide an up-to-date list of each television advertising campaign carried out, or to be carried out, by *(a)* the Department of Employment and *(b)* the Training Agency during 1991-92, and of each other publicity campaign costing more than £100,000, giving for each (i) the topic, (ii) the commencement date, (iii) the duration and (iv) the advertising, promotional and public relations companies involved.

Mr. Forth: Two television advertising campaigns have been carried out for the Department so far in 1991-92, for TECs and for Just the Job. No further television advertising is planned by the Department during the remainder of the financial year. The Training Agency is now part of the Department.

Other publicity campaigns costing more than £100,000 carried out or planned during 1991-92 are set out in the table:

Topic	*Start Date*	*Duration*	*Company*
Career Development Loans Press	July 1991	3 months	[1]GGT
Jobclub Press	Late 1991	3 months	[2]DMB&B
Job Review Workshops Press	Early 1992	1-2 months	DMB&B
National Training Awards Press	March 1991	3 months	GGT
National Training Awards Press	December 1991	4 days	GGT
High Technology National Training Press	April 1991	1 month	GGT
High Technology National Training Press	September 1991	2 weeks	GGT
Just the Job Press	September 1991	2 months	DMB&B
TECs Press	April 1991	2 months	GGT
Investors in People Press	October 1991	1 month	GGT

[1]Gold Greenlees Trott.
[2]D'Arcy Masius Benton and Bowles.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether *(a)* the Department of Employment and *(b)* the Training Agency or Manpower Services Commission have sent unsolicited direct mail as part of the distribution of publicity material.

Mr. Forth: Direct mail containing information about the national training awards was sent to senior figures in British industry as part of the March to May 1991 campaign to encourage entries for the awards.

Working Hours

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will consider seeking derogations from the EC proposals for limiting working hours of employees for seasonal agricultural activities;

(2) if he will consider seeking derogations from the EC proposals for limiting working hours of employees for food manufacturing dependent on shift, night and weekend work;

(3) what derogations are currently being considered in the discussions with his EC counterparts on the proposals for limiting working hours of employees.

Mr. Forth: In discussions on the draft directive it has been proposed that member states should be able to make derogations from the main requirements of the draft directive in a number of circumstances. These include activities where the workplace is at a distance from the worker's place of residence; activities where continuity of production or service is necessary; unforeseen exceptional circumstances which are limited in time and predictable peaks of work such as in agriculture. In all such cases employees must be afforded equivalent periods of compensatory rest, or, where this is not possible, other forms of equivalent protection. The Government consider the draft directive unnecessary and unjustified, but will continue to seek to limit the damaging effects of the directive, if adopted, on all employers and employees in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's current position regarding EC proposals for limiting working hours of employees.

Mr. Forth: A draft directive on the organisation of working time was proposed by the European Commission under its social action programme in July 1990. It is under discussion in the Council. Various amendments have been proposed by other member states in discussions, including a limit of 48 hours on the working week and a requirement for the weekly rest period in principle to include Sunday.

The Government question the need for this proposed directive, which would have a damaging effect on the flexibility of firms in the United Kingdom and throughout the EC, increasing their costs and prejudicing their competitiveness. Hours of work are best decided between employers and employees. The Government did not consider the Commission's original proposals justified as minimum requirements for the protection of the health and safety of workers. The Government strongly question the justification for further restrictions on weekly hours and Sunday work.

Earnings

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his latest estimate of the average weekly earnings of *(a)* a male manual worker, *(b)* a female manual worker, *(c)* a male non-manual worker and *(d)* a female non-manual worker.

Mr. Forth: The available information for April 1991 is published in part A of the 1991 New Earnings Survey report, a copy of which is in the Library.

Unemployment Benefits

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was *(a)* the number of benefit staff units dealing with unemployment benefit claims in each of the Employment Service administrative regions, *(b)* the number of unemployed people claiming benefit in each of the administrative regions and *(c)* the benefit staff unit to claimant ratio in each of the administrative regions as at 1 March 1990, September 1990 and September 1991.

Mr. Forth: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the public opinion surveys carried out by his Department since 11 July.

Mr. Forth: The Department's various research branches do not commission public opinion surveys as such. However, they carry out research projects on a variety of employment-related issues which involve surveys of individuals. Listed are those research studies, commissioned or partly funded by the Employment Department Group—ED, Employment Service, Health and Safety Executive and the Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service—which have involved surveys of individuals commissioned since 11 July 1991.

Abolition of the Dock Labour Scheme
Top Managers Views of the ED Group
A Survey of Industrial Tribunal Applications
Customer Satisfaction Survey
New Clients Survey
Job Link
Restart Courses Follow-Up

Small Businesses

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proposals he has to increase the supply of qualified tradesmen, including mechanics and engineers, to small businesses located in rural areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The primary responsibility for training lies with employers, who must recognise that investment in training is essential to ensure the success of their business. This is just as relevant for all businesses, large or small, wherever they are based.

The Government are supporting and encouraging the efforts of employers in a number of ways. In particular, the employer-led training and enterprise councils and local enterprise companies have been charged with helping to ensure that local people develop the skills that businesses need. They also have particular responsibility for promoting the growth of small firms.

Employer-led industry training organisations also have a key role at industry level to develop strategies to meet the needs of particular industries and to work with TECS and LECS to encourage effective training.

Central European Time

Mr. Butterfill: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of the benefits to the tourism industry of moving the United Kingdom into central European time.

Mr. Forth: The Department contributed towards the costs of the work leading to the Policy Studies Institute report "Making The Most Of Daylight Hours", published in 1988. This report concluded that the adoption of single/double summer time would bring a number of likely benefits to the tourism industry.

Press and Publicity Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether any member of his Department's press and publicity staff accompanied him in Blackpool during the Conservative party conference.

Mr. Forth: No.

Commission-only Work

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total number and percentage of commission-only jobs available at jobcentres on the most recent date for which information is available; if he will outline the procedures for clients viewing commission-only jobs; and if he will list the occupations likely to be offered on a commission-only basis.

Mr. Forth: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Youth Training

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish tables to show for each region and for Great Britain as a whole, the latest results of the YTS leavers survey, to show for male and female trainees and for each separate ethnic group and for those with a disability *(a)* those in full-time work with the same employer, *(b)* those in full-time work with a different employer, *(c)* those in part-time work, *(d)* those on a full-time course at a college or training centre, *(e)* those on another YTS, *(f)* those doing something else, *(g)* those who were unemployed, *(h)* those who had obtained a vocational qualification, *(i)* the number of questionnaires issued, *(j)* the usable percentage response rate and *(k)* the percentage of respondents who were early leavers; what were the numbers of accidents on YTS, fatal, major and minor, for the latest available three-month period; and how many YTS placements were closed or not accepted in that period and in the three preceding months.

Mr. Forth: The complete information requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost. Table 1 provides information about the situation of young people three months after leaving youth training in the period April 1990 to September 1990. Table 2 provides separate figures on the numbers of accidents for the period April 1991 to June 1991. Separate figures for closures and rejections of YT placements are no longer available.

Table 1
Youth Training Outcomes April—September 1990: All Leavers

	GB[1]	Scotland	Northern	Y & H	North West	West Midlands	Wales	South West	South East	London	East Midlands and Anglia
Number of returned questionnaires	78,489	10,827	6,112	9,114	10,597	8,460	4,502	5,599	5,414	2,252	10,886

	GB[1]	Scotland	Northern	Y & H	North West	West Midlands	Wales	South West	South East	London	East Midlands and Anglia
	per cent.	per cent.	per cent.	per cent.	per cent.	per cent.	per cent.	per cent.	per cent.	per cent.	per cent.
In jobs at time of survey[2]	65	61	55	63	62	67	61	71	71	61	70
In jobs, YT or another full-time course at time of survey[2]	80	78	74	79	78	82	76	83	83	75	83
Gained qualification	47	47	42	43	45	49	41	57	56	40	49

Source: YT National Follow-up-Survey.
[1] Includes some trainees not identified to a particular region.
[2] Activity 3 months after leaving.

Youth training accident statistics April 1991—June 1991

	Fatal	Major	Minor
West Midlands	0	10	49
East Midlands and Eastern	0	6	24
London	0	3	12
South East	0	8	22
South West	0	5	14
Yorkshire and Humberside	0	11	47
Northern	0	8	67
Wales	0	8	34
North West	0	18	52
Scotland	0	11	32
National	0	87	353

(a) Employment Department figures have been compiled on a similar basis to those prepared by the Health and Safety Executive on employed persons. However, the Employment Department's figures include a number of accidents to trainees in educational establishments and road traffic accidents which would not have been reportable to the Health and Safety Executive had the individuals been employed.

(b) Major injuries are classified according to the severity criteria laid down in the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985. These regualtions which came into force on 1 April 1986 reclassified fractured wrists and ankles as major injuries which were not considered to be major under the previous regulations, the Notification of Accidents and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1980 (NADOR).

Public Expenditure

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish updated versions of tables 6.5 and 6.6 of chapter 6 of the 1990-91 to 1992-93 public expenditure White Paper (Cm 1006) extending the series published there up to date.

Mr. Forth: Tables 6.5 and 6.6 of chapter 6 of the 1990-91 to 1992-93 Public Expenditure White Paper were published in an amended form as tables 6.6 and 6.8 of the 1991 departmental report.

It was necessary to change the format as TECs have taken over delivery of the youth training and employment training programmes. Entrant numbers and target outcomes for all these programmes will be negotiated with all 82 TECs in January, and TEC business plans will be agreed at the beginning of the financial year, after publication of the departmental report at the beginning of the year. The national aggregate of individual TEC targets will be announced to Parliament following completion of the negotiations with all the TECs.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his latest estimate of the total cost to United Kingdom consumer/taxpayers of direct and indirect support to farmers and horticulturalists.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the estimated cost per adult in the United Kingdom of the common agricultural policy for each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Curry: The CAP system of agricultural support, in common with the support policies of other industrial countries, gives rise to substantial costs to taxpayers and consumers compared with a situation in which foodstuffs were imported at world market prices with no support to domestic producers. Estimates of these costs, and the savings that could be secured if current policies were

ended, are possible only by making many assumptions. Important judgments are necessary about the current levels of world prices—no simple matter given the wide variations in quotations and substantial fluctuations from year to year—and the changes in these prices if present policies were abandoned. The latter depend on how producers and consumers throughout the world might respond to the new circumstances and on the impact on factors such as exchange rates.

Estimates made by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, using a particular set of assumptions, imply that the transfers from consumers and taxpayers in 1990 resulting from agricultural policies in the European Community as a whole—separate figures for the United Kingdom are not available—were equivalent to £4·4 per head of total population per week. It is not meaningful to express this per adult. This figure is derived from the OECD estimate of the aggregate cost of 105·1 billion ecu for 1990, assuming the EC12 population is 327·1 million and that 1 ecu=£0·7139. Corresponding estimates can be derived from OECD studies for 1986 to 1989 as follows, expressed per head per week: 1986, £4·0; 1987, £4·4; 1988, £4·0; 1989, £3·7. Consistently based estimates for earlier years have not been published.

The figure for 1990 is one estimate of the extent to which the CAP raised the cost of food and agricultural products, and incurs budgetary costs, compared to existing "world" prices. As I have emphasised on a number of occasions, and as the OECD has made clear, the estimate takes no account of the effect that removal of farm support would have on world prices, and other variables, and thus gives no indication of the extent to which taxpayers and consumers might be better off if current policies were removed. Consumers/taxpayers would benefit by considerably less than £4·4 per head per week if all agricultural support were removed.

"Our Farming Future"

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he intends to consult outside organisations prior to publishing his policy document "Our Farming Future"; and whether it will be a consultation document.

Mr. Gummer: "Our Farming Future" will be a policy statement by the Government, not a consultation document. Consequently we have not consulted outside organisations specifically in its preparation although our regular meetings with consumers, farmers, environmental organisations, manufacturers, distributors, and retailers have enforced our policies.

Fishing Vessels (Decommissioning)

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it the policy of Her Majesty's Government to introduce a decommissioning scheme for fishing vessels.

Mr. Curry: The Government are ready to consider industry proposals for decommissioning provided that these form part of a wider conservation package aimed at reducing fishing effort.

Press and Publicity Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether any member of his Department's press and publicity staff accompanied him in Blackpool during the Conservative party conference.

Mr. Curry: No.

Agricultural Marketing

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the organisations that his Ministry funded that promoted the marketing of agricultural produce giving the amount funded in each case in *(a)* 1980 and *(b)* 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: My Department contributes to a number of bodies concerned with marketing.

These contributions and the purposes concerned are shown for 1990-91 in respect of the main bodies. Information for 1980 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Food From Britain
£4·5 million to cover establishment costs and some marketing activities.

Meat and Livestock Commission
£240,000 to cover salaries and related costs.

Home-Grown Cereals Authority
£115,000 towards administrative expenses.

Potato Marketing Board
£300,000 for the provision of statistical information.

Healthy Eating

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when his catering working group expects to publish a report and make recommendations on healthy eating in different catering establishments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The group is conducting a review and will report to the MAFF/DH/HEA nutrition liaison group as and when it is appropriate to do so.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the public opinion surveys carried out by his Department since 11 July 1991.

Mr. Curry: Public opinion surveys carried out by my Department since 11 July are as follows:

Food Sense Publications Campaign: pre-campaign market research.

MAFF Touring Exhibition: post-project evaluation research.

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give separate figures for the spending by his Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1991-92 and budgets for 1992-93.

Mr. Curry: Expenditure by the Department in the financial year 1982-83 and each subsequent year was as follows:

	Television	Radio	Press advertising	Other publicity material
	£	£	£	£
1982-83	Nil	Nil	3,000	n/a
1983-84	Nil	Nil	27,000	n/a
1984-85	Nil	Nil	26,000	575,000
1985-86	Nil	Nil	29,000	656,000
1986-87	Nil	Nil	54,000	825,000
1987-88	Nil	Nil	12,000	693,000
1988-89	Nil	Nil	380,000	1,004,000
1989-90	Nil	Nil	116,000	2,373,000
1990-91	Nil	Nil	53,000	2,379,000
[1]1991-92	157,000	Nil	108,000	4,135,000

[1] Forecast.

Figures for publicity advertising prior to 1982-83 are not available as the information for those years includes recruitment and other types of advertising. Information is not readily available to distinguish between expenditure on advertising in newspapers and that in the press generally.

Separate figures for expenditure on other publicity material prior to 1984-85 are available only at disproportionate cost. A figure for the overall publicity budget for 1992-93 is not yet available.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will provide an up-to-date list of each television advertising campaign carried out, or to be carried out, by his Department during 1991-92, and of each other publicity campaign costing more than £100,000, giving for each *(a)* the topic, *(b)* the commencement date, *(c)* the duration and *(d)* the advertising, promotional and public relations companies involved.

Mr. Curry: Publicising the new "Food Sense" series of publications, launched in August this year, will include limited regional TV advertising in 1991-92. The production has been undertaken by Coleman RSCG, who were commissioned by the Central Office of Information.

A touring exhibition carried consumer information, on a wide range of food safety and environmental issues, to major shopping centres and agricultural shows between May and October this year. The exhibition was produced by Interactive Learning Productions of Newcastle upon Tyne.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total expenditure by his Department on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1991-92 and budget for 1992-93.

Mr. Curry: The information required for the financial years 1979-80 to 1983-84 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The figures for the subsequent years are as follows:—

	£ million
1984-85	3·2
1985-86	3·5
1986-87	3·0
1987-88	0·6
1988-89	0·8
1989-90	1·1
1990-91	0·5
1991-92	0·5

Figures for the years 1984-85 to 1986-87 refer to the total cost of press services and paid publicity which could be separated to show expenditure on press services only at disproportionate cost. Figures for 1987-88 to 1991-92 relate to press services alone. The budget for press services for 1992-93 is not yet available.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether his Department has sent unsolicited direct mail as part of the distribution of publicity material.

Mr. Curry: No.

Catering Working Group

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the different types of catering establishments that are being considered by his catering working group; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The group is considering ways of increasing the provision of healthier food in all types of catering outlets.

SCOTLAND

Sports Clubs (Rate Relief)

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many non-profit making sports clubs in Scotland applied for rate relief for each of the financial years 1979-80 to 1991-92 and as a total over the same period; and how many of these clubs were granted rate relief of *(a)* 25 per cent. or under, *(b)* 25 to 50 per cent., *(c)* 50 to 65 per cent., *(d)* 65 to 90 per cent. and *(e)* 90 to 100 per cent.

Mr. Allan Stewart: This information is not held centrally.

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give separate figures for spending by the Scottish Development Agency on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1991-92 and budgets for 1992-93.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The information is set out in the table.

Year	Television advertising	Radio advertising	Newspaper advertising	Other promotional material
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
1982-83	—	—	1,620	1,629
1983-84	96	13	2,182	1,698
1984-85	147	154	3,153	2,133

Year	Television advertising £'000	Radio advertising £'000	Newspaper advertising £'000	Other promotional material £'000
1985-86	253	16	2,553	1,738
1986-87	152	5	1,860	1,339
1987-88	201	9	1,708	822
1988-89	—	—	1,430	1,877
1989-90	—	—	1,513	1,550
1990-91	—	—	1,592	1,433

The information for 1979-80 to 1981-82 cannot be provided except at disproportionate cost. The Scottish Development Agency, along with the activity of the Training Agency in Scotland, was replaced by Scottish Enterprise on 1 April 1991.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give separate figures for the spending by the Forestry Commission on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1991-92 and budgets for 1992-93.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 8 May 1991, at column *537*. The estimate for the current year is £260,000. No figure is available at this stage for 1992-93.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total expenditure by the Forestry Commission on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1991-92 and budget for 1992-93.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 3 May 1991, columns *346-47*. The estimate for the current year is £2 million. No figure is available at this stage for 1992-93.

Mar Lodge

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make it the policy of Her Majesty's Government to bring Mar Lodge estate into public ownership.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No. Our objective is to enable Scottish Natural Heritage to negotiate a management agreement with the new owner of Mar Lodge estate, whoever that may be, which will safeguard the conservation and other qualities of the estate.

Forresterhill Hospital

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make it his policy not to allow Forresterhill hospital, Aberdeen, to opt out of local health board control.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The application for NHS trust status submitted on behalf of the Forresterhill group of hospitals will be considered against the published criteria.

Press and Publicity Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether any member of his Department's press and publicity staff accompanied him in Blackpool during the Conservative party conference.

Mr. Lang: No.

Electoral Registers

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many first-time voters appeared on the electoral register *(a)* in each Scottish constituency and *(b)* in the whole of Scotland in each year since 1987.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information on the number of those attaining the age of 18 and appearing on the electoral register in Scotland for the first time, by parliamentary constituency and in total, is contained in the annual series "Electoral Statistics" compiled by OPCS. Copies are available in the House Library.

Dunoon General Hospital

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement concerning the future of Dunoon general hospital.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This is a matter for Argyll and Clyde health board, but any changes proposed by the board would require the consent of the Secretary of State.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Press and Publicity Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether any member of his Department's press and publicity staff accompanied him in Blackpool during the Conservative party conference.

Miss Widdecombe: No.

Income Support

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people he expects to change entitlement from income support to family credit as a result of the Income Support (General Amendment) Regulations, S.I., 1991, No. 1559.

Mr. Jack: We estimate that around 45,000 families on income support and working over 16 hours a week will become eligible for family credit in April 1992.

In the longer term we expect the reduction in the qualifying hours rule to attract many more people who are on income support into work and on to family credit.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many and what proportion of pensioners claim income support.

Miss Widdecombe: There are about 1·4 million pensioners claiming income support, some 14 per cent. of all pensioners.

Source: 1990 Annual Statistical Inquiry.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the categories of income support claimants *(a)* who have to sign on as unemployed, be available for work and be actively seeking work and *(b)* who do not; and if he will give in table form the numbers and the percentages of total income support claimants in each case.

Mr. Jack: All claimants who are not specifically exempt from the availability for work and actively seeking work requirements must satisfy these conditions in order to be entitled to income support.

The circumstances in which exemptions apply are set out in schedule 1 to the Income Support (General) Regulations 1987.

Detailed information on the number of IS claimants taking advantage of each of the exemptions is not available. However, the following table gives a general breakdown of claimant categories, based on entitlement to IS premiums, as at May 1990.

IS claimants by category

Category	*Number*	*Percentage*
Unemployed and required to sign	1,063,053	25
Not required to sign		
In receipt of training allowance	125,075	3
Lone parents	793,099	19
In receipt of disability premium	330,076	8
Aged 60 or over	1,674,714	40
Other cases	193,883	5
Total	4,179,900	100

Note:
The table is based on information contained in table 3.1 of the "IS Annual Enquiry" for May 1990 which categorises IS claimants by premium entitlement.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of how many additional pensioners in receipt of the retirement pension will be eligible for income support as a consequence of the income support level being higher than the retirement pension as a result of his uprating statement.

Miss Widdecombe: It is estimated that around 400,000 people may become eligible to claim income support following the proposed uprating of benefits in April 1992. The majority of these are likely to be benefit units where one or more members is aged 60 or over, although it is difficult to be precise about the proportion, which is extremely sensitive to assumptions used in the estimating model.

Source: Modelled using data drawn from the 1986-87-88 Family Expenditure Surveys at 1992 prices.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of people on transitional protection in April 1991.

Miss Widdecombe: It is estimated that, immediately after the uprating in April 1991, 25,000 income support claimants were receiving a transitional addition.[1] It is not possible to give an estimate of the number of income support claimants who were then receiving a boarder's protected sum. At that time housing benefit transitional protection payments were being made to 21,000 people.

[1] *Source:* Based on modelling using date drawn from the May 1990 Annual Statistical Enquiry of Income Support recipients.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many women and how many men were in receipt of each of the premia paid with income support, listed separately, at the latest date for which information is available.

Miss Widdecombe: The information for May 1990, the latest date for which it is available, is as follows:

	Single		*Couples*	
Premium	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*
Higher pensioner	86,946	490,815	102,324	8,186
Enhanced pensioner	38,039	238,755	35,418	1,792
Pensioner	90,767	307,342	94,929	2,987
Severe disability	10,485	50,713	1,095	100
Disability	108,127	145,774	68,585	8,491
Lone parent	34,119	759,180	199	—
Disabled child	698	10,683	5,995	399
Family premium	38,113	777,460	317,725	10,796

Notes:
(1) There is free choice of claimant between couples; either may claim. Classification by sex denotes the sex of the claimant, and does not identify which partner qualifies for the premium.
(2) Figures show the number of premiums in payment; a case may have more than one premium.
(3) The carer premium, introduced in October 1990, is not included.
(4) *Source:* Income Support Annual Statistical Enquiry 1990.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the effects on incentives to work of the Income Support (General Amendment) Regulations S.I., 1991, No. 1559 for people who receive income support for mortgage interest payments.

Mr. Jack: The change in the hours rule will mean that 30,000 families with children who are receiving income support and working between 16 and 24 hours a week—some of whom pay mortgage interest—will be better off by claiming family credit.

There will be some people working between 16 and 24 hours a week and receiving income support at the time of the change who will either not be eligible to claim family credit or will not be better off by doing so. These will include some with mortgages. They can continue to claim income support and their work incentives will not therefore be affected.

Benefits Uprating

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give precise details of the calculation he made before uprating means-tested benefits by 7 per cent. rather than 7·2 per cent. for April 1992.

Miss Widdecombe: The new index to be used in April 1992 differs from its predecessor in that water and sewerage charges, 20 per cent. of the community charge and miscellaneous housing costs—dwelling insurance and ground rent, repair and maintenance charges, do-it-yourself materials—will be included. Rent and mortgage interest remain wholly excluded. The new index shows a rise of 7 per cent. in September 1991 compared with its level in September 1990.

Marginal Tax Rate

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the marginal tax rate incurred by a combination of income tax, national insurance, housing

benefit rent withdrawal taper and the community charge benefit withdrawal taper in 1990; and what is the contribution of each of these to the total.

Mr. Jack: The marginal deduction rate for a person paying standard rate income tax, national insurance and receiving both a rent rebate and community charge benefit as from April is 87 per cent.

The marginal deduction rate on total gross pay for each element is:

	Per cent.
Tax	25
NI	9
Housing Benefit	43
Community Charge Benefit	10

Widows

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many and what proportion of widows aged under 60 years in receipt of (1) widow's pension, *(a)* full and *(b)* reduced, and (2) widowed mother's allowance also claim (i) income support, (ii) family credit and (iii) housing benefit.

Miss Widdecombe: It is not possible to answer all the question. The most recent available data on widows' benefits are for March 1990 and for income support and housing benefit, May 1990. These two data sources have been combined to provide estimates of the proportion of those on widows' benefits on other benefits. Statistically valid figures of the number of widows receiving both widows' benefits and family credit are not available. A total of 18,000 or 6 per cent. of those in receipt of widow's pension and 6,000 or 9 per cent. of those in receipt of widowed mother's allowance were also in receipt of income support. A further 24,000, or 7 per cent., of those in receipt of either widow's pension or widowed mother's allowance also received housing benefit.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give the composition of income for single pensioners and pensioner couples by quintile of income, using the 1988 family expenditure survey, broken down by average gross weekly income, and the proportion derived from social security benefits, occupational pensions, savings and investment and earnings.

Miss Widdecombe: The information is in the tables.

Table 1
Single pensioners
Averages of income components by quintile

(per week, 1988 prices)

	Total benefits	Occupational pensions	Investment income	Earnings	Total gross	Total net
1st Quintile	43·60	1·10	2·90	0·10	47·80	46·40
2nd Quintile	51·00	2·90	3·40	0·40	57·70	56·80
3rd Quintile	57·80	5·80	3·30	0·50	67·50	66·40
4th Quintile	55·00	18·10	11·10	2·30	86·60	81·30
5th Quintile	49·90	64·00	56·00	16·90	186·70	155·30
Overall	51·80	16·50	13·70	3·50	85·50	73·50

Table 2
Single pensioners
Proportion of average gross income derived from each component, by quintile

(per cent.)

	Total benefits	Occupational pensions	Investment income	Earnings	Total gross
1st Quintile	91	2	6	•	100
2nd Quintile	88	5	6	1	100
3rd Quintile	86	9	5	1	100
4th Quintile	63	21	13	3	100
5th Quintile	27	34	30	9	100
Overall	61	19	16	4	100

Table 3
Pensioner couples
Averages of income components by quintile

(per week, 1988 prices)

	Total benefits	Occupational pensions	Investment income	Earnings	Total gross	Total net
1st quintile	71·30	3·70	5·00	1·10	81·00	78·80
2nd quintile	80·30	10·20	6·20	1·30	98·00	96·30
3rd quintile	81·30	22·80	9·70	2·90	116·80	111·90
4th quintile	77·60	42·80	19·80	13·30	153·40	141·70
5th quintile	69·50	124·00	89·80	64·90	348·20	286·60
Overall	75·20	45·80	30·20	19·90	171·20	151·90

Table 4
Pensioner couples
Proportion of average gross income derived from each component, by quintile

(per cent.)

	Total benefits	*Occupational pensions*	*Investment income*	*Earnings*	*Total gross*
1st quintile	88	5	6	1	100
2nd quintile	82	10	6	1	100
3rd quintile	70	20	8	3	100
4th quintile	51	28	13	9	100
5th quintile	20	36	26	19	100
Overall	44	27	18	12	100

Notes:

1. Source: 1988 Family Expenditure Survey.
2. Quintiles used are of net equivalised income gross of housing costs.
3. Quintile groups used are for all pensioners, rather than for singles and couples separately.
4. Pensioners are defined as single people over state pension age, or couples in which the man is over pension age.
5. Figures may not sum to totals due to rounding.
6. All averages in Tables 1 and 3 are means.
7. '*' denotes a figure of less than 0·5 per cent.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what steps he is taking to notify those pensioners who qualify for income support as a result of his uprating statement that they now have rights to this additional entitlement, and the consequent passported benefits;

(2) what steps he is taking to inform and assist local authorities to ensure that all those individuals entitled to additional benefits, including housing benefit, community charge benefit and other passported benefits, arising from pensioners becoming entitled to income support, are notified of their rights by local authorities.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department has written to the local authority associations to tell them that we shall issue a circular asking local authorities to bring to the attention of pensioners receiving the maximum rate of community charge benefit that they might become entitled to income support when benefits are uprated next April.

We are considering what further steps, through the Benefits Agency or otherwise, can be taken to bring the possibility of new or renewed entitlement to income support for pensioners arising from the uprating.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioners received income support and/or housing benefit to top up retirement pension reduced following a stay in hospital of more than six weeks in 1990-91; and what was the cost.

Miss Widdecombe: The annual statistical inquiry for 1990 did not reveal any such cases. The inquiry is based on a 1 per cent. sample of all cases.

Eating-out Allowance

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the cost of the boarders' eating-out allowance in its final year of operation; how many households received it; and how many individuals received it.

Miss Widdecombe: No data are available on either cost or the number of boarders receiving an additional allowance for meals.

Benefit Claimants

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish the number of claimants and their dependants living below the supplementary benefit and income support line in each year since 1979.

Miss Widdecombe: Numbers of individuals and their dependants with incomes below supplementary benefit levels for the years 1979, 1981, 1983 and 1985, are held in the low income family tables, copies of which are available in the Library. In October 1990, the Institute for Fiscal Studies published data for 1987. This is the latest available information as these tables are no longer published. Any further figures could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish the number of claimants and their dependants on supplementary benefit and income support for each year since 1979.

Miss Widdecombe: This information is published annually in the supplementary benefits or income support statistics. Copies of these reports are available in the Library.

Number of claimants, partners and dependants

	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Claimants	2,854,664	3,117,774	3,722,563	4,266,531	4,349,192	4,609,310	—	4,937,736	4,895,525	4,351,520	4,160,765	4,179,906
Partners	560,871	620,752	848,726	1,010,205	1,020,610	1,086,318	—	1,126,654	1,073,579	841,018	723,770	691,157
Dependants	954,705	1,124,718	1,550,168	1,792,958	1,867,840	2,032,992	—	2,226,548	2,235,824	2,195,454	2,138,404	2,151,159
Total	4,370,240	4,863,244	6,121,457	7,069,694	7,237,642	7,728,620	—	8,290,938	8,204,928	7,387,992	7,022,939	7,022,222

Source: Annual Statistical Enquiries.

Pensioners

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what the gross additional cost of increasing the period from six to 12 weeks would be before cutting the retirement pension of pensioners who become in-patients; and what the cost would be net of other benefit savings.

(2) how many *(a)* retirement pensioners and *(b)* dependants of retirement pensioners had their retirement pension reduced after staying in hospital for more than six weeks in 1990-91;

(3) what was the net saving to his Department in 1990-91 from reducing retirement pensions to pensioners or their dependants who became hospital in-patients for in excess of six weeks.

Miss Widdecombe: The information is not available in the form requested. Statistics show the percentage rate by which the pension is reduced rather when it is reduced. Furthermore, data on the number of pensioners whose pensions have been reduced is available only on the basis of the number of reductions being made at specified dates during the year—31 March and 30 September. Separate information on dependants of retirement pensioners is not collected.

At 30 September 1990, the latest date for which figures are available, the number of pensioners whose retirement pensions were being reduced as a result of receiving in-patient treatment under the national health service was 55,700.

Staff Health

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the organisations which were invited to tender for the health checks on his Department's staff aged 35 years or over.

Miss Widdecombe: Disclosure of the names of the organisations invited to tender for these health checks could cause commercial damage to the unsuccessful tenderers and jeopardise the Department's future relationship with its suppliers.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) who paid for distribution of the leaflet informing his Department's staff of the health checks on those aged 35 years or over; and what was the cost;

(2) who paid for the leaflet informing his Department's staff of the health checks on those aged 35 years and over; and what was the cost.

Miss Widdecombe: The cost of the production and distribution of publicity material was included in the tender and formed an integral part of the contract. This element of the work was not costed separately.

Severe Disability Premium

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many individuals will be prevented from claiming severe disability premium by the proposed change to regulation 3 of the Income Support (General) Regulations 1987; and what saving the Department expects.

Miss Widdecombe: The amendment regulation restores the policy intention that the severe disability premium goes to people who live alone or with others on a commercial basis. The number of people who might have tried to establish a commercial relationship with members of their family who are close relatives, but for the amendment regulation, is not known. No savings are anticipated; the amendment avoids unplanned expenditure. Further, the amendment regulations contain preserved rights to the premium, at a cost of £5 million.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people currently claim the severe disability premium on income support by having tenancy agreements with their families; how much it would cost to continue to allow such claims; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The information is not available in the form requested. An estimated 3,000 people may be receiving the premium, or have taken steps to obtain it, on the grounds that since April 1988 they have become joint tenants or co-owners with close relatives with whom they live. The regulations laid on 21 October 1991 provide preserved rights to the premium for this group at an estimated cost of £5 million.

Mortgage Assistance

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give the comparable figures to those contained in his answer of 22 October, *Official Report*, columns *577-78*, for 1987, 1988 and 1989; and if he will give unemployed claimants receiving mortgage assistance as a proportion of unemployed claimants.

Mr. Jack: The information is given in the table:

Income Support

Year	*Unemployed*	*As proportion of all claimants receiving help with mortgages Per cent.*	*As proportion of all unemployed claimants Per cent.*	*Lone Parents*	*As proportion of all claimants receiving help with mortgages Per cent.*
1987	207,000	28	12	74,000	10
1988	114,000	38	8	62,000	21
1989	88,000	31	8	67,000	24

Source: Annual Statistical Enquiries.
Notes: Figures for numbers of claimants are rounded to the nearest 1,000.

Mr. G. P. Simmons

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will ensure that Mr. G. P. Simmons of 13 Hartley street, Bethnal Green, London E2 ONR receives a pension book this week plus a Girocheque for any money owed since his book was returned to the Bawhill office in July 1991.

Miss Widdecombe: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief

executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Occupational Pensions

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of pensioners retiring in each of the past 11 years have retired with an occupational pension.

Miss Widdecombe: Such information as is available is given in the table. The definition of newly retired pensioners is the one normally used when quoting figures from the Family Expenditure Survey: single women aged 60-64, single men aged 65-69 and couples where the man is aged 65-69, in each respective year.

Proportion of Newly-retired Pensioner Units in receipt of an Occupational Pension, by Year.

	Percentage in receipt
1979	50
1980	56
1981	54
1982	61
1983	57
1984	55
1985	60
1986	63
1987	64
1988	62

Notes:
1. *Source:* Family Expenditure Survey.
2. Pensioner units defined as single people of pensionable age or couples in which the man is of pensionable age.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update his answer, *Official Report*, 27 March 1990, columns *161-63*, concerning pensioners with occupational pensions using the 1988 Family Expenditure Survey.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is in the table.

Table 2: Pensioners with occupational pensions

	Proportion with occupational pension (per cent)	*Mean amount received (£ per week)*	*Median amount received (£ per week)*
All pensioners	51	54·10	27·20
Single male pensioners	52	44·80	26·40
Single female pensioners	37	38·10	21·00
Pensioner couples	67	68·00	33·90
Single women 75 or over	33	32·70	18·40
Single men 75 or over	49	47·30	29·60
Couples where at least one partner is 75 or over	61	59·70	23·20

Notes:
1. Source: 1988 Family Expenditure Survey.
2. All figures refer to pensioner units. A pensioner unit is defined as a single person of pensionable age or a couple in which the man is of pensionable age.
3. £s per week at 1988 prices.
4. Mean and median amounts are for those pensioners actually in receipt of occupational pensions.

Unemployment

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish the full cost to his Department of every extra 100,000 unemployed people in *(a)* 1991-92 and *(b)* 1992-93.

Mr. Jack: The information is in table 24 of the departmental report, "Social Security—The Government's Expenditure Plans 1991-92 to 1993-94" (Cm. 1514), a copy of which is in the Library.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the public opinion surveys carried out by his Department since 11 July 1991.

Mr. Jack: Public opinion surveys carried out by the Department of Social Security since 11 July 1991 are listed in the table.

Survey	*Purpose*
1. National Customer Survey	Continuing evaluation of customer opinion of benefits delivery by local and central offices of the Benefits Agency.
2. Family Credit Campaign Evaluation	A continuing evaluation of the campaign. Surveys conducted in August and October.
3. Child Support Agency	Target market study.

Mrs. Teresa Byrne

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will ensure that Mrs. Teresa Byrne of 46 Linden place, Bispham, Blackpool FY2 0QY, who was widowed on 30 October 1990, receives a pension book in the next week.

Miss Widdecombe: I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, that an invalidity pension order book was sent to Mrs. Byrne on 1 November 1991.

SERPS

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will take steps to quantify the contribution of the state earnings-related pension scheme to pensioners' incomes derived from *(a)* social security benefit and *(b)* occupational pensions in each year since 1978-79.

Miss Widdecombe: Administrative data on the average amount of additional pension (SERPS) has been collected since 1978-79, but this is not linked to data on other incomes apart from retirement pension and other benefits paid with it. Questions were added to the 1987 and subsequent annual family expenditure surveys asking for information on the amount of net additional pension (SERPS) paid to each individual and their contracted-out deductions to try to expand the details available on pensioners' incomes. So far, the proportion of those pensioners able to respond accurately to these questions does not appear to be sufficient to estimate the contribution of SERPS to pensioners' total incomes. There is no way of discovering this contribution in any earlier years.

Child Benefit

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the additional administrative cost of *(a)* introducing a two-tier child benefit in April 1991 and *(b)* making a half-year increase in child benefit in October; and what was the yearly cost difference between paying a flat rate child benefit to every child and a two-tier benefit.

Mr. Jack: The administration of child benefit is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Benefit Offices

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many benefit claim offices were closed to the public at any time during the past year during official opening hours because they were becoming overcrowded or because staff were over-pressed; which offices closed; and for how many days.

Miss Widdecombe: I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, that the information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Sickness Benefit

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he last reviewed eligibility to sickness benefit for a person with an untreatable condition and incapable of work within the first six months of the benefit period who wishes to travel abroad; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The special conditions for eligibility to sickness benefit for a person going abroad are contained in regulation 2 of the Social Security Benefit (Persons Abroad) Regulations 1975. These conditions, along with all the other conditions for eligibility to sickness benefit, whether in the United Kingdom or overseas, are kept under constant review. We have no plans to amend these regulations.

Domestic Violence

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the number of district offices in which women fleeing domestic violence are classified as a high, medium and low priority, respectively, for the purpose of community care grants paid under the social fund.

Mr. Scott: I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, that the information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Each district manager constructs his guidance, taking into account guidance issued by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, and a variety of local factors. This specific grouping may not always occur within the high priority band of a district's guidance because of the need to ensure payment for even more needy cases. However, all the circumstances of an application will still be considered and discretion can be used to raise the priority of an individual application, allowing a payment to be made.

Social Fund Loans

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many and what proportion of districts are now paying social fund loans only where there is considered to be serious risk to health and safety.

Mr. Scott: I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, that the information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Student Refugees

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what financial support is available from his Department to a student with refugee status who is barred from taking paid work but unable to claim income support or housing benefit.

Miss Widdecombe: I understand that students with refugee status are not barred from taking up paid employment. The social security system is not intended to support students, who should look to the educational maintenance system for any necessary financial support.

Community Care Grants

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will issue guidance to area social fund officers reminding them that their guidance on community care grants should specify the priority of needs.

Mr. Scott: We are currently considering the need for extending and amending existing guidance. I will write to the hon. Member with details of any action that we decide to take.

Lower-paid Families

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing the numbers of lower-paid families with and without children, whose marginal tax rates including benefit withdrawal will be *(a)* 90 to 100 per cent., *(b)* 80 to 90 per cent., *(c)* 70 to 80 per cent., *(d)* 60 to 70 per cent., *(e)* 50 to 60 per cent. and *(f)* 40 to 50 per cent., taking into account the tax changes for 1991-92.

Mr. Jack: The information requested is set out in the table.

Marginal Deduction Rates Including Social Security
Numbers with marginal deduction rates within each range (thousands) Great Britain

Per Cent.	Families with children	Others
[1]90 to 99	50	0
80 to 89	130	15
70 to 79	140	50
60 to 69	0	5
50 to 59	0	0
40 to 49	5	15

Figures are based on pooled Family Expenditure Survey data.
Calculated for benefit units in receipt of income-related benefits where at least one partner works 24 hours per week or more.
[1] There are no families facing marginal deduction rates of 100 per cent. or more.

Mortgage Interest

Mr. Gerald Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in what circumstances payments of income support for mortgage interest are made to the mortgagee rather than the mortgagor.

Mr. Scott: Income support for mortgage interest may be paid direct where such payments are in the interest of the mortgagor and his family. To strengthen these arrangements we shall in future be asking all claimants with mortgages to provide evidence of the state of their loan account at the outset of their claim, and annually thereafter. This will enable the Department quickly to identify people who have arrears and for whom direct payment to the lender will be appropriate. We expect to have the new administrative arrangements in operation before the new year.

DEFENCE

Nuclear Test Sites

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his most recent assessment of radioactive surface contamination through venting and cratering at the Nevada nuclear bomb test site.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have nothing to add to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Mr. Carlisle) on 29 October 1990, *Official Report*, column *416*.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the outcome of the talks at his Department with the delegation of aboriginals from South Australia on 30 October about compensation for the effects of British nuclear tests at Maralinga.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A delegation representing the Maralinga aborigine population met my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces and senior officials on 30 October. They presented their views on the further rehabilitation of the former nuclear test sites at Maralinga and Emu field, and on the question of compensation for any remaining restrictions on access that might remain once any rehabilitation is complete. Both sides found the meetings useful.

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total expenditure by his Department on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1991-92 and budget for 1992-93.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The earliest year for which figures are available is 1982-83. Figures for the period 1982-83 to 1990-91 are as follows:

	£ million
1982-83	5·1
1983-84	6·3
1984-85	6·8
1985-86	6·7
1986-87	7·3
1987-88	7·0
1988-89	7·1
1989-90	8·0
1990-91	8·4

The estimated expenditure figure for 1991-92 is £9·0 million and for 1992-93 £9·5 million.

The figures provided include staff costs and expenditure on films, exhibitions, publications and equipment.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department has sent unsolicited direct mail as part of the distribution of publicity material.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No.

Service Accommodation

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the report of the working party report on service accommodation requirements.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No. The Government's conclusions on the recommendations of the task force on service housing will be made public by announcements in the usual way.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service married quarters he plans to make available for purchase by members of the armed forces; and where they are located.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: All surplus married quarters which are suitable for individual sale are normally offered for sale to service personnel through the services' discount scheme in the first instance. Those currently being offered for sale include properties in Exmouth, Devizes, Kirkudbright, Edinburgh, Barton Stacey, Gosport, Peterhead, Ripon, Lower Quinton, Uckfield, Southend, Chatham, Forres, Ely, Folkestone, Portsmouth and Plymouth.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discount will be offered to service personnel wishing to buy their service married quarters.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Service personnel purchasing surplus married quarters through the services' discount scheme are given a 30 per cent. discount.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service married quarters are currently vacant; and where they are located.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As at 30 September 1991, the latest date for which figures are available, 9,834 service married quarters were vacant.

The regional breakdown is as follows:

Region	*Total vacant*
Northern	98
Yorkshire	731
East Midlands	745
East Anglia	622
South East	3,604
South West	1,659
West Midlands	289
North West	121
Wales	273

Region	Total vacant
Scotland	1,191
Northern Ireland	501
Total	9,834

Many of these properties were either undergoing or awaiting major works or modernisation, some were already allotted to service families who were due to move in shortly, and others were being considered for disposal. In addition, 1,613 houses were in the process of being sold.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether service personnel leaving the armed forces will have the same right to purchase their service married quarters as those continuing in the services.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Service personnel in general do not have a right to purchase their service married quarters. There is, however, a scheme under which service personnel may apply to purchase surplus vacant married quarters at a discount. We are examining the scope for giving personnel who will be made redundant a degree of priority under this discount scheme.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of service personnel are married; and what proportion live in service married quarters.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Approximately 52 per cent. of service personnel are married and approximately 20 per cent. of service personnel live in service married quarters.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service married quarters he is planning to make available to housing associations; for how long they will be made available; whether the housing associations will be charged; and where the properties are located.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Discussions with housing associations are continuing. It is too soon to provide details of any scheme that may be adopted.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the public opinion surveys carried out by his Department since 11 July 1991.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I will write to the hon. Member.

Gordon Highlanders

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will review the White Paper proposals concerning the Gordon Highlanders.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to my statement during the debate on the Address on 1 November 1991, *Official Report*, column 186.

Worcester and Sherwood Foresters

Mr. Ashton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement regarding the absence without leave since 4 October of Private Patrick Callaghan of Tylder road, Worksop and Private Byron Dent of Kilburn road, Belper now stationed in the Worcester and Sherwood Foresters at Lichfield following their allegations of brutality by non-commissioned officers while stationed in Cyprus this summer; if he will ensure that any disciplinary hearings and sentence will be made in this country and that they will not be sent back to Cyprus.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The two soldiers are no longer absent. The special investigation branch of the Royal Military Police is undertaking a full investigation into the allegations of bullying they have made.

Bullying is not tolerated in the Army, and anyone found responsible for such behaviour will be appropriately disciplined. Any charges that may follow from the SIB investigation will be dealt with in Cyprus, and the two soldiers may have to return there to give evidence.

Charges arising from the soldiers' absence will also be dealt with in Cyprus, and their attendance will be necessary. With regard to future postings, as soldiers must be available for duty anywhere in the world, I cannot give the undertaking sought.

Press and Publicity Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether any member of his Department's press and publicity staff accompanied him in Blackpool during the Conservative party conference.

Mr. Tom King: No.

Mortgages

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence with which financial institution his Department has arranged the provision of mortgages for service personnel; at what rates will the mortgage be offered; and whether they will be made available to service personnel leaving the armed forces.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The company concerned has asked that such details are not made public.

Merchant Ships (Emergency Use)

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his policy for having available a pool of British registered merchant ships for emergency defence use.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Current policy for providing merchant ships for defence purposes during crisis and war is to charter commercially on the open market or, where this is not possible, to requisition ships on the British register.

Thames House, Millbank

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Government Departments' workers will be located, and what work will be carried out, at Thames house, Millbank, which is currently being refurbished.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Staff will be moved into Thames house from a number of buildings currently occupied. Details will not be finalised for some time yet.

WEU Satellite Centre

Sir Michael Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action is being taken by his Department to ensure that the proposed Western European Union ground sector data management sector is based in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The UK is one of three countries to have bid for the location of the proposed WEU satellite centre. All three bids are currently under consideration and await the decision of WEU Ministers on 18 November.

HEALTH

NHS Trusts

13. **Mr. Bidwell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has of the financial difficulties being experienced by trust hospitals.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: All the NHS trusts submit details of their financial performance to the NHS management executive on a quarterly or monthly basis. The returns received to date indicate that all trusts are planning to meet their financial duties this year.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list his estimate of the start-up cost for each of the first and second wave hospital trusts; and which budget has met this cost in each instance.

Mr. Dorrell: A sum of £190,000 was allocated for each trust in the first wave and £15,000 towards conveyancing costs. A similar figure will be allocated to the second wave of trusts. This is a top-sliced budget to support expenses arising from the reforms and is a non-recurring revenue addition paid to regions to help cover expenditure incurred by trusts during their shadow running period.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many trust boards are without female representation; and if he will list them.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: None.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the female trust chief executives and the trusts they manage.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The appointment of the chief executive and other executive directors is a matter for the NHS trust board. The hon. Member may wish to contact the individual NHS trust boards for this information.

Immunisation and Smear Testing

14. **Mr. Trotter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will report on the extent to which doctors in the Northern health region have achieved the targets for immunisation and smear testing.

Mr. Dorrell: At 1 October 1990, the latest figures available, 74 per cent. of GPs in the Northern regional health authority area had achieved the higher target level for immunisations and 20 per cent. had achieved the lower target level. The corresponding figures for cervical cytology targets were 72 per cent. and 27 per cent. I congratulate all those involved in this splendid achievement.

Prescription Charges

15. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the percentage increase in the NHS prescription charge, since May 1979.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The figure is 1,600 per cent.

Care of the Elderly

16. **Mr. Trimble:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give the number of beds for the continuing care of the elderly in 1979 and currently.

Mr. Dorrell: The average daily number of available geriatric beds in national health service hospitals in England fell from 55,000 in 1979 to 49,000 in 1989-90 —the latest figures available. These figures include all beds under the supervision of a geriatric consultant; beds for long-stay patients are not separately identified.

In the same period, the numbers of elderly patients treated rose from 243,000 to 447,000.

Patients Charter

17. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the patients charter will affect health care for patients.

Mr. Waldegrave: The key aim of the charter is to improve the service provided to patients. Patients will be clear what their rights are under the national health service. They will know the standards of service they can expect to receive and what to do and who to contact if standards of service do not meet expectations. They will also be encouraged to give their views on services to help the NHS to do even better in the future.

Waiting Lists

18. **Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he next plans to meet representatives of health authorities to discuss waiting lists.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I meet representatives of health authorities regularly to discuss a whole range of NHS issues.

28. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on how the length of time for waiting lists is to be calculated.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Waiting time is calculated from the date on which a patient's name is added to a waiting list for in-patient or day case treatment by a hospital doctor.

Under the patients charter, from 1 April 1992, all patients—except for special cases—are to be guaranteed admission within two years from the date on which their name is added to the waiting list. Health authorities will also set local charter standards on waiting times for first out-patient appointments.

27. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he is proposing to provide patients with more information about waiting times for treatment at hospitals before they undergo the initial consultation.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The patients charter, published last week, sets out a new right for patients to be

given detailed information on local health services, including waiting times for treatment. From 1 April 1992, health authorities must provide information about waiting times for in-patient, day case and out-patient treatment by hospital, specialty and individual consultant, set out in a standard way. Health authorities will also set and publicise local charter standards on waiting times for first out-patient appointments.

GP Fund Holders

19. **Mr. Tim Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of general practitioners became budget holders on 1 April.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: A total of 1,720 general practitioners became budget holders on 1 April in England. This represents 6·8 per cent. of the total number of GPs in England.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioners' practices are interested in acquiring fund-holding status from April 1992.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced to the House on 13 March that 306 GP practices in England became fund holders this year. It is anticipated that a similar number will acquire fund-holding status from April 1992.

Cardiologists

20. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will obtain a copy of the review into cardiology staffing published jointly by the British Cardiac Society and Royal College of Physicians; and what steps are being taken by his Department to ensure that each district is served by a full-time cardiologist.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We received the report on 29 October. Its implications are being considered.

Gynaecology and Obstetrics, Liverpool

21. **Mr. Loyden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received about the proposed reorganisation of the gynaecology and obstetrics service in Liverpool.

Mr. Dorrell: We have received a letter from the hon. Member about the £16 million development proposed for the new women's hospital that will bring together at last in one place all the services for women and expectant mothers in Liverpool.

GP Earnings

22. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on the average current earning levels of general practitioners.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: From 1 December 1991, general practitioners are intended to earn, on average, £37,975 per annum. In 1988-89, the latest year for which actual earnings are known, general practitioners earned, on average, £28,979.

Dorset Health Authorities

23. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the real level of resources available to *(a)* West Dorset and *(b)* East Dorset district health authorities in 1979 and currently.

Mr. Dorrell: Total revenue expenditure by Dorset health authority for the financial year 1979-80 equates to some £116,807,000 at 1990-91 prices.

The total revenue expenditure by the successor East and West Dorset health authorities in the financial year 1990-91 was £165,860,000.

These figures represent an increase in real terms of some 30 per cent.

NHS Trusts, Essex

24. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress towards self-governing trust status for hospitals in Mid-Essex.

Mr. Dorrell: I am happy to report that the Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS trust was established on 1 November and will become fully operational on 1 April 1992. The unit has an excellent record and I am sure that it will use its new freedoms to bring even greater benefits to its patients.

NHS Public Finance

25. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of expenditure by the NHS is raised by public finance in 1991-92, and what was the comparable figure in 1978-79.

Mr. Dorrell: It is estimated that public expenditure will account for 94·3 per cent. of NHS expenditure in England this year. The comparable figure for 1978-79 was 97·5 per cent.

Manchester NHS Trust

26. **Mr. Litherland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the financial viability of Manchester Central Hospitals and Community Care NHS Trust in Manchester.

Mr. Dorrell: The Manchester Central Hospitals and Community Care NHS trust was financially viable when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State established it last year and continues to be so.

Stillbirths

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give, for the most recent year, the percentage of birthweights under 1500g and the stillbirth and neonatal mortality rates for babies whose mothers *(a)* delivered at a domestic address and originally intended to do so, *(b)* originally intended to deliver in a national health service hospital but delivered at a domestic address as a result of circumstances which occurred unintentionally during labour, *(c)* originally intended to deliver at a domestic address but delivered in a national health service hospital as a result of a decision made during labour for clinical or other reasons or *(d)* delivered in a national health service hospital and originally intended to do so.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information requested is not available. Data relating to maternity episodes are

collected via the hospital episode statistics—HES—system which will in future years provide some of this information. HES data for 1989-90, the latest year currently available, are not of sufficient quality to allow analysis at this level of detail.

Midwifery

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he intends to include basic and post-basic midwifery education within the terms of reference for the special investigation into how London's health care should be planned in the 1990s.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Sir Bernard Tomlinson, who has been appointed to advise my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on the development of London health services, has been given a wide-ranging remit to look at the provision of health care, the organisation and provision of undergraduate medical teaching, postgraduate medical education and research and development. If, in the course of his investigation, issues arise which have implications for midwifery education, he would be free to offer advice on this area.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the concern expressed in the eighth report of the Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors and Professions allied to Medicine Review Body with regard to regional discrepancies in the allocation of clinical grades to posts, particularly in midwifery, is being addressed in his Department's evidence to the forthcoming review body report.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We are aware of the concerns expressed by the review body in its eighth report about the outcome of the clinical grading review. The Health Departments' evidence to the review body is not published.

Hospital Closures

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by national health service region for each of the last five years the number of national health service maternity beds which have been lost to the service.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is contained in "Summary of Bed Availability—England" a copy of which is available in the Library. This includes the numbers of NHS maternity beds and the annual average percentage change in each region from 1984 to 1989-90.

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department has sent unsolicited direct mail as part of the distribution of publicity material.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department has used direct mail to every household to inform the public about AIDS and the NHS reforms. A summary of the patients charter will shortly be issued to each household.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give separate figures for the spending by his Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1991-92 and budgets for 1992-93.

Mr. Dorrell: Information for the years 1979-80 to 1987-88 is not available in the form requested.

The Department's budget for communications and publicity includes provision for nurse recruitment, blood donor recruitment and drug misuse campaigns. The other information is set out in the table.

	£ million
Expenditure for 1988-89 is as follows	
Television	1·662
Radio	0·205
Newspaper	1·196
Other Material	7·736
Expenditure for 1989-90 is as follows:	
Television	3·549
Radio	0·127
Newspaper	2·258
Other Material	10·828
Expenditure for 1990-91 is as follows:	
Television	1·900
Radio	0·005
Newspaper	2·739
Other Material	16·845
Estimated expenditure for 1991-92 is as follows:	
Television	3·200
Radio	0
Newspaper	2·030
Other Material	18·853

The budget for communications and publicity for 1992-93 has yet to be decided.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide an up-to-date list of each television advertising campaign carried out, or to be carried out, by his Department during 1991-92, and of each other publicity campaign costing more than £100,000, giving for each *(a)* the topic, *(b)* the commencement date, *(c)* the duration and *(d)* the advertising, promotional and public relations companies involved.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer the hon. Member to the replies that I gave him on 1 July at column *54*, 10 July at column *414* and 11 July at column *459*. In addition to that information, other campaigns for 1991-92 costing more than £100,000 are:

Advice to elderly people—commencing shortly and will be ongoing.
The Patient's Charter —commenced October and will continue to January 1992.

The only additional major company involved is Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

Television advertising is currently being used for the nursing campaign and will be used in early 1992 for the solvent misuse campaign.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total expenditure by his Department on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1991-92 and budget for 1992-93.

Mr. Dorrell: Functions that are commonly associated with press and public relations are carried out by the Department's information division. Manpower and running costs of this division are:

	£ million
1989-90 Expenditure	0·890
1990-91 Expenditure	1·250
1991-92 Expenditure[1]	1·540

[1] Estimated.

Information for the years 1979-80 to 1987-88 is not available in the form requested. Budgets for 1992-93 have yet to be decided.

Abortion

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department first approved the practice of using a macerator to dispose of the bodies of aborted unborn babies into the sewage system.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This method has been used in a small number of private sector approved places since the early 1970s.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on the methods of disposal of the bodies of unborn babies by private clinics licensed to perform abortions.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is one of the conditions of approval of private sector places under section 1(3) of the Abortion Act 1967 that the method of foetal disposal is agreed by the Department and that no change is made without prior consultation.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on how many occasions and for what reasons his Department has withheld approval of the use of a macerator to dispose of the bodies of aborted unborn babies.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: None. The use of maceration following termination of pregnancy will not be approved in future.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement regarding the disposal of the bodies of unborn babies following abortion.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Incineration is the preferred method of disposal following termination of pregnancy.

Sugar

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those diseases, ailments or other disorders, other than tooth decay, recognised by his Department as being solely or primarily caused by consumption of sugar.

Mr. Dorrell: The Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy—COMA—in its 1989 report "Dietary Sugars and Human Disease", identified the consumption of non-milk extrinsic sugars or NMEs, principally sucrose, as the primary cause of tooth decay. It found insufficient evidence to identify dietary sugars as either the sole or primary cause of any other disease or disorder. However, it recommended that intakes of sucrose in excess of about 200g per day should be avoided, since this may be associated in normal adults with elevations of blood cholesterol, glucose and insulin concentrations. It also recommended restriction of intakes of NMEs in the obese and those becoming obese.

COMA further advised that people with diabetes or hypertriglyceridaemia should restrict their intake of NMEs to less than about 25g to 50g per day, unless otherwise instructed by their own physician or dietitian. It also recommended the intensification of research into links between sucrose intake and colo-rectal cancer, renal and biliary calculi and Crohn's Disease as evidence in these areas is inadequate to justify any general dietary recommendations.

COMA's report, "Dietary Reference Values for Food Energy and Nutrients for the United Kingdom", published in July of this year, endorsed the findings of the 1989 report. Both reports are available in the Library.

Birth Statistics

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each national health service region the number of babies that were born in 1990.

Mr. Dorrell: The number of live births occurring in each regional health authority in England and Wales in 1990 is given in the table.

Regional Health Authorities	*Total live births*
Northern	40,446
Yorkshire	51,084
Trent	59,399
East Anglian	28,206
North West Thames	47,332
North East Thames	60,536
South East Thames	51,168
South West Thames	38,183
Wessex	38,137
Oxford	36,211
South Western	40,464
West Midlands	76,103
Mersey	33,008
North Western	60,447
Wales	37,193

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each national health service region *(a)* the number of babies born weighing less than 1500g and *(b)* the proportion of births under 1500g in 1990.

Mr. Dorrell: The number of low birth weight babies under 1500g, and the proportion of births under 1500g, by regional health authority, in 1990, is as follows:

RHA by residence of mother	*Total births Under 1500g*	*Proportion under 1500g per 100 [1]total births*
Northern	408	1·0
Yorkshire	541	1·1
Trent	723	1·1
East Anglian	231	0·9
North East Thames	596	1·0
North West Thames	540	1·1
South East Thames	542	1·0
South West Thames	397	1·0
Wessex	400	1·0
Oxford	320	0·9
South Western	384	0·9
West Midlands	904	1·2
Mersey	352	1·0
North Western	676	1·1
Wales	371	1·0

[1] Live and stillbirths.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each national health service region *(a)* the number of low birth weight babies, under 2500g, and *(b)* the proportion of births under 2500g in 1990.

Mr. Dorrell: The number of low birth weight babies under 2500g, and the proportion of births under 2500g, by regional health authority, in 1990 is as follows:

Regional health authority by residence of mother	*Total births under 2500 g*	*Proportion under 2500 g per 100 total births*
Northern	2,795	6·8
Yorkshire	3,660	7·1
Trent	4,666	7·3
East Anglian	1,596	6·0
North East Thames	3,956	6·8
North West Thames	3,425	6·7
South East Thames	3,437	6·6
South West Thames	2,461	6·1
Wessex	2,499	6·5
Oxford	2,298	6·3
South Western	2,460	6·0
West Midlands	5,631	7·5
Mersey	2,165	6·4
North Western	4,435	7·5
Wales	2,432	6·2

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each national health service region *(a)* the number and rates of perinatal deaths, *(b)* the number and rates of neonatal deaths and *(c)* the number and rate of post neonatal deaths in 1990.

Mr. Dorrell: The numbers and rates of perinatal, neonatal and post neonatal deaths for each regional health authority in 1990 are as follows:

RHA by residence	*Perinatal deaths*		*Neonatal deaths*		*Postneonatal deaths*	
	number	*rate*	*number*	*rate*	*number*	*rate*
Northern	322	7·9	174	4·3	148	3·6
Yorkshire	410	8·0	267	5·2	200	3·9
Trent	538	8·4	307	4·8	189	3·0
East Anglian	157	5·9	84	3·2	99	3·7
North West Thames	380	7·4	214	4·2	135	3·0
North East Thames	503	8·6	240	4·1	163	2·8
South East Thames	430	8·2	234	4·5	189	3·6
South West Thames	282	7·0	174	4·3	101	2·5
Wessex	271	7·0	141	3·7	131	3·4
Oxford	299	8·2	157	4·3	107	2·9
South Western	292	7·1	163	4·0	118	2·9
West Midlands	771	10·2	473	6·3	271	3·6
Mersey	268	7·9	149	4·4	107	3·2
North Western	527	8·9	275	4·7	228	3·9
Wales	290	7·4	152	3·9	116	3·0

Perinatal mortality: stillbirths and deaths in the first week of life. Rates per 1,000 live and still births.
Neonatal mortality: deaths in the first 28 days of life. Rates per 1,000 live births.
Postneonatal deaths: deaths at ages 28 days and over but under one year. Rates per 1,000 live births.

Aromatherapists

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on the number of unqualified aromatherapists practising in England.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce a licensing system for practitioners of herbal medicine, aromatherapy and other forms of alternative or complementary medicine.

Mr. Dorrell: There are no such plans.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the public opinion surveys carried out by his Department since 11 July.

Mr. Dorrell: The information readily available relates to the register of surveys maintained by the Central Statistical Office. Titles of surveys carried out since 11 July are as follows:

Public perception of family doctor services.
Anti-Drugs Misuse Campaign 1991-92: Strategy.

Clinical Waste (Disposal)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance has been issued to regional health authorities and district health authorities with regard to the upgrading of existing facilities for the disposal of clinical waste, following the removal of Crown immunity from hospitals.

Mr. Dorrell: Guidance, under cover of an executive letter ELM(91)M/1, was issued to the NHS on 20 March 1991 in a document entitled "Strategic Guide for Waste Management", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Cot Deaths

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what was the recommendation to mothers on whether to lie babies down to sleep on back, front or side in the "Pregnancy Book" issued to all mothers *(a)* in the version issued in 1990, *(b)* as revised in 1991, *(c)* as reprinted in 1991 and *(d)* as intended now; and how many copies of it were printed for distribution;

(2) what steps he is taking to inform health care professionals, doctors, midwives, and maternity homes of how to advise mothers on avoiding cot deaths;

(3) when his Department was informed about the New Zealand research and the factors associated with cot deaths; what steps he then took to assess that research; and what other action was taken.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I shall let the hon. Member have such information as is available as soon as possible.

Criminal Justice

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance has been given to the national steering group on social service departments' role in the Criminal Justice Act on the need for an early report; and what studies are being conducted into the resource implications.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The first meeting of the national steering group is to be held on 8 November. A detailed timetable for the production of an action plan will be considered at that meeting. Members are aware of the need to complete their work by the time the main provisions of the Criminal Justice Act 1991 are implemented in October 1992. Part of the group's remit will be to make an assessment of the additional resources required to enable the practice of remanding juveniles to penal establishments to be abolished.

Adoption

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the difficulties facing social workers undertaking inquiries into the proposed adoption of children brought into the United Kingdom from other countries; and what guidance has been issued by his Department on procedures to be followed.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: As part of its responsibilities for liaising with local authority social services departments on all child care matters, the Department's social services inspectorate is in contact with local authorities on intercountry adoption. The inspectorate is available to advise on intercountry adoption in general and on any particular matters of difficulty.

Detailed guidance on intercountry adoption is contained in letters CI(90)17 and CI(91)14 issued by the chief inspector of the social services inspectorate to directors of social services in England. Copies of which are available in the Library.

South Yorkshire Ambulance Service

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the hospitals offered in the consultations on the application of the South Yorkshire ambulance service for trust status expressed opposition or criticism of the proposal.

Mr. Dorrell: The public consultation exercise was organised by Trent regional health authority; the results are available from the authority.

Health Authorities

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each national health service region *(a)* the total number of health authority members and *(b)* the number of female health authority members.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Each regional health authority has five non-executive members. The number of female members in each is as follows:

	Number
Northern	1
Yorkshire	1
Trent	1
East Anglian	2
North West Thames	2
North East Thames	2
South East Thames	1
South West Thames	2
Wessex	3
Oxford	1
South Western	1
West Midlands	1
Mersey	1
North Western	1

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each national health service region *(a)* the number of health authorities without female representation and *(b)* the district health authorities without female representation.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information about the number of district health authority members who are female is not collected centrally. The appointment of district health authority members is the responsibility of regional health authorities.

Hospital Social Workers

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the implications of recent changes in the national health service, including the creation of hospital trusts, for the roles and responsibilities of hospital social workers.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The NHS reforms have not changed the collaborative arrangements whereby local authorities provide social work services to the NHS without charge or the responsibilities of the individual social workers concerned. Local authority circular LAC(91)14 issued in October 1991 made this clear; a copy of the circular is available in the Library.

Press and Publicity Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether any member of his Department's press and publicity staff accompanied him in Blackpool during the Conservative party conference.

Mr. Dorrell: No.

Dentures

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many sets of complete upper and lower synthetic dentures were supplied under the national health service during the financial years 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91.

Mr. Dorrell: In 1988-89 there were 439,630 sets of complete upper and lower synthetic dentures provided under the national health service in England. The figure for 1989-90 was 345,430. The figure for 1990-91 is not yet available. The decline in numbers is likely to continue as people retain their natural teeth for longer.

Lowermoor (Pollution)

Sir Gerrard Neale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he received the report of the Lowermoor incident health advisory group of their assessment of reports on the health effects on people resident in the Lowermoor distribution area at the time of the pollution incident in 1987 which have become available since the group reported in July 1989; when it will be published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: I am pleased to say that the Lowermoor incident health advisory group has completed its report following careful assessment and evaluation of all available information. It has consulted extremely widely on all the matters before it. Its report is being published today, and I am placing copies in the Library.

The group has concluded that the research reported to it does not provide convincing evidence that harmful accumulation of aluminium has occurred, nor that there is a greater prevalence of organic abnormalities in the exposed population. It does not expect lasting physical harm from the toxicity of the contaminated water itself. Nevertheless, it acknowledges that the incident was unique and although it has no reason to predict any late consequences, it cannot exclude them categorically.

The group states that it has no doubt that the accident itself and subsequent events have led to real mental and physical suffering in the community. Such a situation is well recognised following major accidents. The district health authority is arranging the continuation of counselling services for at least two years.

The advisory group has recommended that preliminary work which suggests that some residents are "sensitised" to aluminium, so that they experience increased absorption of aluminium and a worsening of symptoms, be repeated. Agreement in principle has been reached for the Medical Research Council to commission and manage this research, and for the Department of Health to provide funding. The Medical Research Council will provide the mechanism for the development of protocols, and provision of peer review for this research.

The Government welcome the group's advice, and I have asked the health authority to act on those recommendations for following up the health of local people that the group have made.

I am grateful to the chairman, Professor Dame Barbara Clayton, and the members of her group for the thorough way in which they have produced such an authoritative report. The Department, the health authority, and the people of the Camelford area have been well served by the group.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 6 November 1991

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

House of Fraser

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Attorney-General what action he has taken following the report of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry to the effect that criminal offences may have been committed by persons interested in the outcome of that Committee's report into the takeover of House of Fraser; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: On 13 September I informed the Chairman of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry that some further inquiries would be necessary before a firm view could be reached about possible criminality of those mentioned by the hon. Member. On the same day the Director of Public Prosecutions asked the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police to undertake those inquiries. The police report is awaited.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Attorney-General if the Crown prosecution service has received a report from the Metropolitan police concerning possible criminal offences by persons interested in the outcome of the report by the Select Committee on Trade and Industry into the takeover of House of Fraser; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: A report has not yet been received by the Crown Prosecution Service; the Metropolitan police are conducting their inquiries as quickly as the circumstances allow and will submit a report as soon as possible.

Cash Limits

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Attorney-General whether any changes have been made to the class X, vote 3 cash limit and running costs limit for the Northern Ireland court service.

The Attorney-General: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the cash limit for class X, vote 3 has been increased by £560,000 from £17,996,000 to £18,556,000 and the running costs limit by £120,000 from £13,498,000 to £13,618,000. The increase is within the forecast out turn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today. The increases arises because of additional costs incurred in respect of bomb damage to a court building, a judicial removal and computer costs for a fixed penalty/penalty points scheme. Additional appropriations-in-aid of £725,000 will offset the increase in the provision.

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Attorney-General whether any changes will be made to the class X, vote 12 cash limit and running costs limit for the Public Record Office.

The Attorney-General: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the cash limit for class X, vote 12 will be increased by £254,000 from £21,997,000 to £22,251,000. This includes £169,000 for part take up of the £880,000 capital end year flexibility entitlement announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 17 July 1991; and £85,000 towards the pay and associated expenses of the additional staff recommended in the recent Efficiency Scrutiny report. The running costs limit for the Public Record Office will as a result be increased by £85,000 from £19,207,000 to £19,292,000.

These increases are within the forecast out turn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement.

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Attorney-General whether any changes will be made to the Lord Chancellor's Department's running costs limit for 1991-92.

The Attorney-General: Yes. Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the running costs limit for the Lord Chancellor's Department, class X, vote 1 will be increased by £7,413,000 from £347,899,000 to £355,312,000.

The Supplementary Estimate gives effect to an increase of £1,419,000 in running costs under end year flexibility arrangements.

It is also required to increase the running costs provision for certain tribunals by £391,000 and to regularise arrangements for management charges in respect of the common investment funds scheme by an increase to provision of £300,000.

The Supplementary Estimate is required to increase provision in running costs by £5,125,000 to meet the cost of PSA bills carried over from 1990-91 that have been paid in 1991-92 or that remain outstanding.

Finally the Supplementary Estimate gives effect to a running costs transfer of £18,000 from Her Majesty's Stationery Office for work by the Statutory Publications Office and a running costs transfer of £160,000 from the Home Office for training material to be provided through the Judicial Studies Board.

The increase is within the forecast out turn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement.

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Attorney-General whether he proposes any changes to the Serious Fraud Office's cash and running costs limit for 1991-92.

The Attorney-General: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the cash limit for class X vote 7 will be increased by £1,070,000 from £7,792,000 to £8,862,000. Within this total the Department's running costs limit will be increased by £793,000 from £7,339,000 to £8,132,000.

This increase will enable the Serious Fraud Office to meet the additional costs arising from the investigation into the affairs of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International. The increase is within the forecast out turn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

DEFENCE

Ocean Hound

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information is in his possession which would indicate whether any naval ships from countries other than the United Kingdom were in the proximity of the Ocean Hound when it sank off the Kent coast on 10-11 August; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Records of the movements of non-United Kingdom naval ships in and around United Kingdom waters are not maintained unless they are operating in conjunction with Royal Navy vessels. There were no such joint operations in the vicinity of the Ocean Hound on 10-11 August.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether he has arranged for all records held by his Department with regard to the location of naval vessels in the area where the Ocean Hound sank on 10-11 August, to be made available to the marine accident investigation branch of the Department of Transport;

(2) if he will make available all records indicating which naval vessels were in the area off the Kent coast in which the Ocean Hound sank on 10-11 August; and what evidence there is that none of the naval ships in the area collided with the Ocean Hound.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There were no Royal Navy ships or submarines at sea within 300 nautical miles of the area at the estimated time of the loss of the Ocean Hound. The marine accident investigation branch has been advised accordingly.

Departmental Land Holdings

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give the hectarage, number of holdings and numbers of tenants of agricultural land owned by his Department in each county or Scottish region in *(a)* 1980 and *(b)* 1991.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: This information could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Meteorological Office

Mr. Higgins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will announce the identity of the next chief executive of the Meteorological Office.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: My right hon. Friend has decided, following an open competition, to appoint Professor Julian Hunt as the chief executive of the Meteorological Office Executive Agency. He is currently the professor of fluid mechanics at the university of Cambridge. He will take up the appointment on 2 January 1992, in succession to Sir John Houghton.

TRANSPORT

Railway Junctions

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all the locations which British Rail has identified at which enhanced protection arrangements, to which he referred in his answer of 22 October, *Official Report*, column *477*, are being introduced; and if he will set out for each location what specific measures are being adopted.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail have identified the following 10 locations as requiring changes to the protection: Ashford (junction with Appledore line), Bellgrove, Doncaster (junction with Sheffield line), Dorchester, West, Hanwell, Hydem, Newton, Paddock Wood, Shipley and Wimbledon (junction with Merton line).

At present, BR has amended the signalman's instructions in eight cases, so that if it is not possible to permit a train to leave a station platform, trains will be held at the previous signal (ie will not be allowed to enter the station). In the other two cases, that instruction is not applicable, as the train starts from a dead-end platform. The instructions given to platform staff on the starting of trains from those platforms have been reinforced by special instructions and monitoring.

Other options under consideration include modifying the signal inter-locking to achieve that precaution automatically, and modifying the track layouts to reduce the effect on services of these precautions. BR is evaluating the options in each case, and will discuss proposals with the Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate before taking further action.

Seat Belts

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which other countries of the European Community fit seat belts to all seats in coaches and minibuses.

Mr. Chope: None. EC legislation does not require seat belts or anchorages to be fitted other than on front seats or exposed seats.

The Government have been seeking to have the EC directives on seat belts and anchorages amended so that fitment to all seats in minibuses and coaches can be required.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the impact of the fitting of seat belts to all seats in coaches and minibuses on the incidence of death and injury in coaches in the event of an accident.

Mr. Chope: The number of injuries to seated bus and coach passengers in Great Britain in 1990 was 4,670, of which 289 were serious and nine fatal. The average annual total of injuries in the years 1986-1990 was 4,202.

It is believed that the fitting of seat belts could significantly reduce the minority of injuries which are due to passenger ejection or vehicle rollover. The benefit of seat belts in the case of frontal impact accidents is less clear, since the nature of the seat or surface in front of the occupant has to be taken into account. Research into this problem is continuing.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about the provision of seat belts in coaches and minibuses.

Mr. Chope: We have received a great many letters from individuals, schools and other organisations on this question, the vast majority of whom are in favour of the provision of seat belts in these vehicles.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions have taken place between his Department and coach manufacturers and operators about the fitting of seat belts.

Mr. Chope: The Department meets representatives of the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders and the Bus and Coach Council on a regular basis. Whenever the question of seat belts is raised, we emphasise the importance of making seat belts in coaches more readily available to the travelling public. Seat belts can already be fitted in most large coaches.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the likely additional cost of fitting seat belts to all seats in coaches and minibuses.

Mr. Chope: The estimated cost of fitting lap belts to every seat in a new coach is about £1,000, approximately £20 per seat.

Comparable figures for minibuses are not available but would probably be higher because of the additional floor strengthening work necessary to secure the seat belt anchorages.

Road Construction

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will quantify the savings expected this year in the road construction budget; what percentage of these savings has been reallocated to (i) road building and (ii) rail investment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The Government always seek to secure best value for money from its road construction budget. Estimated provision for new construction and renewal of national roads systems in England is £1,842 million gross (£1,755 million net) in the current financial year. We expect to start more than 150 miles of new roads this year.

A12, Chelmsford

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects emergency telephones to be installed on the A12 Chelmsford by-pass; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: During 1992.

BR (Bus Services)

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what powers British Rail has to run bus services to link in with and complement its rail services.

Mr. Freeman: Section 118 of the Transport Act 1985 gives the British Railways Board powers to secure the provision by other persons of services for the carriage of passengers by road where a railway service has been temporarily interrupted, or has been discontinued. The board has no power to run bus services themselves.

Road Schemes

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what changes he proposes to make in updating COBA 9 to COBA 10 to be used in evaluating possible road schemes on a cost benefit analysis basis.

Mr. Chope: The basic parameters, assumptions and methodologies incorporated in COBA are continually reviewed and researched. Since COBA 9 was released, there have been several parameter changes which have been considered necessary, and users have accordingly been notified of changes they need to make when running COBA 9. COBA 10 will incorporate these changes in to the default parameter set, thus simplifying the task of running the program. These changes include revised national road traffic forecasts (1989), values of time, accident rates, discount rate, GDP and petrol price forecasts.

Occasionally research may indicate the need for change to parameters or methodologies which cannot be incorporated by the user, and which therefore require a revised version of the program to be released. COBA 10 will incorporate some changes of this kind.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what basis his Department uses in cost benefit analysis terms on the valuation of time savings in relation to different methods of commuting to work when considering possible road schemes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: In cost-benefit analyses of road schemes, time savings for commuting to work are given the same value, whatever the method of commuting. Commuting time is valued at the standard appraisal value for non-work time, which is based on research into what people are willing to pay to save time.

A27

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to announce possible routes for the proposed A27 Polegate-Lewes dual carriageway; how many options he intends to publish; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: I hope to consult the public on a number of possible options for improving the A27 Lewes-Polegate route around the end of the year.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much British Rail has invested, and is planning to invest, in Scotland's railway infrastructure in preparation for the opening of the channel tunnel.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail plans to invest, with the private sector, in a channel tunnel freight terminal in Strathclyde. It considers the existing infrastructure is otherwise adequate for the channel tunnel services it plans to run to and from Scotland. Its substantial investment in passenger and freight rolling stock for these services will benefit Scotland as well as other parts of Great Britain.

Railways (Bus Services)

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those countries in Europe whose publicly-owned railway undertakings operate bus services to complement their railway services.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is not available within the Department.

Public Service Obligation Grant

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what will be the public service obligation grant ceiling for 1991-92.

Mr. Freeman: The cash ceiling on public service obligation grant for 1991-92 will be £900 million.

Cash Limits

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what changes he proposes to make to the cash limit and running costs limit for his Department.

Mr. Freeman: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the cash limit in class VII will be changed as follows:

Class and vote	*Current cash limit*	*Changes*	*Revised cash limit £'000s*
VII, 1	1,968,824	[1] −15,160	1,953,664
2	232,444	[2] 1,994	234,438

[1] There is a reduction of £15,000,000 in the cash limit on this Vote to cover part of a shortfall on class VII, vote 3 and additionally £160,000 running costs has been transferred to class VII, vote 2 in respect of certain relocation costs.

[2] Take up of entitlement to end year flexibility announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 17 July 1991, *Official Report*, columns 186-89. There are additions in respect of repayment services of £80,000 from Department of Trade and Industry (class IV, vote 2) and £15,000 running costs from Civil Service Commission (class XIX, vote 1) together with an addition of £1,000,000 for consultancy work connected with the sale of the Trust Ports. There is a reduction of £325,000 in Appropriations on Aid as a consequence of the transfer of Offshore Safety responsibilities to Department of Employment. There are reductions on this Vote in respect of the transfer of running costs to Department of Employment for Offshore Safety (£300,000) and to the Lord Chancellor's Department (class XIX, vote 1) for pensions (£21,000).

The running costs limit of the Department of Transport has been reduced by £306,000 from £379,290,000 to £378,984,000 as a consequence of the above.

The increase is within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

Ocean Hound

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will release the video film taken last week by agents acting on behalf of the Marine Accident Investigation Bureau, and in particular the shots of the damage primarily to the starboard and portside of the Ocean Hound which is currently lying on the sea bed off the Kent coast; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Marine accident investigation branch inspectors are examining the video film. The nature of the damage to the vessel is such that very thorough analysis is required.

To release the film to be viewed generally would be inappropriate both because it is an important item of evidence for the inquiry in progress and because general release might be offensive to the feelings of the bereaved. It has already been shown to near family of those lost.

The hon. Gentleman and I have exchanged letters, and we are to meet soon to discuss the Ocean Hound.

Departmental Land Holdings

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give the hectarage, number of holdings and numbers of tenants of holdings of agricultural land owned by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* British Rail in each county or region in the United Kingdom in *(a)* 1980 and *(b)* 1990.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information is not held in the format mentioned by the hon. Member and records of the 1980 holdings would not exist. The latest information on the Department's holdings is shown in our Register of Unused and Underused Land for 1990-91 in the Library. Details of individual tenancies are not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

The Department does not hold information on agricultural land owned by British Rail and the hon. Member is advised to contact the British Rail Property Board for this information.

Breath Testing

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the number of drivers breath-tested for alcohol in 1989-90; how many tests proved positive; and what was the comparable position in each of the last five years.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I have been asked to reply.

Statistics of breath tests for England and Wales are published in Home Office statistical bulletins. The most recent annual statistics, for the calendar year 1990, were published in issue 16/91 on 23 July 1991. A copy of this bulletin is in the Library.

The following table shows for England and Wales the number of screening breath tests reported and the number of these with positive results for the financial years 1984-85 to 1989-90.

Number of screening breath tests and those with positive results—England and Wales

	Screening breath tests	
	Total tests Thousands	*Number positive Thousands*
1984-85	203·0	[1] 74·0
1985-86	263·3	[1] 80·0
1986-87[2]	321·1	[1] 86·0
1987-88	420·0	103·3
1988-89	455·0	99·9
1989-90	557·6	98·3

[1] Estimate using monthly figures for total tests and percentage negative.

[2] Improvements in the comprehensiveness of reporting were made from 1 January 1987 so that figures for earlier years are not comparable.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Taxi and Hire Car Licences

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will bring forward proposals to ensure that local authorities issuing taxi and hire care licences are aware of any criminal record of the applicants.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Section 47 of the Road Traffic Act 1991 makes provision for this. It is due to come into effect on 1 April 1992.

Correspondence

Mr. Mudd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne can expect replies to his letters of 10 July, 24 July and 24 September regarding the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I wrote to the hon. Member on 29 October.

Mr. Mudd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne can expect a reply to his letter of 2 September on behalf of Mr. W. M. Dewdney, of Cairngorm Cottage, Treluswell, Penryn, Cornwall.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 1 November 1991.

Court Hearings

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prosecutions for murder in the last 10 years have been terminated before or during court proceedings as a result of failure of material witnesses to attend;

(2) how many proceedings for malicious wounding and grievous bodily harm have been terminated during the last 10 years as a result of failure of material witnesses to attend.

Mr. John Patten: Information collected centrally does not identify the number of court cases which are terminated because of a failure of material witnesses to attend.

Prisoners (Psychiatric Care)

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners in the United Kingdom are receiving psychiatric care; how many of these were previously in long-term psychiatric hospitals; how many of those who receive psychiatric care or were previously in long term psychiatric hospitals have been imprisoned for crimes of violence; and what percentage of the prison population received psychiatric care in each of the last five years.

Mrs. Rumbold: The information requested is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Prisoners (Suicides)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the recent proposal by the governor, medical officers and staff at Lewes prison that suicidal prisoners should be kept with others and supervised on a 24-hour basis by prison staff.

Mrs. Rumbold: It is the general policy of the prison service that, where prisoners are identified as being at risk of suicide, they should wherever possible be kept in shared accommodation to reduce feelings of isolation, facilitate support and ensure more effective monitoring and supervision. The options include location in a multi-cell or in a dormitory or hospital ward. Some prisoners, however, cannot always be held with others because of their difficult or violent behaviour. It is a matter for governors and their staff to decide where individual prisoners should be located, taking into account the needs and behaviour of the prisoner, the degree of suicide risk (which will vary from time to time), and the facilities and staffing which are available. It is desirable for local prisons and remand centres to have the option of holding acutely suicidal prisoners in a ward with 24-hour supervision by staff. This is not yet feasible at a number of establishments, including Lewes, but it is the prison service's intention to work towards the introduction of such wards as the necessary resources become available.

House of Fraser

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Metropolitan Commissioner on the progress of inquiries by the Metropolitan police into possible criminal offences by persons interested in the outcome of the report by the Select Committee on Trade and Industry into the takeover of House of Fraser.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. Any question of possible criminal offences arising out of the Department of Trade and Industry's report into the takeover of House of Fraser would be a matter for the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis and the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Illegal Camping

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will introduce legislation to give additional powers to the police to curb illegal camping by itinerants.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. Friend has no such plans.

Departmental Land Holdings

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the hectarage, number of holdings and numbers of tenants of holdings of agricultural land owned by his Department in each county or Scottish region in *(a)* 1980 and *(b)* 1990.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Home Office has the following agricultural land holdings in England and Wales:

Hectarage of agricultural land owned and managed by the prison service

County	*Number of Holdings*	*1980*	*1990*
Cambridge	1	51	28
Devon	3	751	559
Dorset	3	146	146
Buckinghamshire	1	4	4
Essex	1	6	6
Gloucestershire	1	10	10
Greater Manchester	2	46	46
Gwent	1	86	96
Hampshire	1	79	79
Hereford and Worcestershire	1	43	43
Humberside	1	102	102
Kent	3	101	85
Leicestershire	1	34	34
Lancashire	2	189	189
Lincolnshire	2	518	518
Nottinghamshire	3	353	353

County	Number of Holdings	1980	1990
Oxfordshire	1	123	nil
Staffordshire	3	204	204
Suffolk	2	491	491
Warwickshire	1	nil	113
Wiltshire	1	5	5
Yorkshire (North)	1	2	2
Yorkshire (South)	2	226	226
Yorkshire (West)	2	60	60

Hectarage of agricultural land owned by the prison service but let to tenants

County	Number of Tenants	1980	1990
Warwickshire	1	[1]—	95·0
Surrey	1	[1]—	19·0
Oxfordshire	1	5·5	5·5

[1](Tenancies not in existence in 1980)

Cash Limits

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he intends to make any changes to the 1991-92 cash limits within his responsibilities.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The cash limit for class IX, vote 3 will be reduced by £365,000 from £891,317,000 to £890,952,000 to reflect transfers of provision to the Department of Education and Science for additional resource units for probation students at universities (£205,000) and to the Lord Chancellor's Department for training material for magistrates on the Criminal Justice Act 1991 (£160,000).

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Aid Budget

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the Government's spending on aid in 1990, expressed both in actual sum spent and as a percentage of gross national product; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: Official development assistance in 1990 was £1,490 million, which was 0·27 per cent. of gross national product. We plan the aid programme on financial years, so that figures based on calendar years may not reflect the planned level of expenditure. Our planning figure for 1991-92 as a proportion of estimated GNP is 0·31 per cent.

Cash Limits

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what changes have been made in the 1991-92 cash limit for expenditure by the Overseas Development Administration.

Mrs. Chalker: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the cash limit on the Overseas Aid Vote (class II vote 5) will be increased by £65,225,000 from £1,573,117,000 to £1,638,342,000. The increase provides for humanitarian relief responses in respect of Iraqi refugees, the African famine and the Bangladesh cyclone, and balance of payments support for India. It also takes account of two small transfers of resources in respect of eastern Europe involving the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Health. The running costs cash limit for the ODA has also been increased by £50,000 from £44,843,000 to £44,893,000. The increase is within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Hong Kong

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the new obligations and undertakings contained in the recently agreed memorandum of understanding between the United Kingdom and Chinese Governments.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The details of the memorandum of understanding were placed in the Library of the House on the same day as my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made a statement to the House on this subject.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the autonomy of Hong Kong before and after 1997.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Hong Kong has in practice long enjoyed substantial autonomy in most areas, particularly in economic, commercial and financial matters. Under the joint declaration, from 1 July 1997 the Hong Kong special administrative region of the People's Republic of China will enjoy a high degree of autonomy except for foreign and defence affairs. It will be vested with executive, legislative and independent judicial power.

Cambodia

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress in Cambodia arising from the Paris peace agreement of 23 October.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I refer the honourable Member to the answer that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) on 22 October. Since then, on 31 October, the UN Security Council has adopted resolution 718 authorising the UN Secretary General to designate a special representative for Cambodia and carry out preparatory work for the establishment of UN transitional authority in Cambodia.

Mr. Mariusz Kuziak

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs why Mariusz Kuziak, a Polish citizen, was denied an entry visa to spend a fortnight with his relatives in Bury St. Edmunds.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

European Community

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consideration the intergovernmental conferences have given to increasing

the membership of the Community; and what adjustment, if any, has been made to draft treaties on environment and political union to accommodate future new members.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The agenda of the intergovernmental conference includes consideration of extended Community action on environment, but enlargement of the Community is not formally under discussion. It is expected to be debated after the conclusion of the conference.

Nuclear Weapons (Ukraine)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what negotiations Her Majesty's Government are engaged in with the Republic of Ukraine to reduce or eliminate nuclear weapons.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: None. In addition to President Kravchuk's earlier assurances to the United Nations General Assembly, the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet recently adopted a declaration affirming its commitment to observing the provisions of START and achieving eventual non-nuclear status, including accession to the non-proliferation treaty. We have, however, had contacts with Ukrainian representatives and are urging them to adhere to these commitments.

Albania

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement concerning government policy towards Albania, its economy and the establishment of democratic institutions there.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We warmly welcome the progress towards full democratisation and the establishment of a free market economy in Albania. In pursuit of this, the Government support the help being given by international institutions and maintains contact with members of the Government and opposition in Tirana.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to establish a British embassy in Albania; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: This matter is currently under review. I will inform the hon. and learned Member when a decision is taken.

Cash Limits

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he proposes to make any changes in his Department's diplomatic wing cash limits for 1991-92.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Subject to parliamentary approval of the Supplementary Estimate the cash limit for class II, vote 2 (Other External Relations) will be increased by £8,500,000 from £156,931,000 to £165,431,000 to reflect increased costs due to our contributions to the United Nations Iraq/Kuwait observer mission, United Nations observer mission in Western Sahara, United Nations human rights verification unit in El Salvador and the United Nations special commission in Iraq.

This increase is within the forecast outturn for the planning total as announced in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Footwear Imports

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the representations he has received from the footwear industry concerning footwear imports from China; whether he has replied; and what measures he plans to take to address their concerns.

Mr. Sainsbury: I have received a number of letters, including an application from the British Footwear Manufacturers' Federation for my Department to ask the European Commission for the suspension, under article 115 of the treaty of Rome, of free circulation of imported footwear originating in the People's Republic of China. After careful consideration of the industry's case I decided that the facts were not sufficient to warrant such a step. The federation has been informed and I have agreed to meet their representatives on 13 December.

RETEXT Scheme

Mr. Lee: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has been consulted by the European Commission on proposals for a RETEXT scheme to encourage economic development of areas of textile and clothing concentration; and whether the United Kingdom will be eligible for EC assistance under such a scheme.

Mr. Leigh: I have not yet been consulted. If such a scheme proceeds, however, I would expect textile areas of the United Kingdom to be eligible.

Uruguay Round

Mr. Lee: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on progress in the GATT Uruguay round, with particular reference to the textile and clothing trade.

Mr. Sainsbury: The Government are continuing to work with our European Community partners for an early successful conclusion to the Uruguay round. This would involve, among other things, an agreement to reduce barriers to world trade in textiles and to integrate this sector into GATT on the basis of strengthened rules and disciplines.

CIVIL SERVICE

Cash Limits

Mr. Wolfson: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if there are any proposals to change the 1991-92 cash limit for the office of the Minister for the Civil Service.

Mr. Renton: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate the cash limit for the Office of the Minister for the Civil Service (class XIX, vote 1) will be increased by £4,173,000 from £37,548,000 to £41,721,000.

The increase is required to cover the increased cost of the London economic summit; the cost of launching the citizens charter and the take up of capital expenditure provision under end year flexibility arrangements. In addition certain capital expenditure provision has been reallocated to current expenditure to cover reimbursing former Prime Ministers for the cost of maintaining an additional office.

Some of the above changes in provision have a consequent effect on the Department's running costs limit which will be increased by £3,776,000 from £45,276,000 to £49,052,000.

The increase is within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Index-linked Gilts

Mr. Lawson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing, for each year since their inception, the proportion that index-linked gilts represented of the total amount of gilt-edged stock in the hands of the public, that is, all holdings other than official.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The proportion of market holdings of gilts in indexed form is as follows:

End-March	
1981	1·3
1982	3·1
1983	6·5
1984	7·0
1985	8·4
1986	9·1
1987	11·3
1988	11·3
1989	13·7
1990	16·0
1991	17·7

Note: Calculated using nominal values plus accrued uplift for indexed gilts divided by the total.

Mortgages

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people are currently repaying a mortgage.

Mr. Maples: According to figures published by the Council of Mortgage Lenders, 9,628,000 mortgages were outstanding at the end of June 1991. A figure for the number of people repaying a mortgage is not available because a proportion of mortgages are joint or second mortgages.

European Central Bank

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what substantial differences Her Majesty's Government have identified between the model set out by the Dutch EC Presidency for an independent European central bank and the Bundesbank.

Mr. Maude: The model to which the hon. Gentleman refers is set out in a document produced by the EC Presidency as a basis for further negotiation at the Inter-Governmental Conference on Economic and Monetary Union. The United Kingdom and other member states are not committed to any particular part of its contents.

The Government have not sought to draw comparisons between the institution proposed in that document and the German Bundesbank.

Bankruptcy

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many bankruptcy petitions have been brought by Customs and Excise this year.

Mr. Gillian Shephard: In the calendar year to 1 November 1991 Customs and Excise have presented 5,486 bankruptcy petitions in England and Wales, 255 in Scotland and a further 178 in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many bankruptcy petitions have been brought by the Inland Revenue this year.

Mr. Maude: The number of bankruptcy (individuals) and winding-up (Companies) petitions filed by the Inland Revenue in England, Wales and Northern Ireland for the period 1 January 1991 to 30 September 1991 is:

	Number
Bankruptcy petitions	2,013
Winding-up petitions	592

The precise equivalent figures for Scotland cannot be ascertained without disproportionate cost but do not exceed 74 individuals and 20 companies.

EC Economic Growth

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing the average rate of economic growth of the six founder members of the EC from 1964 to 1973 and since 1979.

Mr. Maples: Table R1 in "National Accounts ESA Aggregates 1970-1989 Theme 2 Series C" published by Eurostat gives annual growth rates for gross domestic product at market prices for 1970 to 1989. Data for earlier years can be calculated from Table 25 in "National Accounts Main Aggregates Volume 1 1960-1989" published by OECD or can be obtained from the Statistical Office of the European Communities.

Copies of these publications are available in the Library of the House.

Taxpayers Charter

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the differences between the 1986 taxpayers charter and the 1991 taxpayers charter represent changes in Government policy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: The new charter seeks to convey the aims of the 1986 charter more clearly, by expressing them in a fresh and more focused way.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what alteration to the statutes governing the Bank of England's relationship with the Government would be required to comply with the Dutch Government's proposed draft treaty on economic and monetary union and the independence of member states' central banks.

Mr. Maude: The model to which the hon. Gentleman refers is set out in a document produced by the EC Presidency as a basis for further negotiation at the

Inter-Governmental Conference on Economic and Monetary Union. The UK and other member states are not committed to any particular part of its contents. The issues raised by the hon. Gentleman are still under discussion and no conclusion has yet been reached.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consideration was given by participants in the intergovernmental conference on economic and monetary union to including among the convergence measurement criteria the levels of unemployment and investment.

Mr. Maude: The Inter-Governmental Conference on economic and monetary union has considered a range of criteria. The Dutch Presidency text reflects the view that convergence of inflation and interest rates, successful membership of the narrow band of the ERM, and the avoidance of excessive budget deficits are the appropriate tests.

Manufacturing Industry

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the lastest available index figures for real output in manufacturing industry together with figures for the time period or periods since 1973 for the United Kingdom, France, Italy and the Federal Republic of Germany.

Mr. Mellor: The latest available information of manufacturing output at 1985 prices, seasonally adjusted is as follows:

	United Kingdom	*France*	*Italy*	*Germany*
1973	110·5	93·7	85·5	87·9
1991				
Q2	112·6	110·9	114·2	124·3
July	113·4	not available		
August	112·2			

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing manufacturing output less food, drink, tobacco, paper, printing and publishing in 1973, 1979, 1989 and the second quarter of 1991.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested on manufacturing output less food, drink, tobacco, paper, printing and publishing cannot be provided without incurring disproportionate cost.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish a table showing for each year since 1970 imports and exports of semi-finished and finished manufactures, less erratics, at 1990 prices.

Mr. Mellor: Information from which trade in semi-manufactures and finished manufactures less erratics at 1990 prices may be derived is available on the Central Statistical Office database which may be accessed through the Library of the House.

Unemployment

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the effect on the balance of payments on current account in terms of £ billion of an increase of 1 million in the number of unemployed.

Mr. Mellor: There is no straightforward relationship between unemployment and the current account.

Money Supply

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish a table showing for each of the years 1961 to 1990 the percentage increase in the supply of money plus quasi-money as defined by the International Monetary Fund in its International Financial Statistics Yearbook.

Mr. Maples: The information is given in the IMF's International Financial Statistics Yearbook for 1991 (pages 94 and 95) and for 1989 (also pages 94 and 95), copies of which are available in the Library.

House Prices

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what effect the increase in the real price of houses since 1979 has had on the level of economic activity.

Mr. Maples: Increases in real house prices raise real personal sector wealth and hence probably consumer spending. But both real house prices and economic activity will to some extent be influenced by the same underlying factors.

European Parliament

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what reasons a majority of member states in the intergovernmental conference has given for preferring a consultative and not a legislative role for the European Parliament, as set out in the letter to him of 25 October from the Dutch Minister of Finance.

Mr. Maude: The views of the member states expressed in the Inter-Governmental Conference on Economic and Monetary Union are a matter for their respective Governments. The Treaty provisions on EMU as presently under discussion in the IGC will encompass relatively little legislation. Instead, they will develop the coordination of national economic policies between the member states, and will establish a European central bank to be responsible for monetary policy.

Guest Houses

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether his Department has any plans to give Inland Revenue officials the power to carry out spot checks on premises not registered for uniform business rate which can accommodate six or more paying guests.

Mr. Maude: Inland Revenue valuation officers and their staff have powers to enter premises in pursuance of their statutory duties, provided at least 24 hours notice in writing is given, and the authorised person produces his other authority on request. There are no plans to extend these powers.

VAT

Mr. Grylls: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the aggregate amount of bank guarantees currently provided by registered traders to Her Majesty's

Customs and Excise in respect of VAT on imports and the proportion thereof that relates to imports from other EC member states.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Under the duty deferment scheme Her Majesty's Customs and Excise hold guarantees given by banks and insurance companies in respect of combined import VAT, customs and excise duties and levies. The total value of these guarantees fluctuates daily but the element attributable to import VAT is currently estimated to be about £2,600 million, of which some £1,600 million can be attributed to imports from other EC Member States.

Exchange Rate Mechanism

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect of membership of the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system on economic growth.

Mr. Maude: Membership of the exchange rate mechanism helps to secure lower inflation, thereby providing the necessary climate for healthy sustainable growth.

Citizens Charter

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether his citizens charter includes measures taken by Government Departments prior to the publication of the document; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: The citizens charter builds on the earlier successes of the financial management initiative and, more recently, the Next Steps programme of management reform which has led to the creation of 56 agencies. It draws on the efforts of individual Departments and agencies to improve the services they offer to their customers. The charter aims to raise the quality of public services and make them more responsive to their users through increased choice, the extension of competition and accountability, and the provision of more information on the standards of service that they can expect to receive. The citizens charter contains a wide range of new proposals for this.

Cash Limits

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether any changes will be made to the Department for National Savings' cash limit and running cost limit for 1991-92.

Mr. Maples: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the cash limit for class XVIII, vote 9 (expenditure of the Department for National Savings on administration, publicity costs and certain other expenses) will be increased by £2,082,000 from £181,732,000 to £183,814,000. The running costs limit for the Department for National Savings will be increased by £2,082,000 from £175,118,000 to £177,200,000. The increase is within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

£582,000 of the increase is in respect of the take-up of end-year-flexibility on running costs as announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 17 July 1991 at columns 186-190. The remaining £1,500,000 of the increase is in respect of additional expenditure on marketing activities to support the Government's funding objectives.

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he is proposing any change to the Central Statistical Office's cash or running costs limits for 1991-92.

Mr. Maples: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the cash limit for class XVIII, vote 13 will be increased by £2,126,000 from £31,741,000 to £33,867,000 and the running costs limit by £1,336,000 from £31,101,000 to £32,437,000. These increases reflect measures to improve the quality of economic statistics including the redevelopment of computer systems following a review of the Department's information systems strategy, the take up of both capital and running costs end year flexibility entitlements, and transfers from Property Holdings (£78,000), class VIII, vote 7, the Office of the Minister for the Civil Service (£65,000), class XIX, vote 1, the Department of Trade and Industry (£11,000), class IV, vote 2 and Her Majesty's Treasury (£9,000), class XVIII, vote 1. The increase is within the forecast outturn for the planned total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether any changes are proposed to the cash limit and running cost limit for 1991-92 for the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Maude: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate the cash limit for class XVIII, vote 6 will be increased by £6,509,000 from £1,543,608,000 to £1,550,117,000 and the Department's running cost limit by £82,574,000 from £1,521,011,000 to £1,603,585,000. The change in both the cash limit and the running costs limit arises because of the work being undertaken by the valuation office in setting up the valuation lists for the council tax.

This increase is within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes are proposed in the cash limit and running cost cash limit for 1991-92 for Customs and Excise.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the cash limit for class XVIII, vote 5 will be increased by £8,656,000 from £729,600,000 to £738,256,000 and the running cost limit for Customs and Excise by £3,096,000 from £629,800,000 to £632,896,000. The increase in the running costs limit arises from the take up of full end-year flexibility entitlement announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 17 July 1991 at columns 185-90 and the costs associated with a programme for the training of overseas customs officers, the costs of which are being met by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (class II, vote 1), the Home Office (class IX, vote 3) and the Overseas Development Administration (class II, vote 5). The increase in the cash limit otherwise includes take up of the full end-year flexibility entitlement for capital expenditure; the need to pay interest on refunds of VAT being made as

a result of legal decisions prior to Royal Assent to the 1991 Finance Act (from which date payments can be made from revenue); and increased expenditure on legal fees and payments to the civil superannuation vote. The increase is within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he is proposing any change to the Central Office of Information cash limit for 1991-92.

Mr. Maples: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate the cash limit for class XVIII, vote 14, will be increased by £7,400,000 from £20,709,000 to £28,109,000.

The increase is made necessary as a result of the difference between the actual value of assets and liabilities transferred to the Central Office of Information (trading fund) and those anticipated at the time the Trading Fund Order was passed by the House. The increase is within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

Press and Publicity Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether any member of the Treasury's press and publicity staff accompanied him in Blackpool during the Conservative party conference.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* No.

Public Opinion Survey

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the public opinion surveys carried out by Her Majesty's Treasury since 12 July 1991.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* The following public opinion surveys have been carried out on behalf of HM Treasury in connection with the forthcoming sale of shares in BT:

August 1991, surveys covering public attitudes to BT, privatisation and awareness of the forthcoming BT sale;

October 1991, Survey covering public expectations about level of incentives in BT sale;

October and November 1991, further surveys covering awareness of and interest in participation in BT sale.

ENERGY

Departmental Land Holdings

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will give the hectarage, number of holdings and numbers of tenants of holdings of agricultural land owned by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* British Coal in each county or region in the United Kingdom in *(a)* 1980 and *(b)* 1990.

Mr. Wakeham: My Department has no holdings of agricultural land; holdings by British Coal are a matter for the corporation.

Cash Limits

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether any changes will be made to his Department's cash limits for 1991-92.

Mr. Wakeham: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary winter supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class V, vote 9 will be increased by £4,000,000 to £5,000,000. This extra provision is sought to meet further expenditure on advisers' fees in connection with the privatisation of the coal industry.

The increase is within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Correspondence

Mr. Mudd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne can expect replies to his letters of 18 January, 29 March and 24 September regarding funding for the Falmouth school of art and design.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My hon. Friend has received interim replies. I will write again to him as soon as possible and no later than the end of November.

Development Education

Mr. Lester: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether development education falls within the remit of Her Majesty's inspectorate for schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Her Majesty's inspectorate inspects all aspects of pupils' learning within and across the national curriculum. The national curriculum offers pupils considerable opportunity to develop ideas, knowledge and understanding about development education particularly within the study of geography, but also in their study of cross-curricular themes and issues.

Mandatory Grants

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the local education authorities which were more than seven days late in sending cheques for mandatory grants to students in higher education.

Mr. Alan Howarth: This information is not available centrally. Most local education authorities are coping with the record numbers of students seeking grants for higher education. I am, however, most concerned by reports that some students may be in difficulty because their grant cheques have not arrived from certain authorities. My officials are following up such reports and seeking assurances that the authorities concerned are taking action, including making provisional payments where necessary, to ensure that students do not suffer hardship.

World Affairs (Teaching)

Mr. Lester: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how his Department utilises the resources and information from the Foreign Office to teach British schoolchildren about world affairs.

Mr. Eggar: It is for schools to determine how best to deliver the statutory requirements of the national curriculum so as to meet the needs of all pupils. It is they who are therefore charged with selecting the most effective teaching methods and the resources and information necessary to support them.

Mr. Lester: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what scope there is within the national curriculum for world development issues to be studied in British schools.

Mr. Eggar: The national curriculum allows ample scope for world development issues to be studied. National curriculum geography is the main vehicle for this, although other subjects may play a part. The attainment targets and programmes of study in geography afford a balanced perspective of development—its causes, constraints and effects—in a wide range of countries at different levels of economic development.

Health Education

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has any plans to protect school children from exploitation by commercial groups sending teaching materials into schools by setting up a national accreditation scheme for health education materials.

Mr. Atkins: No. My right hon. and learned Friend believes that judgments about the use of such materials are best left to individual schools.

Hearnville School

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will ask for all of the views expressed by parents of children attending Hearnville school, Balham, London SW12 before approving any decision made by Wandsworth council to close this school; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Wandsworth council has not published proposals relating to the closure of Hearnville school. If it does so, parents of children attending the school will have the opportunity to make their views known during the two-month objection period following publication. My right hon. Friend will take those views into account in determining any proposals which come before him.

School Buildings (Regulations)

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps his Department is taking to review the Education (School Buildings) Regulations 1981; which bodies are being consulted; and when new draft regulations will be proposed.

Mr. Eggar: Work is currently in progress on a range of topics as part of the review of the School Premises Regulations. The following organisations were sent a consultation letter by DES. Others were consulted by the Welsh Office.

Local Authority Associations
- Association of Metropolitan Authorities
- Association of County Councils

Local Education Authorities
- Chief Education Officers—England

School Governors
- National Association of Governors and Managers

GM Schools
- Grant Maintained Schools Trust

City Technology Colleges
- CTC Trust

Religious Bodies
- Catholic Education Council
- General Synod of the Church of England
- London Board of Jewish Religious Education
- Methodist Church Division of Education and Youth

Teachers Associations
- National Union of Teachers
- Secondary Heads Association
- Professional Association of Teachers
- National Association of School Masters/Union of Women Teachers
- National Association of Head Teachers
- Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association

Special Education Needs
- Local Authority Social Services Department
- Centre for Studies of Integration in Education
- National Council for Special Education
- Royal National Institute for the Blind
- Royal National Institute for the Deaf
- The Spastics Society
- Special Educational Needs National Advisory Council
- National Association of Independent and Non-Maintained Special Schools

Local Authority Professional Associations
- perSociety of Education Officers
- Society of Chief Architects in Local Authorities (SCALA)
- Association of Heads of County Property Departments
- Society of Chief Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
- Society of Chief Building Surveyors

Ethnic Minority Organisations
- Afro-Caribbean Teachers Association
- Asian Teachers Association
- British Association of Muslims
- Board of Deputies of British Jews Education Office
- Federation of Bangladeshi Associations
- Caribbean Teachers Association
- Greek Cypriot Teachers Association
- National Association of Hindu Associations
- National Muslim Education Council for UK
- Sikh Education Council
- Standing Conference of Asian Organisations UK
- The Islamic Academy
- The Council of Mosques: UK and EIRE
- The Islamic School Trust
- Muslim Educational Trust
- Muslim Educational Services
- Muslim Education Co-ordinating Council UK

Other
- The Chartered Institute of Building
- National Confederation of Parent Teacher Associations
- Association of Community Councils in Rural England (ACRE)

Organisations maintaining non-maintained special schools
- Royal National Institute for the Blind
- Barnardo's
- National Children's Home
- The Shaftesbury Society
- Invalid Children's Aid Nationwide
- Order of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary (Essex)
- Order of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary (Merseyside)
- The English Province of the Daughters of the Cross
- The Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul
- Order of the Dominicans
- Royal London Society for the Blind
- Christian Service Union
- Boys' and Girls' Welfare Society
- The Royal Eastern Counties Schools Ltd
- Mind
- Henshaw's Society for the Blind
- The Birmingham Royal Institute for the Blind
- The Smith Foundation
- The Royal Catholic Diocese of Arundel and Brighton

Other Bodies
Local authority social services departments.

The results of the review are expected to be available towards the end of next year, at which stage decisions will be taken about the necessary action.

GCSE

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what consultations he conducted and what evidence he assembled for his appraisal of the function of course work as a part of the GCSE; and if he will place the material in the Library.

Mr. Eggar: I refer the honourable Member to my reply of 21 October to the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett), *Official Report*, column *362*.

My right honourable and learned Friend is currently considering advice on GCSE coursework from the School Examinations and Assessment Council.

Parents Charter

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will make a statement on the reasons for the differences in the form and substance of the parents charter commitments on the publication of examination and test results in England, Wales and Scotland;

(2) whether performance tables on school examination results will be published in the same way throughout Great Britain if the parents charter is enacted.

Mr. Eggar: The parents charters for England, Scotland and Wales all contained a commitment that performance information about schools would be published in order to help parents choose a school for their child and monitor the school's performance. The necessary new powers are included in the Education (Schools) Bill which was introduced today. Detailed arrangements for implementing the commitment will be set out in regulations in due course; these may vary according to the particular circumstances in each country, but will all be subject to parliamentary scrutiny.

Expenditure Plans

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement about his Department's expenditure plans for the financial years 1992-93 to 1994-95.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in his statement today, the provision for the Department of Education and Science's own spending programme in 1992-93 will be £7,947 million, which is £627 million or 8·6 per cent. higher than the estimated outturn for 1991-92. This figure includes central Government expenditure on higher education, science, schools, and sport; it also includes specific grants to local authorities and credit approvals for capital expenditure by LEAs.

Capital Expenditure in Schools and Colleges

Local authority capital programmes at schools and colleges—annual capital guidelines and supplementary credit approvals—rise from £538 million in 1991-92 to £590 million in 1992-93. The total for local authority schools rises from £472 million to £524 million—an increase of 11 per cent. Provision for building grants for voluntary aided schools increases from £130·8 million to £150·7 million, a rise of over 15 per cent. £28·5 million has been allocated for capital expenditure in grant-maintained schools, up from £10·5 million in 1991-92, reflecting the rapid increase in the number of schools entering this sector. The total for school building work rises to £703 million in 1992-93: up by some 10 per cent. in real terms over the equivalent figure for this year. The increase should also be seen against continuing downward pressure on building tender prices, which should enable sums allocated to new work this year and next to go even further. This level of provision underscores the Government's commitment to give priority to improving school buildings and to implementing the national curriculum, in particular science and technology.

For the third year running, available recurrent public funding for universities, polytechnics and colleges is planned to increase by some 10 per cent. outturn in the previous year—to £3·9 billion in 1992-93. Total recurrentand capital spending on all higher education—UFC, PCFC and other higher education—funded through fees and grant will be £4·4 billion in 1992-93.

These plans will enable the continued expansion of the number of students in higher education described in the White Paper "Higher Education: A New Framework" (Cm. 1541). More than one in four of all young people in Britain are expected to enter higher education in autumn next year and one in three by the end of the century. As the White Paper explained, the plans envisage additional public funding to support this expansion while also expecting institutions to take advantage of the efficiency gains available to them as they take on more students.

Based on actual enrolments to each sector up to October 1990, the plans allow for the following distribution between sectors of the projected number of students for 1992-93 given in the White Paper:

Projected Home and EC student numbers (FTE) (Financial years)

	thousands		*Percentage*
	1991-92	*1992-93*	*increase*
PCFC	368	401	9·0
UFC	343	363	5·8

Under the Government's proposals to bring together universities, polytechnics and colleges into one higher education sector, the funds for 1993-94 will be made available to the new higher education funding councils. On a comparable basis to 1992-93, the planned available recurrent funding for 1993-94 and 1994-95 is £4·2 billion and £4·4 billion, some 17 per cent. and 22 per cent. respectively more than in 1991-92. Subject to the passage of the necessary legislation, there will be adjustments from 1993-94 to the planned funding for these years to take account of the changes in territorial responsibilities of the new funding councils.

These plans confirm that the Government are providing for the cost of the extra students enrolled as well as for an increase in resources for the funding councils. Universities, polytechnics and colleges remain free to take on, and finance through the tuition fee, as many qualified students as they are able to accommodate.

The level of fees which will be reimbursed through public funds in the academic year 1992-93 will be up to these limits:

Classroom based courses: £1,855.

Laboratory/workshop based courses: £2,770.

Clinical medicine, dentistry and veterinary science courses: £4,985.

Postgraduate fee: £2,200.

The plans allow for an increase in fee income and capital and recurrent grant to the universities of £144 million in 1992-93, compared with estimated outturn for 1991-92. They will also benefit from extra income from tuition fees for every additional student enrolled beyond these plans.

The total planned recurrent grant for the Universities Funding Council in 1992-93 will be £1,585 million. The plans allow for a further transfer of resources to provision for science as part of the new boundary for dual support. Taking account of the dual support transfer, total planned available recurrent funding in 1992-93 is nearly 8½ per cent. higher than the expected level in 1991-92.

It will be for the universities to determine what can be afforded for academic pay within their overall resources, having regard to other cost increases, the scope for efficiency improvements and the need for additional staff. The Government will hold back £24 million of grant in 1992-93 for release only in the event of a satisfactory pay settlement for non-clinical academic staff which makes provision to relate pay more closely to performance.

Capital funding for the universities will be £9 million more than plans for 1991-92. This should allow a start to be made on an upgraded academic computer network, SuperJANET.

The plans allow for an increase in fee income and capital and recurrent grant to the polytechnics and colleges of £175 million in 1992-93, compared with estimated outturn for 1991-92. They will also benefit from tuition fee income for every additional student enrolled beyond these plans. The total planned recurrent grant for the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council in 1992-93 will be £898 million. Planned available recurrent funding in 1992-93 is some 12 per cent. higher than the expected level in 1991-92.

It will be for the polytechnic and college employers to determine what can be afforded for academic pay having regard to other cost increases, the scope for efficiency improvements and the need for additional staff. The Government will hold back £11 million of grant in 1992-93 for release only in the event of a satisfactory pay settlement for the lecturers to whom national negotiations currently apply which makes provision to relate pay more closely to performance.

Capital funding for the PCFC sector is increased to £137·5 million, a level over 50 per cent. higher than in 1989-90 when the polytechnic and college sector was established.

We will increase by 4½ per cent. the level of support to each student next year from grant and loan combined, thus maintaining its value in real terms. Mandatory awards and loans will be available for all eligible students who apply for them.

Public expenditure provision for the DES science programme, including expenditure financed by EC receipts, has been increased significantly to £1,054 million in 1992-93, £1,184 million in 1993-94 and £1,274 million in 1994-95. These figures include transfers from higher education funding of £48 million, £125 million and £154 million respectively, which will enable the research councils, from August 1992, to meet the full costs of the projects which they support in higher education institutions.

Within these totals, the sums available for distribution by the Advisory Board for the Research Councils will be £1,050 million, £1,181 million and £1,270 million. The totals for 1992-93, 1993-94 and 1994-95 are £29 million, £50 million and £85 million higher than previous plans for those years. Total science provision for each year will be 7, 12 and 19 per cent. higher in cash than the estimated outturn in 1991-92, excluding the sums transferred and after allowing for the one-off saving of £8 million in 1991-92 on postgraduate fees. This gives an excellent basis for the research councils to plan and manage basic and strategic research.

I am inviting the Advisory Board for the Research Councils to advise me on the distribution of these resources which will best advance the Government's aims for civil science in the interests of the nation as a whole.

The plans provide for the successful establishment and development of the 15 city technology colleges announced, and for a start from 1993-94 on spreading CTC principles and practices into other secondary schools.

The 1992-93 settlement for recurrent provision for grant-maintained schools takes account of the rapid increase in projected school numbers; there are already over 100 grant-maintained schools operating, and numbers are projected to double by April 1992.

We shall make available, subject to the passage of the Further and Higher Education Bill, £25 million in 1992-93 for the costs of establishing the Further Education Funding Council and preparing further education and sixth form colleges for independence from local authority control.

Economic and Social Research Council

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he received the annual report of the Economic and Social Research Council for 1990-91; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The annual report of the Economic and Social Research Council has been submitted to me under the requirements of the Science and Technology Act 1965 and a copy is being laid before the House today.

I was most interested to read about the council's achievements during its 25th anniversary year. I would note in particular its publication of new "Postgraduate Training Guidelines" issued after widespread consultation to help establish higher standards of training for research students in the social sciences; and the launch of the ESRC's largest-ever research initiative to examine the causes and consequences of global environmental change.

I congratulate the council on these and its other achievements during its silver jubilee year.

Cash Limits

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has any changes to announce to cash limits on votes within his responsibility for 1991-92.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the cash limits for class XI, vote 1, schools, research and miscellaneous

services, class XI, vote 2, higher and further education, and class XI, vote 4, administration will be changed. The cash limit changes are as follows:

Class and vote	Current cash limit £	Change £	Revised cash limit £
Class XI, vote 1	712,863,000	+5,607,000	718,470,000
Class XI, vote 2	2,916,285,000	+518,000	2,916,803,000
Class XI, vote 4	98,692,000	+7,925,000	106,617,000

The increase on class XI, vote 1 includes the full take-up of capital end-year flexibility entitlement of £6,085,000 announced by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 17 July 1991, columns *186-89*. It takes account of the transfer to the Overseas Development Administration of £300,000 towards covering the shortfall between the contribution from the European Commission and the level of fees levied by higher education institutions for students coming to the United Kingdom from central and eastern Europe under the trans-European mobility scheme for university studies (TEMPUS) for which the British Council is undertaking administration of United Kingdom participation; and a transfer of £178,000 to class XI, vote 2.

The increase on class XI, vote 2 includes provision for a transfer of responsibility to the Universities Funding Council for course costs in training for social work. This is offset by decreases in provision for the Department of Health (class XIII, vote 3), the Home Office (class IX, vote 3) and the Welsh Office (class XVI, vote 5). The vote 2 increase also makes provision for the preparatory costs of establishing new funding arrangements for further education in England, offset by a reduction in provision on vote 1 and in provision on vote 2 for bursaries for the training of teachers in shortage subjects.

The increase on class XI, vote 4 includes the full take-up of capital (£2,000,000) and running costs (£404,000) end-year flexibility entitlement. It provides for slippage of expenditure associated with the Department's new headquarters building. It also provides for a further transfer (£200,000) from the Department of the Environment towards the costs of the sport and recreation directorate following the transfer of responsibility for sport to my Department. The increase is net of a transfer of £78,000 to the Department of Employment to reflect that Department's responsibility for the secretariat of the School Teachers' Review Body. The net effect of the changes to running costs is to increase the limit by £526,000 from £96,445,000 to £96,971,000.

These changes are within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Public Appointments

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give the numbers of persons or bodies appointed by him or by departments subject to his direction and control; and the date of creation of each such body.

Dr. Mawhinney: At 31 August 1991, there were 147 such public bodies with a total of 2,358 appointments. Further details of these bodies may be found in "Public Bodies" and "Public Appointments: A Handbook for Women's Organisations", copies of which are available in the Library.

Departmental Land Holdings

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give the hectarage, number of holdings and numbers of tenants of holdings of agricultural land owned by his Department in each county in Northern Ireland in *(a)* 1980 and *(b)* 1990.

Mr. Hanley: The Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland owns agricultural land which it farms for educational and research purposes. Its forest service also owns areas of agricultural land which are surplus to its current planting plans or which it is holding pending the availability of adjoining land; this land is generally let out to neighbouring farmers under short-term lets. The figures for 1990 are shown below (1980 figures in brackets):

Areas of agricultural land owned and the number of holdings owned and let by the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland, 1990 (1980)

County	Hectares owned	Holdings owned		Holdings let	
Antrim	1,691 (1,490)	20	(10)	18	(8)
Armagh/Down	658 (1,179)	27	(31)	23	(27)
Fermanagh	1,768 (1,753)	36	(50)	34	(48)
Londonderry	1,148 (868)	16	(27)	16	(27)
Tyrone	1,367 (2,480)	45	(14)	44	(13)
Northern Ireland	6,632 (7,770)	144	(132)	135	(123)

EMPLOYMENT

Manufacturing (Earnings)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will publish a table showing the increase in, respectively, the average real earnings of full-time adult male and female manual workers in manufacturing industry, whose pay was not affected by sickness, in the 12 years to April compared to full-time male and female manual employees (i) in the public sector and (ii) not in the public sector;

(2) whether he will publish a table showing the increase in the average real earnings of full-time adult male manual workers in manufacturing industry, whose pay was not affected by sickness, in the 12 years to April 1991 relative to full-time male adult manual workers in (i) the public sector other than the nationalised industries, (ii) the nationalised industries and (iii) the private sector;

(3) whether he will publish a table showing the increase in the average real earnings of full-time adult female manual workers in manufacturing industry, whose pay

was not affected by sickness, in the 12 years to April 1991 relative to full-time adult female manual workers in (i) the public sector other than the nationalised industries, (ii) the nationalised industries and (iii) the private sector;

(4) if he will publish a table showing the increase in, respectively, the average real earnings of full-time adult male and female manual workers in manufacturing industry, whose pay was not affected by sickness, in the 12 years to April compared to full-time adult male and female non-manual employees in (i) the public sector and (ii) not in the public sector;

(5) whether he will publish a table showing the increase in the average real earnings of full-time adult female manual workers in manufacturing industry, whose pay was not affected by sickness, in the 12 years to April and the same data for full-time adult female non-manual workers in *(a)* manufacturing, *(b)* the public sector other than the nationalised industries, *(c)* the nationalised industries and *(d)* the private sector;

(6) if he will publish a table showing the increase in the average real earnings of full-time adult male and female manual workers in manufacturing industry whose pay was not affected by sickness, in the 12 years to April compared to full-time adult male and female non-manual employees in (i) the public sector and (ii) not in the public sector;

(7) whether he will publish a table showing the increase in the average real earnings of full-time adult male manual workers in manufacturing industry, whose pay was not affected by sickness, in the 12 years to April 1991 relative to full-time adult male non-manual workers in *(a)* manufacturing, *(b)* the public sector other than the nationalised industries, *(c)* the nationalised industries and *(d)* the private sector.

Mr. Jackson: Information on the average gross earnings of manual and non-manual male and female employees by sector and of manual employees in manufacturing can be found in tables 1, 4 and 6 of part A of the new earnings survey reports from 1979 onwards, apart from those in the "Public Sector other than the nationalised industries" for 1979 which are given in the table below.

Information on the retail prices index (all items) to convert 1979 figures to 1991 prices is published in table 6·4 of the latest *Employment Gazette* for April 1991, and in table 26 of the annual supplement to *Economic Trends* for April of earlier years.

Copies of the publications are available in the Library.

Average gross weekly earnings of full-time adult employees whose pay was not affected by absence. Public sector other than public corporations

	April 1979 £
Manual women	52·9
Manual men	79·5
Non-manual women	74·5
Non-manual men	111·0

Employees (Underpayments)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many employers in the east midlands have been prosecuted for underpaying their employees since 1979; and if he will list the name, offence and penalty in each case.

Mr. Forth: Maurice's Discount of Nottingham is the only employer in the east midlands to have been prosecuted since 1979. The employer was prosecuted in 1989 under section 16 of the Wages Act 1986 for failing to pay at least the statutory minimum remuneration. The court imposed a fine of £100 and costs of £100 were awarded against the employer. Arrears of wages amounting to £429·71 were paid by the employer to the worker concerned.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the number of jobs lost in manufacturing since 1970, 1973, 1979 and 1988, respectively; and what is his estimate of the number of jobs in each case lost as a result of (i) lack of training and (ii) lack of capital investment.

Mr. Jackson: The number of employees in employment in manufacturing in the United Kingdom at June 1991 has fallen by:

Since	*Number*
1970	3,456,000
1973	2,959,000
1979	2,375,000
1988	332,000

It is not possible to estimate the causes underlying the falls, but manufacturing has accounted for a declining share of total employment in most other industrial countries over the last twenty years, and has seen substantial increases in output per employee over the period.

Mr. Lee: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish the level of employment in the United Kingdom apparel, knitting and textile industries (classes 26, 43, 453 and 455; including Northern Ireland) at September 1988, September 1989, September 1990 and September 1991.

Mr. Jackson: Estimates of employees in employment in the apparel, knitting and textile industries in the United Kingdom are only available at census of employment dates. The following table shows Great Britain estimates for the dates requested together with United Kingdom estimates for the latest two censuses.

Employees in employment
Apparel, knitting and textile industries
(SIC 26, 43, 453 and 455)

Thousands

	Great Britain[1]	*United Kingdom*
September 1987	511·2	508·6
September 1988	509·1	—
September 1989	477·7	476·5
September 1990	456·0	—
June 1991	429·1	—

[1] The Great Britain figures include:
(i) group 255, manufacture of paints, varnishes and printing ink, and;
(ii) activity heading 4560, manufacture of fur goods.

Youth Training

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what criteria are used to justify different unit prices for youth training places, or weeks; and what is the range of prices paid.

Mr. Jackson: Targets for numbers of training weeks and outputs to be delivered on youth training (YT), the payment for each and the overall budget are agreed by negotiation between the employment department and individual training and enterprise councils (TECs). TEC volume targets and unit prices are influenced by past performance and by a range of local factors.

TECs are responsible for all contractual and financial arrangements with individual organisations which provide training.

Car Industry

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his estimate of the increase since April 1979 in *(a)* output per head and *(b)* the average weekly earnings in real terms of adult male manual workers in the car industry.

Mr. Jackson: The increase in output per head in the motor vehicles and parts industry between the second quarter of 1979 and the second quarter of 1991 is estimated to be 57 per cent.

Information on the average gross weekly earnings of manual male employees in the motor vehicle industry can be found in table 4 of part A of the new earnings survey reports for 1979 and 1991.

Information on the retail prices index (all items) to convert 1979 figures to 1991 prices is published in table 6.4 of the latest *Employment Gazette* for April 1991, and in table 26 of the annual supplement to *Economic Trends* for April of earlier years.

Copies of the publications are available in the Library.

Cash Limits

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether any changes will be made to his Department's cash limits or running costs limits for 1991-92.

Mr. Howard: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimates, the following changes will be made:

The cash limit for class VI, vote (programmes and central services) will be increased by £81,066,000 from £2,357,241,000 to £2,438,307,000. The increase principally reflects additional provision for the package of employment measures which I announced to the House on 19 June 1991. The changes for this vote relating to the package are: £43,520,000 provision for the new employment action (EA) programme; an increase of £29,900,000 for employment training (ET); increased provision of £1,000,000 for publicity to promote the June measures; increased receipts from the Welsh Office (class XVI, vote 4) to recover increased expenditure on EA and ET in Wales; and increased running costs associated with the delivery of EA, of which £1,315,000 is for training and enterprise councils and departmental area offices in England and Wales and local enterprise companies in Scotland, and £342,000 is for Employment Department headquarters. The increase in the cash limit as a result of these measures is partially offset by reduced requirements by the Department of Social Security (class XIV, vote 1). Other changes to the cash limit reflect: a transfer of £3,100,000 from the Scottish Office (class XV, vote 3) for residual expenditure by my department mainly on Youth Training (YT) in Scotland; increased provision of £1,599,000 (running costs) and £2,000,000 (capital) for full take up of end year flexibility entitlement, to carry forward unspent provision from 1990-91 to 1991-92 as announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 17 July 1991 at columns 186-190; an increase of £2,585,000 running costs for payment to Property Holdings for opportunity cost rents; an increase of £1,168,000 running costs for payment to the Treasury Solicitor's Department (TSD) for legal services and £17,000 new receipts for recovery of costs and awards from legal cases following the move to a repayment system with the Treasury Solicitor's Department; a transfer of £78,000 running costs from the Department of Education and Science (class XI, vote 4) for secretariat services to the school teachers review body; increased receipts of £300,000 from the sale of capital assets from the former National Dock Labour Board; a transfer of £45,000 to the Scottish Office (class XV, vote 13) to fund a grant to the Scottish Council on Alcohol; and a reduction of £20,000 for tourist projects to reflect an excess in expenditure on tourism in 1990-91.

The cash limit for class VI, vote 2 (employment service), will be increased by £35,031,000 from £453,849,000 to £488,880,000. The increase is the net result of an increase of £15,715,000 running costs for measures to assist the unemployed; an increase of £5,408,000 running costs for administration of payments to ET, YT and EA participants; an increase of £2,800,000 for job review and restart courses programmes; an increase of £10,060,000 running costs in respect of opportunity costs rents; an increase of £3,106,000 for full take up of running costs end year flexibility entitlement to carry forward unspent provision from 1990-91 to 1991-92 as announced by the Chief Secretary on 17 July 1991; an increase of £5,000,000 in running costs for increased funding for fraud investigation, offset by equivalent receipts from the Department of Social Security (class XIV, vote 4); increased receipts of £1,651,000 relating to VAT refunds on contracted out services and increased VAT receipts of £407,000 in respect of programmes for priority groups.

The running costs limit for the Department of Employment will be increased by £44,725,000 from £1,057,699,000 to £1,102,424,000.

The increases are within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

WALES

Pupils (English)

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he is taking to ensure parents who wish their children to be educated through the medium of English in maintained primary schools in Dyfed will receive such an education for their children.

Mr. David Hunt: This is the responsibility of the local education authority.

Cancer Specialists

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will indicate where there are health authorities in Wales with a shortage of consultant cancer specialists;

(2) what steps he will take to deal with a shortage of consultant cancer specialists.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The Welsh medical and dental manpower committee advises the Department on the relative priority of consultant appointments and reflect in their recommendations any shortages identified by district health authorities.

The latest information shows no shortages in this speciality.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he will take to speed up treatment for cancer sufferers.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: We are continuing to make available central funds to improve the accessibility and quality of the regional radiotherapy and oncology service. We are also encouraging an exchange of information and ideas between those interested in the development of an effective cancer service in Wales.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people were in employment in the Holyhead travel-to-work area in *(a)* June 1987 and *(b)* June 1991.

Mr. David Hunt: In September 1987 there were 13,800 employees in employment in the Holyhead travel to work area. In September 1989 (the latest date for which information is available) the number of employees in employment had increased to 15,000. Employment data for the area are available only from biennial censuses of employment.

Cash Limits

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he proposes to make any changes to the cash limits for his Department in the current year.

Mr. David Hunt: Yes. Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimates, the cash limit for class XVI, vote 4 will be increased by £5,159,000 from £151,408,000 to £156,567,000; the cash limit for class XVI, vote 5 will be reduced by £6,590,000 from £399,875,000 to £393,285,000; the cash limit for class XVI, vote 8 will be increased by £12,783,000 from £1,130,677,000 to £1,143,460,000; the cash limit for class XVI, vote 10 will be increased by £10,521,000 from £1,764,799,000 to £1,775,320,000. In addition, the cash limit for WO/UA will be increased by £8,061,000 from £74,091,000 to £82,152,000 and the cash limit for WO/LACAP will be reduced by £4,879,000 from £379,541,000 to £374,662,000.

The increase in vote 4 is in respect of the Welsh share of the increased provision for measures to help unemployed people, announced by the Secretary of State for Employment on 19 June 1991. The Welsh share is mainly for employment training and the new employment action programme.

The reduction to vote 5 allows for the transfer to class XVI, vote 10 of payments to the Valuation Office Agency for rating list work (£5,158,000). There are also further reductions of (i) £735,000 in the provision for rating list work and (ii) £697,000 in respect of the running costs of the valuation and community charge tribunal offices (including associated receipts) which are being accommodated from offsetting savings within vote 10.

The additional resources for vote 8 are for (i) the increase in VAT announced on 19 March 1991 (£7,500,000), (ii) full take-up of end year flexibility entitlement for capital carryover as announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 17 July 1991 (cols. 186 to 190) (£5,086,000) and (iii) the transfer from class XIII, vote 1 (Department of Health) of the Incentive Bonus Scheme Policy Group (£197,000).

The increase to vote 10 takes account of (i) the transfer of provision for rating services from class XVI, vote 5 (£5,158,000) and (ii) additional provision for payments to the Valuation Office Agency in respect of council tax banding work (£5,363,000).

The increase to the urban aid capital cash limit (WO/UA) takes account of (i) the take-up of end year flexibility entitlement on capital expenditure (£3,182,000) as announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 17 July 1991 at columns 186 to 190 and (ii) the transfer of provision for the rural initiative from WO/LACAP (£4,879,000).

The reduction in the local authority capital cash limit (WO/LACAP) relates to the transfer of provision to WO/UA in respect of the rural initiative.

The net increase represented by these changes is within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

Non-domestic Rates

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what will be the national non-domestic rate poundage for Wales for 1992-93 and the distributable amount of non-domestic rates which will flow from this.

Mr. David Hunt: We propose that the national non-domestic rate poundage for Wales should rise in line with the increase in the retail price index for the 12 months to September 1991 giving a poundage for 1992-93 of £0·425. This represents an increase of just over 4 per cent. compared with just under 11 per cent. between 1990-91 and 1991-92. We believe this is fair and reasonable, and will be widely welcomed. It reflects the Government's success in reducing inflation, and will demonstrate to business the benefits of the uniform business rate. We propose that the distributable amount of non-domestic rates income will be £536 million.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Mr. T M French

Mr. Mudd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne can expect a reply to his letter of 14 August on behalf of Mr. T M French, of Portobello boarding cattery, Portobello, Troon, Camborne, Cornwall.

Mr. Jack: A reply was sent to the hon. Member on Tuesday 5 November.

Benefits (Claimants' Savings)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will state *(a)* the present tariff income schedule of attributed interest on savings held by benefit claimants, *(b)* the interest rate and annual percentage rate on savings implied by the schedule, *(c)* when the schedule was last revised and *(d)* whether he proposes to revise it again in the light of recent falls in interest rates.

Miss Widdecombe: The tariff income rules in the income-related benefits do not imply any particular return on savings. They ensure that help is targeted on those who need it most, while gradually reducing the amount of benefit paid to those with higher amounts of capital.

The level of income assumed from capital is calculated by ignoring the first £3,000 and taking into account £1 a week for every £250, or part of £250, between £3,000 and the upper capital limit for the particular benefit. The tariff income rule has not been revised since it was introduced in 1988. The maximum amount of capital that a claimant can have and still be entitled to benefit was increased in income support and family credit from £6,000 to £8,000, and doubled in housing benefit and community charge benefit from £8,000 to £16,000 in April 1990.

The capital rules continue to be kept under review.

National Insurance Contributions

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he has yet completed the review of National Insurance contributions for 1992-93.

Mr. Newton: I have completed the annual review under section 120 of the Social Security Act 1975. My proposals will take effect from 6 April 1992.

Employers and employees

As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer said in his statement earlier today, I do not propose to change the standard rates of contributions for either employees or employers, which remain at 9 per cent. and 10·4 per cent. respectively.

In line with the Social Security Pensions Act 1975, the lower earnings limit for class 1 contributions is to be raised to £54 a week, which is the nearest whole pound to the basic retirement pension rate for a single person from April 1992. The upper earnings limit is to be raised to £405 a week, which is slightly less than seven and a half times the new basic pension rate as provided by the Social Security Pensions Act. These new earnings limits will replace the current ones of £52 and £390 respectively.

Under the structure for employees which came into force in October 1989 people whose earnings reach the lower earnings limit will continue to pay an initial contribution of 2 per cent. of that limit and standard rate contributions of 9 per cent. on that portion of their earnings which exceeds the lower but not the upper earnings limit. For employers the reduced contribution rates of 4·6 per cent., 6·6 per cent. and 8·6 per cent. for the lower paid will continue unchanged. However, the ceilings for these rates will be raised so that from April 1992 they apply to weekly earnings which fall below the ceilings of £90, £135, and £190 respectively, compared with £85, £130 and £185 at present.

Not contracted-out employees and their employers

Neither the employee nor his employer will have to pay any contribution if earnings are less than £54 a week. Those whose earnings do not exceed £390 (the former upper earnings limit) will pay 14 pence a week less in contributions than at present. This is because a further £2 of their weekly earnings will be subject to a deduction of 2 per cent. rather than 9 per cent. For employees with earnings above £390 a week the maximum possible increase will be £1·21 a week. Employers' contributions will generally be unchanged although there will be some gains where employees' earnings which were above the former ceilings fall below the new ceilings. There will be no increase for employers of the higher paid since there is no upper earnings limit for employers' contributions.

Contracted-out employees and their employers

Contracted-out employees will gain in the same way. The contributions due from employees earning less than £390 a week will drop by 10 pence a week. For employees earning over £390 the maximum possible increase will be 95 pence a week. Their employers will generally pay 7 or 8 pence a week more than at present because they will have to pay not contracted-out contributions on the first £54 of earnings rather than the present lower limit of £52 a week, although there will be gains in respect of lower paid employees whose earnings fall between the old and new ceilings for reduced rate contributions.

Self-employed people

The flat rate class 2 contribution will be raised by 20p to £5·35 a week.

There will be no increase in the rate of class 4 contributions currently 6·3 per cent. The annual limits of profits between which class 4 contributions are paid will be raised £6,120 and £21,060 from £5,900 and £20,280 respectively. Self-employed people who pay only class 2 contributions will pay an extra £10·40 a year in 1992-93.

For people with profits between £6,120 and £20,280 (the former upper profits limit) class 4 contributions will be reduced by £13·86 per year assuming an unaltered level of profits. For those self-employed people with profits at or above the new upper profits limit the annual charge for class 4 contributions will be £35·28 higher.

Class 3 (Voluntary) contributions

The rate of class 3 contributions will be raised by 20p to £5·25 a week.

National Health Service Allocation

The allocation to the national health service, currently 1·05 per cent. from employees and 0·9 per cent. from employers, remains unchanged.

The draft order, together with a report by the Government Actuary, will be laid before Parliament shortly.

National Insurance Contributions on Shares

I am also today laying before Parliament regulations concerning the payment of national insurance contributions on certain financial instruments including shares and unit trusts, which are at present treated as payments in kind and are not therefore subject to such contributions, and which in some cases have clearly been used by employers as a means of avoiding them.

As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer made clear in his Budget statement when announcing the changes in respect of company cars and free fuel, subsequently enacted in the Social Security (Contributions) Act 1991, in the Government's view there is no reason why payments in kind should necessarily be treated any differently from payments in cash for national insurance contribution purposes. The regulations laid today, which will come into effect at midnight tonight, accordingly provide that both primary and secondary contributions will be payable on the value of financial instruments and certain short-term insurance policies which form part of an employee's remuneration. There will however be an exemption for shares and options to acquire shares in the company for which an employee works, so that employee share ownership schemes will not be affected.

Cash Limits

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether there are any proposed changes in the cash-limited programme expenditure of his Department for 1991-92.

Mr. Scott: Subject to parliamentary approval on the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the cash limit for class XIV vote 3 (housing benefit administration and community charge benefit administration, and other grants) will be increased by £32,918,000 from £292,625,000 to £325,543,000. The revision takes account of a transfer from class XIV vote 4 (Administration and Miscellaneous Services) for housing benefit administration and community charge benefit administration costs (£1,070,000), an increase in the grant towards Motability's administrative costs (£38,000), an increase in the grant-in-aid to Motability to help with high cost car adaptations for war pensioners (£60,000) and an increase in the subsidies to local authorities for housing benefit administration (£1,750,000). There is also an increase in payments into the social fund to finance budgeting loans, crisis loans and community care grants (£30,000,000). The increases are within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether there are any proposed changes in the cash limits or running costs limit of his Department for 1991-92.

Mr. Scott: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate the cash limit for class XIV, vote 4 (Administration and Miscellaneous Services) will be increased by £19,789,000 from £1,881,428,000 to £1,901,217,000. The revision takes account of increased requirements to meet the additional administrative expenditure arising from higher unemployment (£34,736,000), additional expenditure within the child support unit (£4,000,000), an increase in Agency Payments to Department of Employment (class VI, vote 2) (£5,000,000), £2,434,000 in respect of the end of the year flexibility arrangements for capital expenditure, a transfer to Housing Benefit Administration (class XIV, vote 3) of £1,070,000, a transfer to Department of Health (class XIII, vote 3) of £69,000 and a transfer from Inland Revenue (class XVIII, vote 6) of £76,000. The additional requirements are partially offset by an increase in receipts of £25,318,000 and the balance is within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

In addition to the running cost increases of £35,213,000 included above there is a transfer to Department of Health and Social Services (Northern Ireland) of £445,000 for the running costs of the Belfast Social Security Centre. There will be a corresponding increase on Department of Health and Social Services (Northern Ireland) vote 3 Administration and Miscellaneous Services. Also a reduction of £677,000 to take account of a variation from a previously anticipated outturn of expenditure.

As a result of these changes the running cost limit of the Department of Social Security will be increased by £34,091,000 from £2,115,817,000 to £2,149,908,000.

Benefits Uprating

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list each of the measures announced in his uprating statement of 21 October, giving the gross cost or saving for each, and the net cost or saving net of other benefit expenditure, in 1992-93.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced earlier today, the increase in total expenditure on social security between 1991-92 and 1992-93 is planned to be some £5·5 billion.

Increases in rates for contributory and non-contributory benefits generally will be with reference to the September 1990 to September 1991 increase in the retail price index (RPI) and for income-related benefits with reference to the revised Rossi index which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, announced on 21 October. The cost of these increases over unchanged rates of benefit amounts to over £3 billion in 1992-93.

On 21 October my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was also able to announce measures to extend or increase provision in 1992-93 in a number of important areas. The benefit costs of these are listed below (except in the case of the social fund, the difference between the net and gross costs is negligible and does not affect the figures given).

	£ million
Increase in income support premium for pensioners who are disabled or over 80	+ 57
Changes in attendance allowance/disabled living allowance giving additional benefit to people in voluntary hospices	+ 2
Direct funding of hospices (through the Department of Health)	+ 1
Social fund discretionary budgets (increase in gross budgets)	+ 67
Minor measures to improve war pensions, severe disability allowance, disability living allowance, invalid care allowance provision and to provide protection for changes in the severe disability premium	+ 10
Increased provision for independent living fund	[1]+ 23
Increases in income support limits for residential care	+ 190

Note:

[1] Subject to confirmation in the light of later information on caseload.

In reviewing the level of statutory sick pay my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State decided to increase the lower rate by RPI but not to increase the higher rate which goes to many people covered by occupational schemes.

The overall cost of this is £19 million less than if both rates were increased. He also announced a restructuring of the system for calculating the contributions which could be reasonably expected from non-householders living with those householders on income-related benefits. This would reduce the contribution expected from those on lower incomes and would increase the contribution expected from those with significant incomes from full-time work. The net effect would be to reduce benefit expenditure by £50 million.

The uprating statement also covered extra help in 1992-93 for disabled people through disability living allowance at a cost of £120 million and for the families of those in work, through the hours change in family credit and the introduction of a maintenance disregard, at a net cost of £70 million.

Pensioners

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the net cost to the Exchequer of the measures announced in the uprating statement.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) earlier today.

ENVIRONMENT

Poll Tax

4. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations he has received to date advocating the abolition of the minimum payment requirement of 20 per cent. for poll tax payers.

Mr. Key: I have received a number of representations.

Broadleaved Trees

19. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what initiative his Department is currently taking for the protection and provision of broadleaved trees.

Mr. Baldry: My Department is currently undertaking a comprehensive review of tree preservation policies and legislation. We have also made available resources for the Countryside Commission to provide grants for amenity planting, and have supported initiatives to create community forests near towns and cities and to establish a proposed new national forest.

Local Government Finance

20. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has made any assessment of the amendments in local services that will be needed if his total standard spending target is to be achieved; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: The £41·8 billion which we have proposed for total standard spending in 1992-93 is sufficient to cover the full range of local authority services.

30. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to confirm his proposed 1992-93 financial settlement for local authorities; and if he will make a statement.

36. **Mr. Patchett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to confirm his proposed 1992-93 financial settlement for local authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: Shortly.

28. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any proposals to strengthen the ability of his Department to restrict the spending of local authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: The Local Government Finance and Valuation Act enacted earlier this year removes the exemption capping for those authorities setting budgets below £15 million. In future we shall be able to protect all chargepayers from high bills caused by their authorities' excessive spending, and we shall not hesitate to do so should it prove necessary.

Building Work

21. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his most recent assessment of activity in the building and construction industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: Output rose every year from 1981 to 1990. It fell back during 1990, but still reached a new record level. Output is expected to continue falling in the remainder of this year. However, the first indications of a recovery are now appearing.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultations he has had with representatives of the construction industry over the effect the recession has been having on building works.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is closely in touch with representatives of the construction industry and frequently discusses this and other matters of interest with them.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultations he has had with the Royal Institute of British Architects over planning for building work over the next six months.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had no such consultations.

Beaches

22. **Mr. Gareth Wardell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which was the English beach in the summer of 1991, designated as a bathing beach under the terms of the 1976 European Commission's bathing waters directive which had the sample containing *(a)* the highest number of E. Coli per 100 ml of water and *(b)* the highest number of total Coliforms per 100 ml of water.

Mr. Baldry: This information will be available in the detailed summary of the 1991 bathing water quality monitoring results which will be placed in the Library when available from the National Rivers Authority.

Thames Corridor

23. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce his decision for consultancy for the placing of his Thames corridor initiative.

Mr. Heseltine: I shall announce the names of the consultants who will undertake the Lower Thames study shortly.

Local Government (Internal Management)

24. **Mr. Stevens:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what response he has so far received to the consultation paper on the internal management of local authorities.

Mr. Portillo: The Department has received about 150 responses so far.

Empty Council Properties

25. **Mr. Moss:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the latest figure for the number of council properties left empty by the 10 worst councils.

Mr. Heseltine: Local authorities reporting the highest percentage of their stock empty in housing investment programme returns for April 1991 were: Liverpool, Manchester, Salford, Burnley, Brent, Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Knowsley, Newcastle upon Tyne and Wolverhampton. In total, these 10 authorities had some 24,000 properties lying empty.

Waste Regulation

26. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the effect of the transfer of local authorities' waste regulation role to the new environment agency, on the functions of that service.

Mr. Baldry: The Government's proposals for transferring waste regulation to the new Environment Agency are set out in the consultation paper issued on 3 October—copies of which have been placed in the Library. The new agency will be able to ensure that standards of waste disposal are applied consistently across the country, and develop the necessary expertise to deal with the increasingly sophisticated waste disposal techniques. It will also ensure better co-ordination with the agency's other regulatory responsibilities.

Commonhold

27. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes to introduce legislation concerning commonhold; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: As soon as parliamentary time allows.

City Challenge

29. **Mr. Dover:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the impact on housing in inner city areas of the Government's city challenge initiative.

Mr. Heseltine: The 11 city challenge pacemakers have yet to prepare detailed action plans for their areas. Housing initiatives can, however, be expected to be included in these plans, their number and type depending on the needs and characteristics of the individual city challenge areas.

Environment Agency

31. **Mr. Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received on the form that the proposed environment agency should take.

Mr. Baldry: The Government's proposals for an Environment Agency were set out in a consultation paper published on 3 October. We have invited views on these proposals by 31 January 1992. So far we have received representations about the role of the National Rivers Authority, the arrangements for waste regulation, and the drinking water inspectorate.

Water Quality

33. **Mr. Gerald Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the progress of the privatised water companies programme to improve water quality.

Mr. Baldry: Progress on the water companies' improvement programmes was checked in the course of the drinking water inspectorate's first round of annual inspections. The chief inspector concluded in his report that the programmes were found generally to be running to timetable. This is consistent with the findings of the Director General of Water Services.

Street Lighting

34. **Mr. Loyden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will consider making additional finances available to local authorities to deal with the problems of inadequate street lighting.

Mr. Key: Local authorities' responsibilities for street lighting are taken into account in each year's local authority finance settlement. It is for authorities themselves to decide how much to spend.

Tyne and Wear UDC

34. **Mr. Trotter:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will report on the progress made by the Tyne and Wear urban development corporation.

Mr. Portillo: Tyne and Wear Development Corporation has made excellent progress in transforming and regenerating the riverside areas of Tyneside and Wearside. It has attracted over £250 million of private investment and created more than 3,000 jobs since it was set up in 1987.

Water Rates

37. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his long-term proposals for the future of water rates.

Mr. Baldry: The Water Act 1989 already prohibits water companies from fixing their charges wholly or partly by reference to rateable value after the year 2000. It is for individual companies to choose their preferred alternative method of charging, in the light of guidance which the Director General of Water Services will be issuing following his consultation exercise.

EC Environment Directives

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next proposes to meet the European Commissioner for the Environment to discuss compliance with EC environmental directives.

Mr. Baldry: I plan to attend the Environment Council when it next meets in December, when a variety of topics will doubtless be on the agenda.

Community Charge (Bailiffs)

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will make a statement on the responsibilities of local authorities for giving advice to community charge payers who do not pay their charge in full on how to handle bailiffs when they visit their home;

(2) what information he has on the number of local authorities issuing guidance to community charge payers on dealing with bailiffs who call to recover unpaid community charge.

Mr. Key: There is no requirement on local authorities to inform community chargepayers about their rights when bailiffs visit their home and we have no information on the number of authorities who issue guidance on this. The majority of local authorities do have, however, a code of practice which governs the way their bailiffs undertake distress action.

Water Abstraction

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in tabular form, by National Rivers Authority region, the amount of water abstracted in 1990 for *(a)* water supply, *(b)* spray irrigation, *(c)* other agricultural purposes, *(d)* electricity generating companies and *(e)* other industrial purposes, respectively.

Mr. Baldry: These statistics are published annually in chapter 7 (Water Supply and Use) of the Digest of Environmental Protection and Water Statistics. The next volume (No. 14) will be published in February/March 1992.

Public Bodies (Audits)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) whether external audit for public bodies and local authorities can be carried out by panels of auditors working collectively;

(2) what guidance he has given to local authorities and other public bodies on the appointment of external auditors; and what efforts he has made to ensure that small accountancy practices are able to take up the position of external auditors to public bodies.

Mr. Key: The appointment of external auditors to local authorities, related bodies and the national health service is the responsibility of the Audit Commission. Section 13 of the Local Government Finance Act 1982 states that an auditor may be an officer of the commission, an individual who is not such an officer or a firm of such individuals. It is for the commission to determine its own policies on audit appointments.

The appointment of external auditors to public bodies is made in accordance with the relevant statute and is a matter for the relevant Secretary of State or the National Audit Office. Appointments made by the Secretary of State may consist of a qualified individual or a firm whose members are qualified individuals. Any applicant, whether an individual or a firm, with relevant qualifications or experience may be considered for such appointments.

Flats

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the Government intend to introduce for England and Wales a scheme providing for the freehold ownership and communal management of flats including the collective right to buy from the freeholder at market value; when legislation to implement the proposals will be introduced; and whether the title of the Bill will allow an amendment to the Leasehold Reform Act 1967, so as to allow long leaseholders of higher rateable value houses to enfranchise.

Sir George Young: The Government intend to introduce legislation to provide for the communal management of flats, including a collective right to buy the freehold interest at market value, as soon as parliamentary time can be found. The Government are currently considering sympathetically the case for including in the Bill provision to allow long leaseholders of higher rateable houses to enfranchise, but I can in any case confirm that the long title of the Bill will be so drawn as to allow amendments to the Leasehold Reform Act 1967.

Social Housing

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to encourage local authorities to repair and replace social housing stock.

Sir George Young: Local authorities are already responsible for the maintenance and repair of their own housing stock. The building of new social housing is now mainly the responsibility of the Housing Corporation, with local authorities assuming an enabling role.

European Commission

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will raise with Commissioner Ripa di Meana the issue of the extent to which the Commission intends to exercise powers relating to his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The European Commission's powers and functions and its relationship with the Governments of member states are set out in the treaties establishing the European Communities. I encourage constructive communication between my Department and the Commission's directorate general XI.

Non-domestic Rates

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what will be the national non-domestic rate poundage for 1992-93 and the distributable amount of non-domestic rates which will flow from this.

Mr. Heseltine: We propose that the national non-domestic rate poundage for England should rise by 4·1 per cent., the September increase in the retail price index, giving a poundage for 1992-93 of 40·2p. We believe

this is fair and reasonable. It reflects the Government's success in reducing inflation, and will demonstrate to business the benefits of the uniform business rate. We propose that the distributable amount of non-domestic rates income will be £12,306 million.

Eco-labelling

Mr. Knowles: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the Government's response to the eighth report from the Environment Committee (HC 474-1) will be published.

Mr. Baldry: We have today published our response to the Environment Select Committee's report on eco-labelling (Cm 1720). We welcome this comprehensive and helpful report from the Select Committee, which is a valuable contribution to the ongoing debate on eco-labelling, and are grateful for its endorsement of much of the work we have done towards the development of an official scheme of environmental labelling.

We are particularly pleased that the Committee has chosen to back our quest for agreement on an acceptable European Community-wide scheme of eco-labelling. We have aired the Committee's concerns in the continuing negotiations over the scheme and are optimistic that these will be addressed in the final text of the Regulation.

The Government's response backs many of the specific recommendations made by the Committee. In particular, my colleagues at the Department of Trade and Industry have given a commitment to amending the Trade Descriptions Act at the earliest opportunity to put beyond doubt that the Act embraces environmental claims.

The response outlines action that we have already taken to address some of the Committee's concerns. By commissioning further logo designs and market testing them against the Commission's proposed logo, we have persuaded the Commission to undertake further work to ensure that a more appropriate logo is adopted. The UK is also working with the Commission to develop detailed guidance to assist in the development of product criteria on a cradle to grave basis.

I would also echo the Committee's praise for the immensely valuable contribution the National Advisory Group on Eco-Labelling have made to the development of our ideas on eco-labelling over the past year.

PSA Services

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he proposes to make any changes to the running cost limit on PSA Services' Vote in 1991-92.

Mr. Heseltine: Yes. Subject to parliamentary approval, and as part of wider changes to my Department's cash limits for 1991-92, the cost limit for class VIII, vote 13 will be reduced by £13,691,000 from £83,307,000 to £69,346,000 mainly due to lower than previously forecast expenditure on severance. In addition, the following changes will be made to my Department's cash limits:

i) the DOE/UA non-voted cash limit will be increased by £28,781,000 from £855,033,000 to £883,814,000. This includes increased grant-in-aid of £23,000,000 to the London Docklands Development Corporation for the Eastern extension of the docklands light railway. A further £11,581,000 is required for various projects by other urban development corporations and to meet a backlog of urban programme grant claims. The costs will be met, in part, from full take up of entitlement of £8,781,000 under the end year flexibility scheme for capital projects. There are also some offsetting savings amounting to £5,800,000 on the city grant programme;

ii) the cash limit for class VIII, vote 5 (Central environmental services, etc.) will be reduced by £9,450,000 from £327,290,000 to £317,840,000. Of this decrease £7,000,000 reflects reduced grant-in-aid requirement by the National Rivers Authority, and £2,450,000 reflects adjustments to the grant-in-aid payable in 1991-92 to the Nature Conservancy Council and English Nature. The latter offsets in part an increase in the cash limit on class VIII, Vote 6 (Royal palaces, royal parks, historic buildings, etc.) as described below;

iii) the cash limit for class VIII, vote 6 (Royal palaces, royal parks, historic buildings? etc.) will be increased by £3,450,000 from £173,034,000 to £176,484,000. An increase of £2,450,000 is required to meet payments arising from contracting out the gardening services in the royal parks, in accordance with the plans I announced to the House on 18 July. This increase is offset by a reduction in the cash limit on class VIII, vote 5 as outlined above. The additional associated running cost provision of £2,450,000 will be offset by an equivalent reduction in running cost provision on class VIII, vote 8 (Department of the Environment: Administration) so that the Department's running cost limit of £190,061,000 remains unchanged. There will be a further increase of £1,000,000 for improving public facilities in the royal parks that will be met from part take up of entitlement of £1,048,000 under the end year flexibility scheme for capital projects;

iv) the cash limit for class VIII, Vote 9 (Revenue support grant, payment of non-domestic rates, Valuation Office rating service, etc., England) will be increased by £78,232,000 from £22,681,112,000 to £22,759,344,000. The increase is required for the implementation of Council Tax; and

v) the DOE/LACAP non-voted cash limit will be reduced by £3,867,000. The reduction is due to lower than expected claims by local authorities of specific current grants.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury, announced in a written answer on 17 July 1991 at columns 186-190 the entitlements for 1991-92 cash limits allowed under the end-year flexibility schemes.

These changes are reflected in the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

Council Tax

Mr. Fry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement about the treatment under the council tax of district councils in England whose budgets are less than their entitlement to redistributed non-domestic rates and revenue support grant.

Mr. Portillo: Under our council tax proposals some district councils, because of prudent housekeeping, are likely to receive more redistributed non-domestic rates and revenue support grant than they wish to spend. We do not propose to claw back non-domestic rates or revenue support grant in such circumstances. Instead we are seeking Parliament's approval, in the Local Government Finance Bill, to permit district councils in this position to use surplus non-domestic rates and revenue support grant for the benefit of local taxpayers, by offsetting the county precepts in their areas.

Development Plans

Mr. Favell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to commence the development plans provisions of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: On 4 September, the Department published proposals for the implementation of the

development plans provisions of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 and invited views on a draft of planning policy guidance note 12. The consultation period closed on 1 November. The Department is carefully considering all the responses made but it would clearly assist those local planning authorities at critical stages of plan preparation to have as much notice as possible of the intended date of commencement of the new development plans system.

Accordingly, I am announcing today that, subject to Parliamentary considerations, we propose to commence the new system early in February 1992. We shall try to lay the regulations setting out the details as early as possible before that date, and I expect to announce a firm commencement date within the next month or so. The Department is today writing to all local planning authorities in England to confirm that information. The Welsh Office are writing similarly to authorities in Wales.

Loan Charge Grants

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to commute specific loan charge grants to local authorities.

Mr. Portillo: We will commute specific loan charge grants for housing and urban programme expenditure in England on 1 October 1992. The Department will pay a lump sum equivalent to the present value of future grants for each local authority to the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB), or to the local authority itself if any authorities have insufficient PWLB debt though such payments are expected to be small. Annual loan charge grants will then cease. As the commuted sums will repay local authority debt, cancelling out the loss of annual grant, the effect on local authority resources will be neutral. The commutation payment is expected to be around £4·5 billion in England, but the effect on general government expenditure will be negligible because virtually all the transfer payments involved are within general government. Similarly, the effect on the central government borrowing requirement, the public sector borrowing requirement (PSBR) and monetary aggregates will be negligible, since virtually all the commuted sums will return to the PWLB. Within the PSBR, central government borrowing on own account will be increased and the local authority borrowing requirement will be reduced by the amount of debt repayment. There is no effect on the planning total. The various transfer payments involved have been taken into account in my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer's autumn statement.

Abortion

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidelines he has issued to the National Rivers Authority on the disposal of bodies of aborted unborn babies into the sewerage system.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* Human tissue is disposed of as clinical waste. Guidance on the treatment and disposal of such waste is given in Waste Management Paper No. 25 (published 1983) which also refers to the recommendations given in the Health and Safety Commission guidance note: The Safe Disposal of Clinical Waste (1982).

Paragraph 5.1.4 of Waste Management Paper No. 25, which is based mainly on the conclusions of the HSC guidance document, states that incineration should be the preferred disposal route for human tissues.

Advice is given on discharges to the sewers in Chapter 6. Discharges of certain other clinical wastes can be made to the sewer but only with the consent of the sewerage authority.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give *(a)* the number of confirmed cases and *(b)* the number of expected cases of BSE between (i) April 1990 and March 1991 and (ii) April 1991 to date.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give *(a)* the actual amounts and *(b)* the estimated amounts of money paid out in compensation for BSE in (i) 1990-91 and (ii) to date in 1991-92.

Mr. Gummer: The numbers of confirmed cases of BSE by date of clinical onset is as follows:

(i) between April 1990 and March 1991	15,869 cases
(ii) in April 1991	1,708 cases

More recent information is not available for the reason given in my reply to the hon. Member on 23 May 1991 col. *559.*

The amount of money paid in compensation for BSE is as follows:

(i) 1990-91—£10·8 million, compared with a forecast in early April 1990 of £12·1 million.

(ii) 1991-92 to the end of September 1991—£8·0 million from an expected total annual spend of £14·6 million.

It is impossible to predict accurately the number of expected cases over particular periods and forecasts are regularly revised as more data comes in. Nevertheless the number of cases is in line with the epidemiological forecast that they will continue to increase until a peak is reached some time in 1992. Thereafter a decline in the number of cases is expected leading to the eradication of the disease around the end of the decade.

Ministry Land Holdings

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the hectarage, number of holdings and numbers of tenants of holdings of agricultural land owned by his Ministry in each county in England in *(a)* 1980 and *(b)* 1990.

Mr. Gummer: The information requested for 1980 could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. The information requested for 1990 is as follows.

Agricultural land owned by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (excluding land managed by the Forestry Commission) 31 March 1990

County	*Hectarage*	*Number of holdings*	*Number of tenanted holdings*
Bedfordshire	26	12	12
Cambridgeshire	404	4	2
Cornwall	50	1	0
Essex	38	1	1
Hampshire	653	4	2

County	Hectarage	Number of holdings	Number of tenanted holdings
Hereford/Worcester	176	1	0
Hertfordshire	10	1	0
Kent	75	1	0
Lincolnshire	42	1	0
North Yorkshire	500	2	0
Norfolk	119	1	0
Nottinghamshire	199	1	0
Somerset	200	1	0
Suffolk	5	1	1
Surrey	133	2	0
Tyne and Wear	21	1	0
Warwickshire	280	2	0
Total	2,931	37	18

No central record is kept of the number of holdings or of the distribution by county, but information is available on the number of tenancies and grazing lets for each of the commission's conservancies. This is set out in the table.

Agricultural land owned by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and managed by the Forestry Commission—31 March 1990

Conservancy	Hectarage	Number of tenancies	Number of grazing lets
North	7,900	57	126
East	1,300	48	49
West	800	59	50
Total	10,000	164	225

Farmhouse Cheeses

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list all the EC member states that have applied the recent reduction in milk quotas to farmhouse cheesemakers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: All member states are obliged to apply the quota reductions agreed by the Council of Ministers in May, which apply equally to all categories of producer.

Cash Limits

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether any changes are proposed in the cash limits for the Intervention Board executive unit.

Mr. Gummer: Yes. Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the cash limit for class III, vote 2 (administration) will be increased by £2,046,000 from £55,042,000 to £57,088,000. Within this limit running costs including VAT recovery will be increased by £117,000 from £28,814,000 to £28,931,000 and capital will be increased by £306,000 from £2,400,000 to £2,706,000 both in respect of end of year flexibility as announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 17 July 1991 at columns 185-89; agency services will be increased by £1,650,000 from £24,572,000 to £26,222,000, and appropriations in aid, excluding VAT recovery on running costs, will be increased by £27,000. These increases in administration costs reflect Meat and Livestock Commission redundancy costs following the ending of the sheep variable premium scheme offset in part by various savings, and take up of running cost and capital end year flexibility entitlement. The increase is within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

Fisheries Council

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the outcome of the EC Council of Fisheries Ministers meeting on 28 October 1991.

Mr. Curry: I attended the EC Council of Fisheries Ministers on 28 October 1991 with my noble Friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Scottish Office.

This specially convened Council met to discuss the 10th, 11th and 12th amendments to the Community's technical conservation measures regulation 3094/86. The measures which the Council agreed were primarily designed to reduce the catches of immature fish to secure better conservation of fish stocks and to control strictly the use of drift nets. The measures will come into effect on 1 June 1992.

In the North sea and west of Scotland areas there will be an increase in the minimum mesh size from 90 mm to 100 mm diamond mesh. Additionally, all EC fishermen may use a 90 mm square mesh panel; the acceptance by the Community of the value of such a panel, which we introduced unilaterally this summer, for the benefit of the conservation of fish stocks is very welcome. Further, new net design specifications which we worked out with the industry will be introduced to prevent the ballooning of nets and so improve selectivity.

These changes in mesh size and new net design are major steps forward in the conservation of cod and haddock stocks which are of great importance to this country but currently at a low ebb.

A derogation from the 100 mm mesh provision will permit the use of 90 mm diamond mesh only in respect of a directed whiting fishery for which there must be a minimum percentage of 50 per cent. whiting and a maximum percentage of 10 per cent. cod, haddock and saithe. The details will be subject to review in the first half of next year in the light of trials being conducted this year.

In the Irish sea we achieved the increase in mesh size from 70 mm to 80 mm which we and our industry have been pressing for and which should lead to better conservation.

In the North sea the derogation provisions in respect of sole are to be rationalised to allow vessels to use 80 mm mesh all year round south of 55°N with a minimum percentage of sole of 5 per cent. and no than 10 per cent. cod, haddock or saithe. This should ease enforcement and the introduction of a minimum percentage of sole, which previously did not apply to the large beam trawls, should also assist conservation.

There will be a uniform mesh size of 40 mm, instead of the 16 or 32 mm requirement, for fishing for the pelagic species of herring, mackerel, horse mackerel, blue whiting, pilchard and squid. Associated with this mesh size will be a minimum percentage of 50 per cent. for any one of these species or a minimum cumulative percentage of 80 per cent. of a mixture of these species. The maximum percentage of other protected species will be 10 per cent.

In order to reduce the waste of fish by discarding, it will be prohibited for vessels using purse seines or towed gear to carry automatic sorting equipment on when fishing for mackerel, herring and horse mackerel. This rule will not apply to freezer vessels but the sorting equipment on such vessels will have to be installed and used under strictly controlled rules.

There will be a number of changes in minimum landing sizes of fish. These will include whiting reduced from 27 cm to 23 cm in line with the new directed fishery, 20 cm introduced for mackerel (except 30 cm in the north sea), 15 cm for horse mackerel and 110 mm for scallops (Pecten spp.) in ICES division VIId. It will be permitted to land only entire scallops and not parts, which is designed to prevent the landing of undersized scallops.

We rejected the proposal put to the Council that there would be an automatic increase in mesh sizes in 1995. The Council will instead consider a proposal in due time from the Co mmission, to be made if scientific analysis confirms that stocks have not been restored, to increase mesh sizes from 100 mm to 110 mm in the North sea and west of Scotland and from 65 mm to 80 mm in the region from the bay of Biscay southwards from 1 January 1995.

A number of other changes to rationalise the very detailed technical conservation measures regulation and to upgrade conservation aspects were also in the final package.

Most importantly the Council agreed, in response to the United Nations Resolution on large-scale drift nets, that Community vessels should not be able to use drift nets longer than 2·5 kilometres wherever they fish. The only exception to this will be those vessels which have been fishing in the north-east Atlantic tuna fishery for two years or more. No United Kingdom vessel meets this qualification. Qualifying vessels may, until 31 December 1993, use up to 5 km of net which is less than the nets of up to 8 or 10 km which have been in use. The nets are to be submerged 2 metres in depth to help avoid the catch of dolphins and porpoises. The fishery will be closely monitored throughout and in 1993 the data obtained will be reviewed. Unless it is shown that the fishery is not environmentally damaging the derogation will cease at the end of 1993. This important decision means there can be no development of large scale drift netting by European Community vessels anywhere in the world.

There are a few elements in the package which we fought strongly against, in particular the whiting derogation and reduction in the minimum landing size for whiting. However, the Government believe that it would have been wrong to oppose what is otherwise a very good package, which incorporates gains which we have sought for two years.

We have secured a substantive and positive basis on which to work for the recovery and stability of fish stocks for the longer-term benefit of the fishing industry.

Low-fat Milk

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what answer he has made to the recent reasoned opinion from the European Commission about low-fat milk.

Mr. Gummer: In its reasoned opinion the Commission asserts that the exclusive purchasing rights granted to the milk marketing boards under Community legislation extend to whole milk only. It takes the view that the actions undertaken by the milk marketing boards to assert exclusive purchasing rights over low-fat milk, and the extension of the three Scottish milk marketing schemes in 1982 and 1984 to cover low-fat milk are contrary to Community law. It also states that the United Kingdom Government have failed in their obligation to ensure that the boards comply with Community requirements.

We are today informing the Commission that the Government consider that skimmed and semi-skimmed milk should be regarded as falling within the exclusive purchasing powers of the boards. We therefore do not accept that we are in breach of our obligations under the EC treaty or Community law.

Our response to the reasoned opinion in no way reduces the need for progress to be made on ending the milk marketing boards' present statutory monopoly. The need for change is as great as ever and we are looking to the boards to advance rapidly towards voluntary co-operative status. I shall therefore be urging the milk marketing board for England and Wales to complete its current proposals.

SCOTLAND

Examination Costs

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the estimated cost of presenting a pupil for an SCE standard grade exam.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Scottish Examination Board's charge for each examination presentation in 1991 was £15·68.

Infant Mortality Statistics (Cot Deaths)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what is the total infant mortality rate for Scotland;

(2) what is the infant mortality rate attributed to respiratory disorders up to one year old in Scotland;

(3) what is the sudden infant death syndrome rate of death per 1,000 live births in Scotland;

(4) what the incidence of cot deaths each year since 1969 was in Scotland;

(5) what are the cot death rates for Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The terms sudden infant death syndrome and cot death are synonymous. I have therefore grouped the questions together and the answers are given in order.

Sudden infant death syndrome was first defined in 1969, but until 1979 there was no specific code under the World Health Organisation international classification of diseases to which to allocate such deaths. Before sudden infant death syndrome became an accepted term for use on death certificates, many cot deaths would have been assigned to "bronchopneumonia", "accidential suffocation in the cot" or "regurgitation and inhalation of milk". It is therefore not possible, with any certainty, to provide numbers or rates of sudden infant deaths in Scotland prior to 1979.

1. The infant mortality rate in Scotland in 1990 was 7·7 deaths per 1,000 live births, the lowest figure ever recorded.
2. The infant mortality rate attributed to respiratory disorders (ICD* Nos 450-519, 769 and 770) in Scotland in 1990 was 1·5 deaths per 1,000 live births.
3. The sudden infant death syndrome rate of death in Scotland in 1990 was 1·9 deaths per 1,000 live births.
4. The numbers of sudden infant deaths in Scotland since 1979 are as follows:

	Male	*Female*	*Total*
1979	66	51	117
1980	72	58	130
1981	95	59	154

	Male	Female	Total
1982	89	55	144
1983	79	45	124
1984	76	51	127
1985	86	51	137
1986	95	52	147
1987	85	48	133
1988	75	57	132
1989	83	55	138
1990	83	45	128

5. The sudden infant death rates per 1,000 live births in Scotland since 1979 are as follows:

	Male	Female	Total
1979	1·9	1·5	1·7
1980	2·0	1·7	1·9
1981	2·7	1·7	2·2
1982	2·6	1·7	2·2
1983	2·3	1·4	1·9
1984	2·3	1·6	2·0
1985	2·5	1·6	2·1
1986	2·8	1·6	2·2
1987	2·5	1·5	2·0
1988	2·2	1·8	2·0
1989	2·6	1·8	2·2
1890	2·4	1·4	1·9

* International Classification of Diseases (9th Revision)

Housing

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will set out the number of *(a)* housing starts and *(b)* housing completions carried out in the private housing sector in (i) Edinburgh, (ii) Dundee, (iii) Glasgow and (iv) Aberdeen districts in each year from 1974-75;

(2) what was the number of *(a)* housing starts and *(b)* housing completions carried out in the non-council public sector in (i) Edinburgh, (ii) Dundee, (iii) Glasgow and (iv) Aberdeen districts in each year from 1974-75;

(3) what was the number of *(a)* housing starts and *(b)* housing completions carried out by (i) Edinburgh, (ii) Dundee, (iii) Glasgow and (iv) Aberdeen district councils in each year from 1974-75.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The available information, as supplied by the relevant housing authorities and agencies, is set out in the following tables.

Housing starts and completions 1975-1990

Year	Starts			Completions		
	Private	Local authority	Public sector[1]	Private	Local authority	Public sector[1]
Edinburgh						
1975	1,100	227	215	1,051	355	102
1976	1,977	129	—	978	621	184
1977	1,420	283	64	1,012	167	8
1978	1,226	29	39	1,563	84	20
1979	1,808	35	40	1,882	199	83
1980	1,241	110	120	1,217	—	—
1981	935	—	17	1,165	117	157
1982	1,000	—	60	600	49	18
1983	1,901	—	74	1,206	8	55
1984	1,403	—	13	1,227	—	25
1985	1,493	—	—	1,504	—	69
1986	2,369	115	123	1,711	—	1
1987	1,899	107	—	1,640	63	111
1988	1,169	154	46	1,412	87	12
1989	1,699	—	[2]—	1,369	101	[2]—
1990	98	—	[2]—	381	125	[2]—
Dundee						
1975	179	32	89	158	263	12
1976	332	124	—	304	211	184
1977	164	278	6	186	128	—
1978	249	107	133	232	84	—
1979	340	83	37	261	221	112
1980	109	82	109	244	82	63
1981	224	84	9	160	163	114
1982	364	49	37	162	55	7
1983	484	8	46	469	80	34
1984	434	56	38	470	5	49
1985	113	3	55	250	57	38
1986	241	4	21	179	—	—
1987	279	1	6	260	—	76
1988	179	—	80	299	5	—
1989	524	5	[2]—	338	8	[2]—
1990	346	5	[2]—	397	—	[2]—
Glasgow						
1975	164	1,382	—	107	1,856	—
1976	376	1,115	188	426	1,923	—
1977	387	224	110	530	1,733	20
1978	586	258	243	347	1,430	182
1979	866	777	340	817	615	96
1980	988	227	632	897	385	79
1981	971	—	42	1,061	558	972
1982	1,479	94	225	1,201	161	255
1983	1,426	118	111	1,299	63	147
1984	1,591	—	290	1,372	—	92
1985	1,782	49	—	1,644	140	237
1986	1,582	—	80	1,814	58	101
1987	1,630	—	218	1,587	—	45
1988	1,500	—	140	1,429	—	293
1989	2,350	—	[2]2	1,745	—	[2]97
1990	2,001	—	[2]—	1,961	—	[2]—
Aberdeen						
1975	403	476	159	237	987	125
1976	563	629	135	431	1,184	143
1977	504	715	352	491	921	191
1978	935	386	—	609	754	296
1979	630	440	—	774	430	—
1980	538	243	—	604	518	11
1981	866	63	—	834	372	—
1982	887	121	—	816	134	—
1983	969	75	87	871	47	—
1984	1,219	103	24	1,090	117	—
1985	1,262	81	57	1,214	178	111
1986	623	91	120	981	45	27
1987	290	185	47	525	93	173
1988	295	35	57	295	136	52
1989	516	12	[2]12	410	109	[2]13
1990	738	107	[2]—	729	71	[2]—

[1] Scottish Homes/SSHA and Government Departments except for years 1975 to 1978 which consists of SSHA only.
[2] Returns outstanding for Scottish Homes.

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the amount of expenditure directly provided by central Government in respect of local authority housing to *(a)* Edinburgh, *(b)* Dundee, *(c)* Glasgow and *(d)* Aberdeen district councils for each year since 1974-75 and in (i) cash and (ii) 1991-92 prices.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The amounts of housing support grant paid to the four local authorities referred to are shown in the tables. Before 1979-80, Exchequer support for local authority housing was provided under a variety of schemes, the details of which could not be provided except at disproportionate cost. The tables exclude subsidy paid to local authorities in respect of rent rebates.

Year	Aberdeen	Edinburgh	Glasgow	Dundee
(i) Cash terms (£)				
1979-80	9,749,391	11,269,405	41,496,149	7,740,698
1980-81	10,733,105	12,517,913	49,487,984	8,602,017

Year	Aberdeen	Edinburgh	Glasgow	Dundee
1981-82	9,533,966	7,869,440	44,099,691	5,285,879
1982-83	7,089,761	2,327,904	37,292,928	1,820,168
1983-84	3,724,702	0	32,355,851	0
1984-85	0	0	32,269,404	0
1985-86	2,260,303	0	32,675,646	0
1986-87	0	0	21,891,239	0
1987-88	0	0	15,116,893	0
1988-89	0	0	24,660,513	0
1989-90	0	0	30,697,621	0
1990-91	0	0	24,536,123	0
1991-92	0	526,144	22,687,417	0
(ii) 1991-92 prices (£)				
1979-80	22,554,982	26,071,498	96,000,345	17,907,919
1980-81	20,983,587	24,472,948	96,750,702	16,817,238
1981-82	16,997,925	14,030,273	78,624,491	9,424,092
1982-83	11,801,909	3,875,125	62,079,350	3,029,927
1983-84	5,926,241	0	51,480,249	0
1984-85	0	0	48,861,203	0
1985-86	3,246,069	0	46,926,192	0
1986-87	0	0	30,385,508	0
1987-88	0	0	19,920,004	0
1988-89	0	0	30,243,455	0
1989-90	0	0	35,392,018	0
1990-91	0	0	26,253,636	0
1991-92	0	526,144	22,687,417	0

Parents Charter

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) which parts of the parents charter in Scotland would require legislation if it were to be enforced;

(2) whether independent schools in Scotland will be required to comply with the parents charter.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Education (Schools) Bill, introduced in Parliament today, provides my right hon. Friend with powers to make regulations to implement elements of the parents charter including information about schools and about progress of pupils.

My right hon. Friend will consider in due course the scope and extent of the matters on which he should prescribe under these and other powers to give effect to the commitments in the parents charter, including the requirements to be placed on independent schools.

School Report Cards

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which parents' organisations and other bodies are being consulted on the new report card.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Scottish Office Education Department working paper No. 11 "Reporting 5-14" has been distributed to a variety of bodies and individuals including the following:

Education authorities for distribution to schools and School Boards; Colleges of Education; Scottish Council for Independent Schools; Convention of Scottish Local Authorities; Teacher Bodies; Scottish Parent Teacher Association; Lothian Parents Federation; Lothian Parents Action Group; Strathclyde Parents Federation; Education Alert; Scottish Council for Research in Education; Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum.

Vocational Courses

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland under what circumstances regional councils will be able to provide vocational courses, under the Government's further education proposals.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Bill provides for the Secretary of State to have a duty to secure in Scotland adequate and efficient provision of further education. Further education as defined in clause 6 of the Bill includes a programme of learning which prepares a person for a vocational qualification. Clause 2 removes from education authorities the duty of providing for their areas further education within the meaning of the Bill. It gives education authorities power to provide such further education. It will be for education authorities to determine in what circumstances they exercise that power, including the power to provide courses which prepare a person for a vocational qualification.

Higher Education

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what criteria will be applied when judging whether Robert Gordon Institute of Technology, Paisley College and Dundee Institute of Technology should have university status under the Government's higher education proposals.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The proposed criteria are set out in the consultation document on degree awarding powers and university title which was issued on Thursday 31 October and to which responses have been invited by 2 December 1991. A copy of the consultation paper is available in the Library.

Departmental Land Holdings

Mr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the hectarage, number of holdings and numbers of tenants of agricultural land owned by his Ministry in each region in Scotland in *(a)* 1980 and *(b)* 1990.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information relating to agricultural land owned by the Secretary of State is set out in table 1. The Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department has provided information relating to the Highland Estates for 1983 and 1990. Prior to 1983 the detail was not held in the format requested. In the case of the lowland estates records were never held in that format. Consequently the information in respect of the lowland estates is presented in summary form.

Relevant information provided by the Forestry Commission is presented in summary form separately in table 2.

Table 1
Government owned land per SOAFD

Region	1983 Hectarage	1983 Holdings/Lets[1]	1990 Hectarage	1990 Holdings/Lets[1]
Highlands				
Highland	96,713	966	93,380	933
Strathclyde	10,896	28	6,626	19
Western Isles	18,195	409	18,080	409

Region	1983 Hectarage	1983 Holdings/Lets[1]	1990 Hectarage	1990 Holdings/Lets[1]
Orkney Islands	280	9	247	4
Shetland Islands	2,247	62	2,161	15
Total	128,331	1,474	120,494	1,420
Lowlands				
Lowlands Total	5,202	276	967	59
Grand Total for SOAFD	133,533	1,750	121,461	1,479

[1]The number of holdings/lets may differ slightly from the number of "tenants" because of multiple tenancies.

Table 2
Government land managed by the forestry commission position as at 30 March 1990

Conservancy	Area of agricultural land (hectares)	Number of tenancies[1]	Number of grazing lets
North	24,800	162	74
Mid	14,100	54	61
South	10,400	39	37
Totai	49,300	255	172

[1] This includes crofting tenancies.

Note: The total area of agricultural land managed by the Forestry Commission at *30 March 1990* was about 104,000 hectares.

Forestry

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures the Government are taking to encourage the planting of new forests close to towns and cities.

Mr. Lang: It is an important part of our forestry policy to encourage the creation of new woodlands close to areas of population. We have therefore decided to introduce a community woodland supplement, of £950 per hectare, as a top-up grant under the woodland grant scheme, which will be available for planting near to towns and cities.

I am sure that this initiative will be welcomed. It will provide a substantial boost to community woodland projects throughout Britain. The Forestry Commission will be publishing details of the arrangements for administering this supplement later this year.

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the Government will make a statement on forestry policy.

Mr. Lang: In our response last year to the Agriculture Committee's report on land use and forestry, we said that we would consider whether there would be benefit in drawing the various strands of forestry policy together into a single statement. We have now decided that there would be advantage in making such a statement available, and a composite summary of our current forestry policy has been published by the Forestry Commission. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

Cash Limits

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he proposes to make any changes to the cash limits for 1991-92 within his responsibility.

Mr. Lang: Yes. Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate:

(a) the cash limit for class XV, vote 3: Training programmes, roads and transport, and industrial support, Scotland will be increased by £23,036,000 from £605,682,000 to £628,718,000. This increase takes account of the £15,000,000 increase in provision for Scottish Enterprise announced by the Prime Minister on 10 May 1991; the final reallocation of £4,921,000 in respect of the transfer of the roads and transport programme from the Scottish Office Environment Department to the Scottish Office Industry Department; also takes account of increased provision of £4,708,000 for Scottish Enterprise and £292,000 for Highlands and Islands Enterprise in respect of Scotland's share of the increased provision for adult training announced by the Secretary of State for Employment on 19 June 1991 after account has been taken of £3,100,000 of residual expenditure incurred by the Department of Employment in respect of training programmes in Scotland; and to take up the £1,215,000 capital end-year flexibility entitlement announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 17 July 1991, at columns *186-90*.

(b) the cash limit for class XV, vote 5: Roads, transport and environmental services, Scotland will be reduced by £3,881,000 from £133,443,000 to £129,562,000. This reduction comprises two changes. First, the cash limit will be increased by £1,040,000 to reflect the full take-up of capital end-year flexibility entitlement and part of the end-year flexibility entitlement for running costs of £984,000. Secondly, the cash limit will be reduced by £4,921,000 in respect of the transfer of roads and transport expenditure to class XV, vote 3: Training programmes, roads and transport services and industrial support, Scotland. Running cost provision will increase by £123,000 from this vote which forms part of the Scottish Office running cost limit.

(c) the cash limit for class XV, vote 13: Law, Order, Miscellaneous Health and Social Work Services, Scotland will be increased by £1,700,000 from £211,764,000 to £213,464,000. This reflects the take-up of full capital end-year flexibility entitlement of £1,075,000 and £495,000 of the running cost entitlement. Provision is also included to cover the costs arising from the Orkney judicial inquiry, for social work offender services and to take account of a transfer of provision from class VI, vote 1 and class XV, vote 26 to cover the costs of grants to voluntary health services bodies.

(d) the cash limit for class XV, vote 21: Revenue and rate support grants, Scotland will be increased by £170,000 from £2,692,607,000 to £2,692,777,000. This increase is required in respect of expenditure to be incurred by local authorities and the Inland Revenue Valuation Office this year in carrying out the valuation of domestic properties in Scotland for the purposes of the proposed council tax.

(e) the cash limit for class XV, vote 26: Hospital, community health, family health (part) and other health services, Scotland will be increased by £23,083,000 from £2,332,404,000 to £2,355,487,000 mainly for the costs of the increase in VAT, announced on 19 March; for full take-up of capital end-year flexibility entitlement of £10,068,000 and to meet the legal expenses of haemophiliacs with HIV.

(f) as a result of the increase on class XV, vote 5 to provide additional management and works services and the take-up of end-year flexibility arrangements in respect of running costs expenditure on that vote and class XV, votes 13 and 20, the running costs limit for the Scottish Office will be increased by £1,084,000 from £260,072,000 to £261,156,000.

(g) in addition the cash block SO/LA1, which covers non-housing capital expenditure by local authorities, will be increased by £8,763,000 from £542,887,000 to £551,650,000. An increase of £8,900,000 in respect of the end-year flexibility arrangements for capital expenditure was announced on 17 July. Since the July announcement, a further increase of £4,363,000 has been agreed. This will be offset by a reduction of £4,500,000 to offset increases in non-cash limited votes.

(h) the non-voted cash limit, SO/LA2, which covers net allocation to local authorities on new town capital expenditure, will be increased by £561,000 from £342,935,000 to £343,496,000. This increase results from take-up in full of end-year flexibility entitlement as announced on 17 July.

The increases are within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

Gourock Ropeworks

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement concerning the circumstances surrounding the sale of the Gourock Ropeworks, Port Glasgow.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 5 November 1991:]* My right hon. Friend understands that Chatom Investments Ltd. may now have concluded missives for the acquisition of the ropeworks. He continues to hope that a new use can be found for this category A listed building.

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total expenditure by his Department on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1991-92 and budget for 1992-93.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* The running costs of the Scottish Office information directorate for each year from 1985-86 are as follows:

Year	*£m*
1985-86	0·9
1986-87	1·0
1987-88	1·1
1988-89	1·2
1989-90	1·4
1990-91	1·7
1991-92	1·9

Budget proposals for 1992-93 have not yet been finalised. These figures exclude expenditure on information campaigns. Directly comparable figures for years prior to the introduction of new Scottish Office budgetary arrangements in 1985-86 are not available.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide an up-to-date list of each television advertising campaign carried out, or to be carried out, by *(a)* the Scottish Office, *(b)* the Scottish Development Agency and *(c)* the Forestry Commission during 1991-92, and of each other publicity campaign costing more than £100,000, giving for each (i) the topic, (ii) the commencement date, (iii) the duration and (iv) the advertising, promotional and public relations companies involved.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* Information television campaigns undertaken by the Scottish Office to date and those planned to be carried out in the current financial year are:

Road Safety: 8-21 April, 6-19 May, 3-16 June, 2-29 September; Faulds Advertising, Edinburgh.

School Boards: 19 August-27 September; Faulds Advertising.

Crime Prevention: 7 October-3 November, Faulds Advertising.

Rent to Mortgage: 14 October-4 November, The Leith Agency, Edinburgh.

Fire Prevention: January-February 1992, Faulds Advertising.

There have been no other campaigns costing more than £100,000 carried out and none are planned.

The Forestry Commission has carried out no television campaigns.

The only publicity campaign costing more than £100,000 carried out by the Commission was:

Promotion of the Woodland Grant Scheme: 4 June—continuing; Hall Advertising, Edinburgh and Brown Associated, Edinburgh.

Expenditure on television advertising and other publicity is an operational matter for the Scottish Development Agency's successor body, Scottish Enterprise, and its local enterprise companies. I understand, however, that Scottish Enterprise has no plans for television advertising this financial year.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give separate figures for the spending by his Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio

advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1991-92 and budgets for 1992-93.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* Estimates for 1991-92 are television advertising £339,000, radio advertising £86,000, newspaper advertising £476,000 and other promotional material £364,000.

For 1988-89 to 1990-91, the figures were:

	1988-89 £	*1989-90* £	*1990-91* £
TV Advertising	576,000	974,000	741,000
Radio Advertising	40,000	85,000	188,000
Newspaper Advertising	378,000	1,022,000	613,000
Other Promotional Material	933,000	1,001,000	1,098,000

For 1979-88 an analysis in the form requested is not available.

Total expenditure on information publicity was:

	£
1979-80	263,000
1980-81	362,000
1981-82	393,000
1982-83	386,000
1983-84	360,000
1984-85	704,000
1985-86	677,000
1986-87	857,000
1987-88	1,094,000

The budget for 1992-93 has not yet been finalised.

The above figures do not include the running costs of the Scottish Office information directorate.

HIV

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many non-haemophiliacs in Scotland have contracted HIV infection as a result of contaminated NHS blood/tissue transfers; and how many of those became infected before the introduction of the screening of donations in October 1985.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* As at 31 October there were 11 reported cases. It is not possible from the information currently available to identify when these cases became infected.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the amount paid from public funds to individuals of groups who have prepared or are in the course of preparation of proposals to set up national health trusts in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* Resources have been made available to all health boards to implement NHS reforms. These moneys are additional to the allocations which are provided to health boards for patient care which, over the past 12 years, have increased by approximately 40 per cent. in real terms.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the public opinion surveys carried out by his Department since 11 July.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* I shall place a list of surveys in the Library as soon as possible.

HEALTH

Hospital Consultants

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the average waiting times for a first appointment with a hospital consultant in England and Wales in *(a)* ophthalmology, *(b)* ear, nose and throat and *(c)* adult orthopaedics; and what are the shortest and longest waiting times respectively in each of these three specialties.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not collected centrally.

Newmarket Hospital

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made, or received from the regional health authority, about the costs of re-providing at West Suffolk and Addenbrookes hospitals the facilities that will be closed at Newmarket hospital in the event that the latter is run down to community status;

(2) what information he has received from the East Anglian regional health authority about its plans to continue Newmarket hospital as a general hospital for three years after any decision is taken on the authority's proposals to downgrade it to community status.

Mr. Dorrell: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will announce his decision about the future of Newmarket hospital as soon as possible.

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent on Newmarket hospital in each of the past five years; and what are the projected sums he has budgeted to spend over the next three years, irrespective of any decision he may take on its future status.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not collected centrally.

Bio Products Laboratory

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many units of BSM factor VIII were sold by the Bio Products Laboratory to United Kingdom hospitals before 31 March.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is commercially confidential.

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who will audit the Bio Products Laboratory from 1 April; and under what accounting standard this audit will take place.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: From 1 April 1991 the Central Blood Laboratories Authority and the other health authorities will be audited by the Audit Commission. The audits are conducted in accordance with the code of audit practice for local authorities and the national health service in England and Wales dated November 1990.

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for Health under what requirements the Bio Products Laboratory now lies in respect of the publication of annual accounts.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Bio Products Laboratory is not required to publish annual accounts separately from the Central Blood Laboratories Authority, which publishes an annual report covering its activities as a whole.

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether all Bio Products Laboratory products deemed to have licences have been subject to the full product licence fee of £130,000 per product payable on the product licence application to the Medicines Control Agency.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Bio Products Laboratory is required to pay a licence fee appropriate to each of its applications for product licences made under the Medicines Act. Details of the fees paid by the Bio Products Laboratory as with any other pharmaceutical company are confidential between the Medicines Control Agency and the applicant.

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what differences exist between the terms, including conditions of confidentiality, on which *(a)* the Bio Products Laboratory and other state institutions and *(b)* commercial pharmaceutical companies compete in respect of tendering;

(2) if he will give details of all contracts or agreements for plasma products including factor VIII, Albumin and IVGG made for 1991-92 by the Bio Products Laboratory with regional health authorities which were not subject to general tenders to the commercial pharmaceutical industry.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The purchase of blood products is a matter for provider units and health authorities. We are not aware of any differences in the terms on which the Bio Products Laboratory and commercial suppliers compete for the supply of such products to national health service purchasers; nor are we aware of any contracts or agreements made by the Bio Products Laboratory in 1991-92 which were not subject to tender to commercial suppliers.

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who is now responsible for funding any losses made by the Bio Products Laboratory over a financial year.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Central Blood Laboratories Authority, of which Bio Products Laboratory is part, is required to stay within the cash limit set by the Department and funded from class XIII, vote 1.

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for Health under what legal status the Bio Products Laboratory has been trading since 1 April.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Bio Products Laboratory is an integral part of the Central Blood Laboratories Authority, a special health authority set up in December 1982. The legal status of that body as a special health authority has not changed.

Cot Deaths

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take steps to facilitate the development of an agreed autopsy protocol for the cot death.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The formulation and adoption of an autopsy protocol for cot death will be for health authorities to determine as part of their involvement in the confidential inquiry into stillbirths and deaths in infancy.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the recommendation to mothers on whether to lie babies down to sleep on back, front or side in the "Pregnancy Book" issued to all mothers *(a)* in the version issued in 1990, *(b)* as revised in 1991, *(c)* as reprinted in 1991 and *(d)* as intended now; and how many copies of it were printed for distribution.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* Advice to pregnant women and mothers contained in the Health Education Authority's "Pregnancy Book" and "Birth To Five" on the recommended sleeping position of babies has been changed once in 1990. Prior to that, the advice was that for the first two months or so babies should sleep on their fronts. This was in accordance with the then commonly held clinical view that not to do so could increase the risk of inhalation of vomit, especially in those babies who were vulnerable or sick.

At the time the text of these books was revised in 1990, the advice was changed to reflect the evidence that was then emerging that the prone sleeping position might have been a risk factor in cot death. On the basis of the evidence at that time, no one type of sleeping position for babies could be recommended. In versions of the booklets reprinted earlier in 1991 this advice continued to be current, although the opportunity was taken to remove photographs of babies lying on their fronts.

Following the chief medical officer's advice last week that babies should no longer be laid down to sleep on their fronts except on medical advice, the authority has taken immediate steps to notify health education units and prevent them from distributing further copies of both books. Urgent steps are being taken to revise the advice in the booklets.

Altogether, approximately half a million copies each of the "Pregnancy Book" and "Birth to Five" are issued to first-time pregnant women and parents each year.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is Government policy on the training of health care workers to deal with cot death;

(2) what steps he is taking to inform health care professionals, doctors, midwives, and maternity homes of how to advise mothers on avoiding cot deaths;

(3) what television advertising his Department intends or has carried out on cot deaths;

(4) how he intends to communicate his advice that young babies should be laid on their backs to *(a)* health care professionals, *(b)* the public generally and *(c)* mothers.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* Although the underlying causes remain unexplained, as the advice issued by the chief medical officer last week made clear, it is possible to reduce the risk of cot death. Sleeping position is only one factor associated with cot death. Other known risks to be avoided are cigarette smoking, overheating a baby and not acting promptly by seeking professional advice when a baby appears unwell.

Whilst non-breast feeding has been identified as a factor in cot deaths in New Zealand, it has not been identified as a risk factor in the United Kingdom. The Department's advice on the known benefits of breastfeeding remains unchanged.

The chief medical officer's press announcement last week and the media coverage following that, has alerted the public to the new advice relating to sleeping position. The chief medical officer and chief nursing officer will be writing to doctors and to other health care professionals shortly with more detailed advice to guide them in their advice to parents. We would expect the statutory and professional bodies to incorporate the new advice into their curricula straightaway.

In addition, the text of the two books published by the Health Education Authority and distributed to first-time pregnant women and parents, the "Pregnancy Book" and "Birth To Five", is being amended to reflect the new advice. We are considering urgently whether further steps are needed to ensure that the new advice is available to parents of young babies.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which parts of the confidential inquiry into stillbirths and deaths in infancy are relevant to cot death; and who has devised these.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will shortly be setting up a national advisory body to advise on which aspects of stillbirths and deaths in infancy should be examined in the confidential inquiry into stillbirths and deaths in infancy.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of infant deaths are given a proper paediatric post-mortem by someone trained as a paediatric pathologist to recognise cot death.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons the confidential inquiry into stillbirths and deaths in infancy was established.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This inquiry is being established on a nationwide basis to examine in detail the circumstances of selected stillbirths and deaths in infancy. This is the first such inquiry worldwide. With increased knowledge of the reason why babies die, health care professionals and others will be better able to prevent these tragic events.

Liver Transplants

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the contracts between King's College hospital, London, and St. Mary's hospital, London, for liver transplantation with non-United Kingdom residents;

(2) if he will give to date the number of private liver transplants undertaken at King's College hospital, London, and St. Mary's hospital, London.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not held centrally. The management of King's College hospital is the responsibility of Camberwell health authority and the management of St. Mary's hospital is the responsibility of Parkside health authority. The hon. Member may wish to write to Sir Derek Boorman, the chairman of Camberwell health authority, and Mr. Michael Hatfield, chairman of Parkside health authority, for details.

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give to date the number of national health service patients in whom it has not been possible to perform a liver transplant due to lack of intensive care facilities, and in which the liver subsequently went to a private non-United Kingdom resident.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not collected centrally.

Paediatric Pathologists

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the Government's policy on conducting paediatric post-mortems and funding them.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Government required regional health authorities to have at least one paediatric pathologist in post by 31 March 1991 and to conduct a review of the need for further posts by 1992. The conduct of paediatric post-mortems is a matter for professional judgment and there are no special arrangements in place for funding them.

Blood Plasma

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether any voluntary donated blood plasma collected in the United Kingdom is used other than to produce plasma fractions or finished products which are used solely for patients in the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Our aim is to collect from our unpaid voluntary donors sufficient blood and plasma to meet national requirements for blood products. Not all the products derived from blood and plasma are in equal demand and a surplus of a particular fraction may arise from time to time. Those products which are genuinely surplus to our own needs may then be exported to EC or other countries which may not be self-sufficient in that particular fraction.

Women's Hospital, Liverpool

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what impact the proposed new women's hospital in Liverpool will have on services for women; how much of the expenditure earmarked for the hospital will be used for security and road alterations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Obstetric and gynaecology services are presently scattered across the city and will be provided on a single site in modern, well-equipped accommodation. The balance of expenditure on new facilities and infrastructure such as security and road alterations is a matter for Liverpool health authority.

Correspondence

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to reply to the letter of 29 October from the hon. Member for Nottingham, North, regarding Mr. L. Lowe and the Queen's Medical Centre hospital, Nottingham.

Mr. Dorrell: A reply will be sent shortly.

Nottingham DHA

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will specify the waiting list for the City, Highbury, General and Queen's Medical Centre hospitals, Nottingham, in each of the specialties for which figures are held centrally for each of the years since 1987.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not collected centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. D. H. White, the chairman of Nottingham health authority, for details.

AIDS and Breast Cancer

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money the Government have put into AIDS and breast cancer research and publicity.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Government expenditure on AIDS research in 1990-91 totalled £20·4 million. In the same year £10·0 million was spent on publicity on AIDS. In the present financial year, 1991-92, the estimated Government expenditure is £22·5 million on AIDS research and £11·3 million on publicity on AIDS. Government spending on research into breast cancer in 1990-91 amounted to £3·0 million. The estimated figure for research in 1991-92 is not yet available. Information on the levels of expenditure on publicity about breast cancer and the breast cancer screening programme is not separately identifiable. The Health Education Authority, the Department of Health and the NHS breast cancer screening programme include advice and information about breast cancer in a range of publications giving general advice on health matters.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to revise the amount of money his Department spends on AIDS; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The amount of money available for spending on AIDS and HIV is kept under constant review.

London Health Service

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the recently announced survey of the health service in London will include consideration of hospital provision in the London borough of Havering.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Sir Bernard Tomlinson, was appointed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to advise him on the development of London health services. He has been given a wide-ranging remit to look at the provision of health care, the organisation and provision of undergraduate medical teaching, post-graduate medical education and research and development. Although we expect him to focus mainly on central London, there may well be issues with wider implications where it is appropriate for him to include outer London in his consideration.

Cash Limits

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether any changes will be made to the cash limits and running cost limits of his Department in 1991-92.

Mr. Waldegrave: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the following changes will be made:

The cash limit for class XIII, vote 1—Hospital, community health, family health services (part) and related services, England—will increase by £110,667,000, from £16,410,032,000 to £16,520,699,000. This increase covers additions of £100,841,000 for health authorities and other bodies for the increase in VAT announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 19 March 1991; £31,480,000 for the take-up of entitlement to carry-over underspends under the end-year flexibility arrangements, as announced by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 17 July 1991 and transfers from class XIII, vote 3 of £3,000,000 for construction of a building for orthotists and prosthetists and £500,000 for drug misuse publicity. These increases are partly offset by a reduction of £19,678,000 reflecting an increase in the NHS trusts' aggregate external financing limit, and transfers to class XIII, vote 3 of £4,679,000 for the NHS estates agency and £600,000 for the clinical standards advisory group, and to class XVI, vote 8 of £197,000 for an incentive bonus schemes policy group.

The cash limits for class XIII, vote 3—Department of Health, administration, miscellaneous health services and personal social services, England—will be increased by £6,960,000, from £726,469,000 to £733,429,000. This increase provides an additional £4,713,000 for litigation costs of haemophiliacs infected with HIV; £531,000 for the increase on VAT as mentioned above; £4,679,000 from class XIII, vote 1 for the NHS estates agency and £600,000 for the clinical standards advisory group; £91,000 from class XIV, vote 3 for an increase in petrol tax allowance and for replacement vehicles; £75,000 from class II, vote 5 for a contribution to the International Peto Institute; and £69,000 from class XIV, vote 4 for the low income scheme and computer equipment. These increases are partly offset by the transfers to class XIII, vote 1 mentioned above; £127,000 to class XI, vote 2 for conversion of social work training courses. Also as a consequence of the excess on the departmental running cost limit in 1990-91 a further reduction of £171,000 is being made.

The provision for running costs on class XIII, vote 3 and the Department's running cost limit is increased by £29,000 from £252,892,000 to £252,921,000. The increase is within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many of the second wave of hospital trusts announced by him have indicated that they have made provision for a nurse to be on the board of the trust; and if he will list those that have not;

(2) if he will list those existing hospital trusts which do not have a nurse on the board of the trust.

Mr. Dorrell: All NHS trusts providing patient services, apart from ambulance and other transport services, are required to have a registered nurse or midwife as an executive director on their board.

Dietary Sugars

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to ensure that the recommendations of the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy report "Dietary Sugars and Human Disease" (1989) are implemented.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave her on 30 January at column *529*. Work continues on all fronts mentioned.

In July this year the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy published its report "Dietary Reference Values for Food Energy and Nutrients for the UK", in which it fully endorsed the findings in the 1989 report; a copy is available in the Library. It advised that the population's average intake of non-milk extrinsic sugars should not exceed about 60 g per day or 10 per cent. of total dietary energy. The Health Education Authority is now working in close co-operation with officials of the Department of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to translate this advice into further nutrition education material.

Stillbirths

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what will be *(a)* the initial costs and *(b)* the annual running costs of confidential inquiries into stillbirths and infant deaths in England; and what additional funds he is making available to (i) the Department of Health, (ii) the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, (iii) regional health authorities and (iv) district health authorities to *(a)* set up and *(b)* run the inquiries.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* Initial costs in regions of setting up epidemiological surveys of stillbirths and infant deaths and of recruiting additional perinatal pathologists are already being met from current allocations. Details of further expenditure are under consideration. As the confidential inquiry will be part of the NHS reforms audit initiative, regions will be eligible to seek funds which have been especially assigned to clinical audit. The total amount available for all clinical audit work will be around £40 million in 1992-93.

Health Service Staff

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each national health service region the number of male doctors and the number of female doctors *(a)* in general practice, *(b)* who are consultants and *(c)* other than consultants who work in hospitals.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* The information requested is given in the tables.

Unrestricted principals (GPs) in England as at 1 April 1991

	Male	*Female*
Northern	1,276	357
Yorkshire	1,511	431
Trent	1,877	531
East Anglia	899	217
NW Thames	1,306	650
NE Thames	1,468	552
SE Thames	1,475	475
SW Thames	1,101	461
Wessex	1,196	391
Oxford	1,003	351
South Western	1,573	409
West Midlands	2,116	586
Mersey	928	313
North Western	1,548	463
Total: England	19,277	6,187

Hospital medical staff in England as at 30 September 1990

	Consultants		*All other staff*		*All staff*	
	Male	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*
Northern	878	140	1,396	635	2,274	775
Yorkshire	916	118	1,757	659	2,673	777
Trent	1,175	173	1,967	947	3,142	1,120
East Anglia	564	83	905	427	1,469	510
North West Thames	847	227	1,613	907	2,460	1,134
North East Thames	1,176	306	1,855	974	3,031	1,280
South East Thames	1,069	207	1,734	827	2,803	1,034
South West Thames	742	202	1,122	641	1,864	843
Wessex	745	106	1,282	662	2,027	768
Oxford	629	137	1,083	630	1,712	767
South Western	817	109	1,390	732	2,207	841
West Midlands	1,307	207	2,333	935	3,640	1,142
Mersey	686	104	1,137	504	1,823	608
North Western	1,128	189	2,183	902	3,311	1,091
LPGTHs[1]	544	110	698	303	1,242	413
Total	12,834	2,369	22,275	10,590	35,109	12,959

[1] London Postgraduate Teaching Hospitals.

Notes:
Figures include all permanent paid and honorary staff and exclude all locum staff.
England totals do not equal the sum of the regions due to doctors working in more than one region.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 7 November 1991

ENVIRONMENT

Drought Orders

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many drought orders his Department has granted in each year since 1979; and how many of these involved varying the conditions of abstraction.

Mr. Baldry: The Secretary of State for the Environment has made the following numbers of drought orders:

	Numbers
1980	2
1981	nil
1982	13
1983	5
1984	92
1985	nil
1986	nil
1987	nil
1988	1
1989	74
1990	65
[1]1991	24

[1] To date.

Most of these involve a temporary variation in the conditions governing the abstraction of water, but only a detailed review of all 276 statutory instruments could give a precise figure: this would involve disproportionate effort.

Refugees

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to assist local authorities with the cost of housing refugees; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: The cost of housing refugees and other commitments are taken into account in authorities' housing investment programme allocations.

The Asylum Bill, which was published on 1 November, contains measures which will modify the duties on local authorities and ease housing pressures.

Council Housing (Unauthorised Occupation)

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what evidence he has received about the extent of unauthorised occupation of local authority housing in Greater London; and what action he plans to take.

Mr. Yeo: Investigations into levels of unauthorised occupation are being undertaken by a number of London authorities, and my Department is taking a close interest in the findings as they emerge. The Government have taken a number of steps which encourage the reduction of unauthorised occupation. These include the financial discipline of the ring-fenced housing revenue account, the incentive in HRA subsidy rules to minimise voids, and the requirement to publish performance indicators. My Department is also funding research which will provide authorities with models of good practice to prevent such activity in the first place. The primary responsibility for tackling the problem must rest, however, with the owners and managers of the housing—the local authorities themselves.

Council Housing

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will authorise district councils to use funds accumulated from the sale of property to build houses and flats for sale or rent to the local community.

Mr. Yeo: Our general policy is to encourage the private sector, including housing associations, rather than local authorities to be the providers of new houses and flats. Local authorities are free to use 25 per cent. of the receipts from the sale of council dwellings to assist this process in various ways, including sponsoring housing association developments.

Animals and Birds (Imports)

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what action he intends to take, following the advice of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, to reduce the number of ports of entry through which live animals and birds may enter the United Kingdom;

(2) what action he intends to take in the light of recent advice from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee to introduce a levy on the import of wild birds and animals.

Mr. Baldry: The Joint Nature Conservation Committee's report on the wildlife trade makes a number of wide-ranging recommendations, including those concerning a levy and further restrictions on ports of entry. Because these are not issues which affect the United Kingdom alone, we have drawn the report to the attention of the European Commission and urged it to propose stricter controls throughout the European Community. We expect the Commission to publish proposals for a new regulation on the wildlife trade very soon. In subsequent discussions we shall take full account of the committee's advice.

Water Quality

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to issue guidance to local authorities on the planning considerations associated with the water companies' investment to improve the quality of bathing and drinking water; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Secretary of State for Wales have today published Circular 17/91—Department of the Environment—and Circular 62/91—Welsh Office. This gives guidance on the planning implications for local authorities of substantial investment by the water industry to improve the quality of bathing waters, to find alternative disposal means for sewage sludge at present disposed of at sea, and to improve the quality of drinking water.

The circular stresses the strict deadlines for improving the quality of bathing and drinking waters, and emphasises

local planning authorities' responsibility to work with the water industry to find suitable sites for sewage treatment works and to handle planning applications without delay. It also reminds authorities of the need to allocate sites for sewage treatment works, where appropriate, when preparing or reviewing development plans. And it advises water companies to consider the need for environmental assessment of their proposals at the earliest possible stage.

Homelessness

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what initiatives his Department has taken over the last six months to reduce the number of homeless people.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 6 November 1991]:* On 5 June I announced that selected housing associations would be invited to bid for grants to run pilot schemes as managing agents for private owners, to encourage landlords to let their empty properties to homeless people. The first homes made available through this initiative were let in October. Also in October I announced a new scheme to bring empty flats over shops back into use. Local authorities will shortly be invited to bid for a share of the £25 million to be made available. Accommodation created through this initiative will help to relieve homelessness pressures in many hard-pressed urban areas.

Under the Department's new initiative with the Council of Mortgage Lenders, announced on 5 November, repossessed properties will be passed to housing associations for temporary letting to homeless families nominated by local authorities. This will bring empty properties back into use, provide homes for families, restore confidence in the market and help mortgage lenders.

These initiatives are additional to our £300 million homelessness allocation to local authorities and housing associations in London and the south-east, which will provide 16,000 permanent homes for homeless families. Work is also progressing on the Department's £96 million initiative to combat rough sleeping in central London. A total of 489 additional hostel places, 530 places in housing leased from private owners and 250 places in permanent housing have been made available this year for rough sleepers. By the end of 1993-94, the total of additional permanent housing generated by this initiative will reach 1,800 places.

West Country (Development Restrictions)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the towns and villages in Somerset, Dorset, Devon and Cornwall, at which the National Rivers Authority has asked for development restrictions; and if he will make a statement as to the reason for those restrictions.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 6 November 1991]:* This detailed information is not held by the Department. We shall be in touch with the National Rivers Authority and I shall write to my hon. Friend.

TRANSPORT

Antares

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the inspector's inquiry into the sinking of the Antares from Carradale has been completed; how much time is required under the Merchant Shipping (Accident Investigation) Regulations for consideration of the report; when the Secretary of State expects to publish the report; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The marine accident investigation branch inquiry is complete; the inspector has submitted his findings and recommendations to the chief inspector of marine accidents who is now preparing his report for submission to the Secretary of State for Transport. Before the chief inspector's report can be published, he is required by regulation 9 of the Merchant Shipping (Accident Investigation) Regulations 1989 to give persons whose reputations are likely to be adversely affected, time to consider the text and further time to provide alternative text if agreement cannot be reached. The duration of both prescribed periods are 28 days but experience has shown that the whole consultation period is likely to take a minimum of three months.

In the light of these facts, and with the additional period being required for the printing of the final report, publication is not expected before April 1992.

Transport Police, Scotland

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the total number of British Transport Police officers on Scotland's railways for each of the last five years.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information is as follows:

Year	*Number of BTP officers*
1986	177
1987	176
1988	172
1989	175
1990	191

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the cost to British Rail of funding the British Transport police in Scotland for each of the last five years, expressed in constant terms.

Mr. McLoughlin: I do not have the information in the form requested but the British Transport police have been able to supply costs at 1989-90 prices for the following years:

Year	*Cost (£000s)*
1990-91	5,192
1989-90	5,241

Disused Railway Lines

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport of which disused railway lines in Scotland, British Rail still owns, *(a)* the land and *(b)* the track bed.

Mr. McLoughlin: I do not have the information in the form requested. British Rail owns some 155 miles of

disused railway in Scotland which in general comprise a large number of short isolated stretches of which only a very small proportion contains the trackbed.

Rail Line, Cowlairs

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the railway inspectorate has given approval to the proposed single-line chord at Cowlairs to join the main Glasgow Queen street line with the line to Cumbernauld; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate gave provisional approval to the single line chord on 29 August 1991. This would enable British Rail to install and bring the new line into use pending an inspection. The works started in September on a new bridge, but work cannot commence on the track and signalling alterations until the bridge is finished, in February 1992. The inspectorate will discuss with BR what amendments may be needed to the scheme in the light of this forthcoming inquiry into the Newton accident.

Buses, Wakefield

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many bus companies operate within the Wakefield district; and what is the proportion of tendered bus routes within the district operated by each of these companies.

Mr. McLoughlin: Information about the number of bus companies operating within the Wakefield district could be produced only at disproportionate cost. Information about tendered bus routes within the district is a matter for the West Yorkshire passenger transport executive.

Rail Electrification

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the proportion of *(a)* Scotland's and *(b)* the whole of Britain's network which is electrified.

Mr. Freeman: As at 31 March 1991, British Rail had some 1,705 route miles in Scotland, of which some 23 per cent. were electrified or in the process of being electrified by projects approved or under construction. BR had 10,305 route miles in Great Britain, 30 per cent of which were or will be electrified.

Tendered Bus Services

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the total public subsidy granted to private companies operating tendered services within west Yorkshire.

Mr. McLoughlin: Subsidies for tendered bus services are a matter for the West Yorkshire passenger transport authority and executive. The executive has budgeted for expenditure of £15·1 million on tendered bus services including school services in 1991-92.

Harbour Revision Orders

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many harbour revision orders have been applied for since 3 August 1988; and if he will give details of the environmental assessment.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Department has received 35 applications for harbour revision orders since 3 August 1988, two of which were subsequently withdrawn. Of the remainder, only three involved the authorisationof specific works projects and all three fell within annex II to Council directive 85/337/EEC. In one of these cases—Harwich, Parkeston Quay—the Secretary of State decided after consultation that an environmental assessment was required. The environmental impact statement prepared by the applicant is still being considered, together with representations on the order.

Motor Vehicles

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) whether he supports the CO standards proposed in the draft EC directive on technical inspection of motor vehicles;

(2) whether he intends the 3·5 per cent. CO standard in the draft EC directive to be extended to roadside spot checks;

(3) what steps he proposes to take to encourage agreement on the draft EC directive on technical inspection of motor vehicles;

(4) what information he has regarding the exhaust emission standards proposed in the draft EC directive on technical inspection of motor vehicles.

Mr. Chope: I refer the hon. Member to the explanatory memorandum on the Commission proposal (7753/91, COM(91) 244), dated 23 September. The in-service CO testing standard proposed by the Commission is 3·5 per cent. for modern conventional petrol-engined cars and light goods vehicles, which is also the current EC prescribed design limit for new engines.

The 4·5 per cent. CO standard which has just been introduced into the MOT test is based on the EC type approval limit, including the 1 per cent. manufacturing tolerance allowed for engines coming off the production line. That standard is realistic for vehicles in service, and brings about a significant reduction in pollution caused by excessive emissions from badly tuned engines. We shall be monitoring the results of emission-checking very closely to help us to make a more informed judgment on the merits of the proposal from the Commission, on which discussion in the EC has not yet started.

The 4·5 per cent. standard applies to petrol-engined cars and light goods vehicles first used after 1 August 1983, and compliance can be enforced at roadside spot checks. There are no immediate plans to apply different standards, but the longer-term intention is to tighten standards further.

Smokemeters

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to develop accurate smoke testing protocols for vehicle testing; if this will apply to roadside spot checks; what assessment he has made of the Bosch smokemeter and Lucas Hartridge diesel exhaust smokemeter for this purpose; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The Government are planning to introduce an instrumented smoke check into the annual roadworthiness test of heavy vehicles next summer. This will replace the current visual check for excessive smoke. Research is currently in progress to help determine the best form of

instrumentation and the best method of testing which can also be used for roadside checking. The two instruments to which the hon. Member refers are among those being considered.

Heathrow Airport

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to improve directional signing at Heathrow airport particularly to the motorways.

Mr. McLoughlin: Directional signing within the airport boundary is the responsibility of Heathrow Airport Limited, and is kept under review by the airport. If my hon. Friend has specific comments on signing at Heathrow, he might want to put them to the airport.

South London Line

Mr. Gerald Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has from British Rail on the safety implications of the cab design fault on the class 456 two-coach trains which do not meet operational requirements for service on the south London line; what action British Rail is taking to rectify the problems; and when the new trains are expected to enter service.

Mr. Freeman: It is imperative that drivers of driver-only-operated trains have a clear and unobstructed view of the TV monitors, or other visual aids, on station platforms. The driver's cab window on class 456 trains was too small for this equipment to be seen clearly from the driving position. The driver's seat was therefore modified to slide sideways to give an acceptable view of the platform equipment. Class 456 trains entered service on 30 September.

Mr. Gerald Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what temporary speed restrictions there are in force on the south London line to the west of Brixton for safety reasons; and when restrictions are expected to be lifted.

Mr. Freeman: Due to the installation of a new junction, a temporary speed restriction has been imposed in the Voltaire road area pending the completion of further track relaying work. The usual line speed of 45 mph has been reduced to 20 mph for a distance of approximately 220 yards. The restriction is expected to be in place until next spring. Also in the vicinity, there is a speed limit of 10 mph in connection with bridge renewal which will operate until 22 November.

A1079 (Market Weighton Exit)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport for what reason his Department has authorised the reopening of the direct exit from Market Weighton on to the Beverley stretch of the A1079; and what representations he has received concerning this matter.

Mr. Chope: The authorisation for a junction with the A1079 at the eastern end of the Market Weighton bypass is contained in the original orders for the scheme. Before the junction is open to traffic its layout will be improved. Written representations have been received from two members of the public in support of the opening of the junction.

M1 (Lane Closures)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will review the closure of lanes in the M1 between junctions 41 and 43 to allow better traffic flow during the current resurfacing works.

Mr. Chope: No. The arrangements were carefully designed to maintain traffic flow in the area and allow work to proceed and, generally, have worked well.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what arrangements have been made to allow continued traffic flow during the current resurfacing work on the M1 motorway in West Yorkshire between junctions 41 and 43; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The work on the M1 between junctions 41 and 43 is being carried out in three separate lengths to minimise delays and disruption overall and especially the effect on the important M1/M62 interchange at Lofthouse.

Tidal flow traffic management is in operation on the M1 to provide a minimum of two lanes for the dominant peak hour flows. In the morning this is northbound towards Leeds and in the afternoon southbound towards Wakefield.

Closed-circuit television and recovery vehicles on permanent duty ensure that incidents are indentified and cleared quickly to keep traffic moving.

Road and Rail Investment

Mr. Sumberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to publish the technical report by his Department on the methodology for appraising investments in road and rail schemes.

Mr. Freeman: I am pleased to say that the report is being published today and I am placing copies in the Library. Further copies are available from the Department's publications sales unit, Building 1, Victoria road, South Ruislip, HA4 ON2, at a price including postage of £2·75.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Mortgage Foreclosures

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Attorney-General what is the latest available annual figure for mortgage foreclosures in Northern Ireland.

The Attorney-General: In 1990, a total of 2,599 originating summonses for the collection of mortgage arrears were issued in the Chancery Division of the High Court for Northern Ireland. The total figure for all mortgage foreclosures in Northern Ireland is not collected centrally. It is not therefore possible to give figures for possession orders granted, cases where suspended possession orders were made, and those cases which did not proceed after the originating summons was issued.

Commonhold

Mr. Soley: To ask the Attorney-General when he intends to bring forward legislation on commonhold.

The Attorney-General: The Government will introduce legislation on commonhold and related matters as soon as parliamentary time for it can be found.

ENERGY

Coal Industry Bill

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what consultations he had with representatives of *(a)* miners and *(b)* underground supervisory staff when preparing the Coal Industry Bill.

Mr. Wakeham: My Department consulted British Coal.

Mines Safety

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last consulted representatives of miners or underground supervisory staff on mines safety.

Mr. Wakeham: Safety in mines is the responsibility of the Health and Safety Commission and Executive which regularly consult representative organisations.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy to what factors he attributes the safety record of mines owned by the British Coal Corporation.

Mr. Wakeham: I pay tribute to the management and work force of the corporation for their impressive achievements in improving safety in recent years.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last discussed mines safety with the Health and Safety Commission and Health and Safety Executive respectively.

Mr. Wakeham: My Department maintains close contact with the Health and Safety Executive.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what representations he has received over the last three years about the number of hours which can be worked underground in coal mines.

Mr. Wakeham: There have been discussions between my officials and British Coal about the number of hours worked by mineworkers.

Electricity Supply

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many representations he has received about the charges being levied by electricity companies to connect electricity from *(a)* renewable sources or *(b)* combined heat and power projects to the electricity distribution system.

Mr. Wakeham: Connection charges are a matter for the parties concerned. Any dispute on the provision of a supply of electricity, including connection charges, may be referred by either party to the Director General of Electricity Supply for determination.

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he will place an up-to-date copy of the note for guidance on Government publicity and advertising in the Library.

Mr. Wakeham: I assume that the hon. Gentleman is referring to the conventions on Government publicity and advertising.

As I said in my reply to my hon. Friend, the Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot), on 28 June 1990, at column *311*, a copy has already been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy which company has been retained for the energy and environment publicity campaign.

Mr. Wakeham: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 5 November, at column *67*.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many copies of the annual report of the ministerial group on energy efficiency have been distributed; and what percentage of them were distributed to the news media.

Mr. Wakeham: Virtually 2,000 copies of the report have been distributed to date. Further copies will be distributed at exhibitions in coming months. Just over 4 per cent. are being distributed to news media.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy which companies were invited to tender for the energy and environment publicity campaign; and how many submitted tenders.

Mr. Wakeham: A number of qualified organisations were invited to tender for the advertising element of the publicity campaign, and a separate group of qualified organisations to tender for the promotional element. All the companies invited made presentations in response, and the appointments were made on the basis of competitive tendering.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the reason for the rise in the estimated cost of the energy and environment publicity campaign.

Mr. Wakeham: Further resources are being made available for this new campaign in order to increase still further its effectiveness and impact. The scale of the resources now available demonstrates the Government's commitment to the campaign.

British Coal

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) which organisations submitted tenders for the appointment as accounting advisers on the privatisation of British Coal;

(2) which organisations submitted tenders for the appointment as financial advisers on the privatisation of British Coal;

(3) which organisations were invited to tender for the appointment as accounting advisers on the privatisation of British Coal;

(4) which organisations were invited to tender for the appointment as financial advisers on the privatisation of British Coal.

Mr. Wakeham: A number of qualified organisations were invited to tender for the positions of accounting and financial advisers in respect of the privatisation of British Coal. The appointments were made on the basis of competitive tendering.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will place in the Library the first and second interim reports on coal privatisation prepared for him by Rothschilds.

Mr. Wakeham: No. The Government will come forward with detailed proposals on coal privatisation in due course.

Power Companies (Shareholdings)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what proportion of shares in National Power and PowerGen, respectively, are owned by foreign shareholders.

Mr. Wakeham: Details of the current share registers are a matter for the companies and their registrars. I am advised, however, that it is not possible to identify shareholdings registered here and overseas according to the nationality of their beneficial owners.

Mining

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what is the total of underground workers in coal mines owned *(a)* by British Coal and *(b)* others, in the current year and at the end of the two preceding years;

(2) what is the total underground work force in private licensed mines.

Mr. Wakeham: I refer the hon. Member to British Coal's annual report and accounts and its annual reports on the licensed sector, copies of which are in the Library of the House.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the total work force involved in opencast mining.

Mr. Wakeham: The Department does not keep details of the number of people involved in opencast mining.

"The Government Information Officer"

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will place in the Library the current edition of the official booklet "The Government Information Officer".

Mr. Wakeham: I have today placed in the Library the current edition of the official booklet "The Government Information Officer" which has been in use since 1980.

Trade Figures

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the changes made since October 1989 in the way fuel trade figures have been *(a)* collected, *(b)* analysed or *(c)* presented.

Mr. Wakeham: Fuel trade data are collected by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise and there have been no changes in the method of collection since October 1989. The data are published each month in "Overseas Trade Statistics".

The Central Statistical Office—CSO—uses the trade data collected by Customs and Excise to compile the balance of payments. The CSO make various adjustments to "Overseas Trade Statistics". From 1989 onwards these have included an estimate for any direct exports of crude oil from offshore fields reported late to Customs and Excise.

The trade data collected by Customs and Excise record import values on a "c.i.f basis"—including insurance and freight—and export values on an "f.o.b basis"—free on board. This is a standard convention used both in the United Kingdom and internationally. The CSO, in compiling the balance of payments, put imports and exports on a comparable basis—that is, both imports and exports are recorded on an f.o.b basis. Again this is an internationally accepted convention. Import data are therefore available on both a c.i.f basis and f.o.b basis and this has not been changed since October 1989. The data are published by the CSO each month in the balance of payments press notice.

The Department of Energy reproduces fuel trade data in the annual "Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics" and the monthly statistical bulletin "Energy Trends". Prior to 1991 data on imports and exports of fuels by quantity were expressed in tonnes of coal, from 1991 onwards data are expressed in tonnes of oil. Also prior to 1991 these two publications included data on imports only on a c.i.f basis; they now, in addition, include imports data on an f.o.b basis. This follows the convention used by the CSO and means that data on the values of imports and exports are available on a similar basis.

EC Energy Council

Mr. Andy Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement about the meeting of the Energy Council of the European Community Ministers on 29 October.

Mr. Wakeham: The Council, which was attended by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy, my hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), adopted the SAVE decision, which provides for improved co-ordination of work on promoting energy efficiency in the Community. A draft directive to harmonise energy efficiency requirements for new gas or liquid fired central heating boilers was agreed in principle; the United Kingdom secured the inclusion of cost-effective standards appropriate to the particular circumstances of its domestic heating market.

The Commission explained the approach it proposed to take towards opening up, and increasing competition in, the gas and electricity markets. The Commission's objectives are supported in principle by the United Kingdom, which is in the lead on progress towards liberalising these markets. No decision was reached by the Council, but the way was paved for the Commission to enter into bilateral discussions with the member states.

The Commission was invited to present revised proposals on oil crisis measures and to adjust its mandate for Community accession to the International Energy Agency.

The Council held a detailed discussion on the Commission's communication on energy and the environment. There was widespread scepticism about unilateral Community action and most member states raised serious practical difficulties which remain to be addressed in connection with a carbon-energy tax.

The Commission presented a report on the progress of the European Energy Charter for the creation of market-based energy co-operation in western, central and eastern Europe, the USSR and beyond.

WALES

Gower Peninsula (Beaches)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what initiatives he will take to ensure that beaches on the Gower peninsula will meet minimum bathing water quality standards; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: In 1990 all seven of the Gower peninsula's identified bathing waters met the mandatory standards for total and faecal coliforms set in the EC bathing waters directive—the standards by which the United Kingdom Government, and the EC, assesses compliance. As part of the investment programme agreed with Dwr Cymru to improve Welsh bathing waters, a sewage treatment works and a long sea outfall are to be built to serve Swansea. This £50 million investment will further improve the quality of all the waters in the area.

River Quality

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he will take to ensure that current river stretches in Wales found to be of bad quality are improved; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The 1985 river quality survey indicated that only 0·6 per cent.—about 17 miles—of rivers in the National Rivers Authority Welsh region's area were placed in class 4—bad quality. The investment programmes agreed with Dwr Cymru; recent initiatives such as those to reduce pollution from farms; and the planned setting of statutory water quality objectives under the Water Act 1989 will result in further improvements to river quality.

Conwy Road Tunnel

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the problems experienced with the Conwy road tunnel on the A55 road since its opening; what is the estimated cost of overcoming the problems; and what guarantee the contractors have given that there will be no recurrence of this problem.

Mr. David Hunt: The tunnel is equipped with failsafe safety systems and TV surveillance cameras which monitor all aspects of its operation.

All systems are linked to the control computers and video display screens in the nearby tunnel monitoring building which is manned 24 hours a day.

On 1 November a safety system installed to warn of a possible fire hazard or fuel spillage resulting from a traffic accident in the tunnel activated.

The video screens clearly showed tunnel maintenance staff that an accident had not occurred. In order to ascertain the cause of the false alarm entry to the westbound bore was necessary The investigation which required the closure of this bore for about two hours established that a heat/gas detection sensor was defective.

Systems were tested during the commissioning period prior to the tunnel being opened to traffic, but it is not unusual for minor problems to develop during the early period of operation once equipment is in permanent use.

The cost of replacing any defective electrical components will be met by the contractor responsible for their installation.

There can, of course, be no guarantee that individual electrical components will never fail, which is why the systems installed to ensure the safety of the travelling public are failsafe.

Empty Industrial Premises

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he proposes to enable empty industrial premises to be occupied.

Mr. David Hunt: The Welsh Development Agency, the Development Board for Rural Wales and the Welsh Office continue to work actively to attract the maximum amount possible of inward investment and to encourage indigenous Welsh companies to grow and prosper.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many industrial units stand empty in each of the industrial estate locations in each county in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: This information is not collected centrally by the Welsh Office. Information is, however, available on those units owned by the Welsh Development Agency and the Development Board for Rural Wales. The number of units vacant at the end of October 1991 were 438 and 120 respectively, representing vacancy rates of 12·5 per cent. and 17·4 per cent.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he proposes to hold with *(a)* the Welsh Development Agency and *(b)* Mid-Wales Development to take measures to attract occupants for empty industrial premises; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I have regular discussions with the chairmen of the Welsh Development Agency and the Development Board for Rural Wales about a wide range of issues concerning the development of the Welsh economy.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to commute specific loan charge grants to local authorities.

Mr. David Hunt: We will commute specific loan charge grants for housing and urban programme expenditure in Wales on 1 October 1992. My Department will pay a lump sum equivalent to the present value of future grants for each local authority to the Public Works Loan Board or to the local authority itself if any authorities have insufficient Public Works Loan Board debt, though such payments are expected to be small. Annual loan charge grants will then cease. As the commuted sums will repay local authority debt, cancelling out the loss of annual grant, the effect on local authority resources will be neutral. The effect on general Government expenditure will be negligible, because virtually all the transfer payments involved are within general Government spending. Similarly, the effect on the central Government borrowing requirement, the public sector borrowing requirement and monetary aggregates will be negligible, since virtually all the commuted sums will return to the Public Works Loan Board. Within the public sector borrowing requirement, central Government borrowing on its own account will be increased and the local authority borrowing requirement will be reduced by the amount of debt repayment. There is

no effect on the planning total. The various transfer payments involved have been taken into account in my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer's autumn statement.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Car Prices

Mr. Warren: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action he is proposing to take in relation to the findings of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission's review of United Kingdom car prices; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The MMC's report on the supply of new cars is currently being considered by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. The report will be published as soon as is practicable.

The contents of all MMC reports remain confidential until publication. If the MMC finds no adverse effects the Secretary of State has no power to act. If the MMC has reached any adverse findings he will decide what steps, if any, should be taken to remedy the situation. He will also consider whether to announce a period of consultation before reaching his conclusions.

BA Engine Maintenance Plant

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on what date the reference was made to the Office of Fair Trading concerning the sale of British Airways engine maintenance plant at Nantgarw, South Wales to General Electric of America; and on what date he expects to receive the report from the Director General of Fair Trading.

Mr. Redwood: The Office of Fair Trading was first informed of the proposed acquisition by General Electric of the British Airways engine overhaul business on 3 September. I understand that the office's inquiries are nearing completion. We therefore expect to receive the advice of the Director General of Fair Trading in the near future.

Apparel, Knitting and Textiles Alliance

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from the Apparel, Knitting and Textiles Alliance about current EC negotiations with Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: My Department has kept in close touch with the Apparel, Knitting and Textiles Alliance as these negotiations have proceeded. The AKT last wrote to me about them on 21 September.

Office of Telecommunications

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether any changes will be made to the Office of Telecommunications' cash limit and running cost limit for 1991-92.

Mr. Lilley: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class IV vote 9, Office of Telecommunications, will be increased by £618,000 from £6,757,000 to £7,375,000. The running cost limit for the Office of Telecommunications will be increased by £254,000 from £6,037,000 to £6,291,000.

End-year flexibility entitlement of £341,000 on capital expenditure announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 17 July at columns 186-90, has been fully taken up. A £254,000 additional running cost provision is required for increased pay and associated other running costs mainly for 11 extra staff for new work stemming from the duopoly review. A £24,000 extra provision is required for the associated accruing superannuation liability charge. These increases are partly offset by an increase in appropriations in aid of £1,000.

The increase is within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement yesterday.

ECGD

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether any changes will be made to the Export Credits Guarantee Department's cash limit and running cost limit for 1991-92.

Mr. Lilley: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class IV vote 4—Export Credits Guarantee Department: administration—will be increased by £2,880,000 from £37,200,000 to £40,080,000 and the running cost limit by £4,257,000 from £30,221,000 to £34,478,000.

The ECGD's running costs are not included in the planning total.

The increase is necessary to meet additional costs which have arisen because of the later than expected date for the privatisation of the short-term credit insurance operation. The necessary legislation in the form of the Export and Investment Guarantees Act received Royal Assent on 22 October 1991.

House of Fraser

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects the takeover panel to conclude its inquiries into possible breaches of the takeover code in relation to the takeover of House of Fraser; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 6 November 1991]:* This is a matter for the takeover panel. I am not responsible for the manner or duration of any inquiry which it carries out as the competent authority for takeover regulation.

PRIME MINISTER

Correspondence

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the Departments which no longer ensure that a ministerial reply is sent to letters from hon. Members; and if he will ensure that letters from hon. Members receive a ministerial reply.

Mr. MacGregor: I have been asked to reply.

There has been no change in the existing practice.

Cabinet Office (Costs)

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister if there are any proposals to change the 1991-92 cash limit or running costs limit for the Cabinet Office: other services vote.

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Prime Minister if there are any proposals to change the 1991-92 cash limit or running costs limit for the Cabinet Office: other services vote.

Mr. MacGregor: I have been asked to reply. Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for the Cabinet Office: other services—class XIX, vote 2—will be increased by £850,000 from £24,814,000 to £25,664,000. At the same time the running costs limit will be increased by £806,000 from £21,656,000 to £22,462,000. This reflects the setting up of the citizens charter unit within the Cabinet Office which will be responsible for seeing that the citizens charter programme of initiatives, which my right hon. Friend announced to the House on 22 July 1991 at column 765, is implemented and developed. The increase is within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement yesterday.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for 7 November.

Mr. MacGregor: I have been asked to reply. This morning my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister had a bilateral with President Bush in Rome. He is currently attending the NATO summit now under way there. That summit will set the future course for NATO to ensure that it remains, as it has been, a bedrock of stability in a still uncertain world.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

University Students

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many undergraduates from non-EC countries were attending universities in each of the past five years.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The information is given in the table.

Great Britain—Full-time undergraduate students—All years

Year	*Total Non-EC students*
1986	17,277
1987	18,301
1988	19,098
1989	20,370
1990	21,174

Source: Universities Statistical Record

Science Budget

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proportion of his science budget is spent in Wales, Scotland and England, respectively.

Mr. Alan Howarth: In 1989-90, the latest year for which figures are available, the proportions were 2·9, 7·9 and 77·9 per cent. respectively.

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what guidance he has given the advisory board for the research councils in seeking its advice on the allocation of the science budget in 1992-93 to 1994-95; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have written to Sir David Phillips inviting the board's advice. The following is the text of my letter:

Sir David Phillips KBE FRS

Chairman of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils

PROVISION FOR SCIENCE: 1992-93 TO 1994-95

I was grateful for the Board's advice for this year's Public Expenditure Survey on the resource needs of the Research Councils, the Royal Society and the Fellowship of Engineering.

I am pleased to tell you that the Government has decided that it is right to make a significant increase in the provision for Science, and that it is desirable to provide a planning framework for future years which provides a rising profile. In reaching these conclusions the Government has been heavily influenced by the array of evidence presented by the ABRC in the preparation for this year's survey.

DES provision for science comprises receipts from European Community programmes which go direct to the Research Councils, and the balance which is the sum I distribute on the advice of the ABRC, known as the "science budget". The latter (net of the dual support transfer) has been increased by £29 million to £1,002·0 million in 1992-93, by £50 million to £1,056·1 million in 1993-94, and by £85 million to £1,116·3 million in 1994-95. I have summarised in the annexed table the additions and adjustments made to the total provision for science at the start of the Survey from which I arrive at these science budget figures.

Next year's science budget is 2·5 per cent. higher in real terms than this year's. The figures for 1993-94 and 1994-95 are, respectively, 4 per cent. and 7 per cent. higher in real terms than in 1991-92. I am particularly pleased that the settlement produces this rising expenditure profile which gives the Board and the bodies funded from the science budget a sound basis for the forward planning and management of their basic and strategic research programmes.

I would like to give some fuller explanations of the adjustments shown in the annexed table.

Supercomputing

You will see that the science budget for the next three years includes further adjustments of £0·185 million in 1992-93, £0·165 million in 1993-94, and £0·180 million in 1994-95 to support 80 per cent. of the supercomputing service.

Dual Support

At this time last year I announced my decision that there should be a change in the dual support boundary from 1 August 1992. Our public expenditure plans were adjusted to take account of the best estimate we could then make of the associated costs. I made clear in my letter of 8 November 1990 that these figures would be revised if that was proved necessary by the further work I was commissioning.

In my further letter to you of 29 July, I accepted that further adjustments had indeed been shown to be necessary by the joint study undertaken by the Research Councils and the CVCP. I also announced the transitional arrangements which would apply to grants already in payment on 1 August 1992. I said that we would take account of the further adjustment and of the transitional arrangements in our public expenditure plans for 1992-93 and later years.

The following sums have now been added to the science budget to provide for the full costs to the Research Councils and the Royal Society of the responsibilities to be transferred:

	£ million
1992-93	48
1993-94	125
1994-95	154

These figures represent the total additions to the Science Budget on this account, ie they replace the adjustments announced at this time last year. They take account of the transitional arrangements announced in my July letter.

I have also made clear that the shift in the boundary of responsibilities should not lead to any change in the volume of research which Research Councils sponsor in higher education institutions. I will be looking for clear evidence that the sums transferred are being used by the Councils for the purpose for which they are intended. I should be grateful for the Board's assistance in achieving this objective.

I should now be grateful for the Board's advice on the appropriate distribution of these sums between the funded bodies.

Computing costs

The further work undertaken earlier in the year did not resolve the question of how central computing costs should be treated. The CVCP have since conducted some further analysis, in consultation with the Research Councils, indentifying options for handling these costs. The CVCP argued that these costs should remain with the institutions because the move towards distributed computing systems means that they would be most appropriately treated with other forms of communications systems as part of general premises costs. Your letter of 8 October preferred a further transfer to the Research Councils to allow them to cover these costs as part of the percentage addition to the direct staffing costs of research projects.

I have considered this issue carefully, and have decided that for the time being these costs should remain with the institutions. I noted the evidence that there is considerable diversity in the provision of computing services, with a tendency away from the main frame computing towards distributed systems. I would, however, like this particular issue to be looked at again in two years time as part of the first review of the percentage addition for indirect costs.

Next Steps

Although I am making no earmarked allocations this year, and will be grateful to receive the Board's advice on the allocation of the increased resources, I shall be looking to the scientific community to use the resources generally in accordance with the priorities that were identified in the evidence put to me earlier in the public spending round.

Since science funding is a matter of considerable Parliamentary and public interest, I propose to follow precedent by publishing the text of this letter in the form of a Parliamentary Answer.

Des Science Provision 1991-92 to 1994-95

£ million

	1991-92	*1992-93*	*1993-94*	*1994-95*
Previous plans				
Science provision	927·1	1,030·2	1,122·8	
plus increase announced in June 1991	+7·0			
less revised EC receipts estimates		−2·6	−3·0	
transfer to IPSR[1]		−0·6	−0·6	
Survey baseline	934·1	1,027·1	1,109·1	1,136·9
New plans				
Survey increase		+29·0	+59·0	+85·0
Supercomputing adjustment		+0·2	+0·2	+0·2
Dual support transfers:				
from higher education		−2·6	+23·5	+49·6
from Dept. of Education, Northern Ireland		+0·6	+1·5	+1·9
New science provision		1,054·3	1,184·3	1,273·5
Science budget				
New science provision		1,054·3	1,184·3	1,273·5
Less EC receipts		−4·2	−3·2	−3·3
Science budget (ie sums distributed on advice of ABRC)		1,050·0	1,181·1	1,270·3
of which:				
dual support transfer from higher education funding		−48·0	−125·0	−154·0
Science budget net of dual support		1,002·0	1,056·1	1,116·3

Notes:

Totals are based on unrounded figures and may not always equal the sum of the components.

[1] The funding of the Institute of Plant Science Research (IPSR) is now provided from the receipts from the sale for the Plant Breeding Institute.

Mature Students

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the basis for assessing maintenance needs of mature students *(a)* on higher education courses and *(b)* on further education courses, when such students are eligible for grants; and if he will consider extending the student loan system to mature students in the further education sector.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Mandatory grants are payable for full-time and sandwich courses leading to a first degree or a comparable qualification, to the HND and DipHE, and for courses of initial teacher training including part-time courses. Under the Education (Mandatory Awards) Regulations a student who is at least 25 before his course begins is treated as "independent" and no parental contribution is expected towards his maintenance. A student who is at least 26 at the beginning of his course and who, in the three immediately preceding years, had income of at least £12,000 is eligible to receive the older student's allowance of up to £935 a year. Various other allowances in respect of spouses and dependants are available to all students depending upon their personal circumstances.

The resources of the student, and, where applicable, of his spouse and dependants are taken into account in the calculation of the maintenance grant payable.

For most courses not attracting a mandatory award, including further education courses, local education authorities have the power to make discretionary awards. It is for each authority to decide its own policies on the courses for which it will offer awards and on the amounts payable. Arrangements for mature students differ among the various postgraduate award schemes.

We have no plans to extend the student loans scheme to further education students.

Further Education

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he intends to establish a further education council to prepare for the funding and guidance of further education colleges as they move to corporate status; when and how he intends to appoint the chief officers of such a council; and what timetable he proposes for its early operation.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Subject to the passage of the Further and Higher Education Bill introduced on 4 November, my right hon. and learned Friend intends to establish the Further Education Funding Council as soon as possible. The Bill provides for the appointment of the chairman and the chief executive by my right hon. and learned Friend. The Department will be preparing the ground for the Council by collecting information it will need, and carrying out programmes to help ensure that the colleges are ready for their new role.

Student Grants

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what monitoring he undertakes of the time taken to make mandatory award payments to students.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My Department does not directly monitor the time taken by individual local education authorities to assess and pay mandatory awards to more than 500,000 students. We are investigating reports of delays in certain authorities, to ensure that they are taking whatever action is necessary to comply with their statutory duties in the interests of students.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will meet representatives of the local authority associations to discuss how the payment of student grants may be expedited.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My Department is in regular contact with the local authority associations on student grant matters. Improvements have already been made in 1990 and 1991 in the grant arrangements to help expedite payments. We have taken actions with individual authorities reported to be facing delays. All authorities have power to make provisional payments to students, pending completion of grant assessments. We will continue to keep the position under review.

GCSE

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the consultations entered into with *(a)* parents, *(b)* teachers and *(c)* local education authorities prior to his announcement of a reduction in the percentage of coursework in GCSE assessment.

Mr. Fallon: I would refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) on 21 October, *Official Report*, column *362*.

Schools Assessment Results

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he intends to publish the national results of the 1991 assessments of seven-year-olds; and whether he will also publish the results in each local education authority in England.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I intend to publish both the aggregate national results and the aggregate results in each local education authority in England, as soon as outstanding information has been sent to the Department by local education authorities. The public is entitled to accurate national and local information about the 1991 assessments of seven-year-olds under the national curriculum. The results will provide for the first time both a national picture of the attainments of this age group in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science and a baseline against which to measure progress.

Cot Deaths

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money the Government have put into cot death research in the last 20 years.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I have been asked to reply.

The Medical Research Council, which receives its grant in aid through the Department of Education and Science, is the main Government agency for the funding of medical research. The MRC generally decides the research to support with the funds available to it. The table gives its expenditure on research into sudden infant death syndrome and respiratory distress syndrome for the financial years since 1979-80. Data on earlier years are not available, nor is there central information on relevant publicly funded research which may be undertaken by medical schools, university departments, the health Departments and the health authorities. We also welcome the contribution made in this field by medical research charities.

	£ thousands
1979-80	79
1980-81	134
1981-82	208
1982-83	207
1983-84	244
1984-85	242
1985-86	283
1986-87	476
1987-88	405
1988-89	434
1989-90	297
1990-91	798

NATIONAL FINANCE

Income Tax

Mr. Grylls: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate what the reduction in the income tax revenue would be for 1992-93 on a full-year basis and assuming no behavioural changes *(a)* if there were no higher rate of income tax for individuals and *(b)* if there were no additional rate for trusts.

Mr. Maude: The costs in a full year at 1992-93 levels of income are estimated to be *(a)* £5·1 billion and *(b)* £30 million. These estimates are based on a comparison with 1991-92 tax rates and an illustrative indexation of personal allowances and the basic rate limit by 4 per cent.

No account is taken of possible behavioural changes or of any effect on receipts of capital gains tax.

Government Deficits

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those member states of the European Community whose actual government deficit exceeded 3 per cent. of gross domestic product in each of the past five years; and how many in the current financial year plan a deficit of a higher level.

Mr. Maples: Data and forecasts of Government deficits of member states are published by the European Commission in "European Economy", supplement A, May 1991.

House Prices

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish a table showing the real increase in (i) house prices and (ii) average earnings in the United Kingdom: and in each of the six founder members of the EC between 1961 and 1973; 1973 and 1987 and 1987 to date: and if he will include an estimate of the amount of consumer debt in each case divided between housing and other goods and services.

Mr. Maples: Data for real average earnings growth are published by the OECD in "Historical Statistics 1960-1990". There is no central source of regularly collected data for house prices, or for consumer debt divided between housing and other goods and services.

Import Penetration

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer why no figures for import penetration overall and by industry have been published in the "Monthly Digest" since June 1989; and if he will publish a provisional estimate of the figures for December 1989 and December 1990.

Mr. Maples: Import penetration figures published in the latest "Monthly Digest of Statistics", September 1991, table 15.10, are the most up to date available. As a result of recommendations in the 1989 review of Department of Trade and Industry statistics, which considered the arrangements for collection of economic statistics by DTI and the burdens placed on businesses, quarterly sales data for most manufacturing industries, which are used in the calculation of this ratio, are no longer collected. Data for 1989 and 1990 are therefore not available. A footnote was added to the table earlier this year, to inform readers of the reason for the absence of new data.

Fraudulent Tax Claims

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many individuals were the subject of *(a)* civil penalties as provided in the Taxes Act and *(b)* other prosecutions for fraudulent tax claims over the last five years.

Mr. Maude: The numbers of individuals taxpayers and partnerships subject to civil penalties as provided in the Taxes Acts during the last two years were as follows:

	Number
1989-90	36,642
1990-91	34,327

Comparable figures for earlier years are not available.

The numbers of successful prosecutions for false accounts or returns of income, and false claims to personal allowances, deductions for expenses or repayments, during the last five years, were as follows:

	Number
1986-87	20
1987-88	15
1988-89	12
1989-90	14
1990-91	14

Vocational Training (Tax Relief)

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how he intends to ensure that further education colleges will not lose financially as a result of the administration and cash flow costs of operating the system of tax relief for vocational training on behalf of the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Maude: The Government's aim in providing that the new tax relief for vocational training should be given at source is to ensure that it will be available to trainees as quickly and as widely as possible. The Government accept that administering the relief will mean some extra work for training organisations. Additional costs will be offset to the extent that the relief encourages more people to train, hence generating more income.

The intention is, however, that the additional cost should be kept to a minimum and to that end the Inland Revenue is currently considering a number of important improvements to the original proposals in the light of responses to their recent consultative paper. The arrangements will be published in regulations later this year.

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether tax relief for vocational training applies *(a)* to payments made by an individual for his or her training, *(b)* to payments made by a parent or other person or organisation on behalf of an individual for his or her training and *(c)* to payments made by an individual for his or her training but paid to the individual by a parent or other person or organisation.

Mr. Maude: Tax relief for vocational training will apply to payments made by individuals in connection with their

own training. This will include the situation where an individual pays for the training out of funds provided by another person or organisation, but not where that other person or organisation makes the payment directly on behalf of the individual.

Non-North Sea GDP

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish *(a)* the index number for non-North sea GDP, both annually and quarterly, back to 1970, and *(b)* an explanation of the methodology and component series which go to make up the series; and if he will ensure that the index on non-North sea, gross domestic product is included in the CSO database.

Mr. Maples *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* The information requested is given in the table. The series is derived by removing from the output estimate of gross domestic product—GDP(O)—the appropriately weighted contribution from "Extraction of mineral oil and natural gas"—class 13 of the 1980 Standard Industrial Classification. The weights reflect the importance of class 13 activity during various periods for which data are assembled on a given price base. On the final part of the question, the CSO is arranging for the quarterly seasonally adjusted series of GDP(O) less extraction of mineral oil and natural gas to be included on their database.

GDP(O) less oil and gas extraction[1]
Index 1985 = 100, seasonally adjusted

Quarterly	
1970 Q1	80·1
1970 Q2	80·8
1970 Q3	81·2
1970 Q4	81·3
1971 Q1	81·5
1971 Q2	82·2
1971 Q3	82·5
1971 Q4	83·3
1972 Q1	82·4
1972 Q2	85·4
1972 Q3	85·9
1972 Q4	87·7
1973 Q1	90·6
1973 Q2	90·4
1973 Q3	90·9
1973 Q4	90·8
1974 Q1	88·1
1974 Q2	90·8
1974 Q3	91·0
1974 Q4	89·6
1975 Q1	89·7
1975 Q2	88·8
1975 Q3	88·1
1975 Q4	87·7
1976 Q1	89·8
1976 Q2	89·6
1976 Q3	89·4
1976 Q4	91·3
1977 Q1	91·6
1977 Q2	91·0
1977 Q3	91·6
1977 Q4	92·1
1978 Q1	92·8
1978 Q2	94·4
1978 Q3	95·1
1978 Q4	94·9
1979 Q1	94·0
1979 Q2	97·4
1979 Q3	95·9
1979 Q4	96·7
1980 Q1	95·7
1980 Q2	94·0
1980 Q3	92·4
1980 Q4	90·4
1981 Q1	90·8
1981 Q2	90·6
1981 Q3	91·4
1981 Q4	91·3
1982 Q1	91·6
1982 Q2	91·7
1982 Q3	92·1
1982 Q4	92·3
1983 Q1	93·4
1983 Q2	93·7
1983 Q3	94·5
1983 Q4	95·6
1984 Q1	96·6
1984 Q2	96·2
1984 Q3	96·4
1984 Q4	97·2
1985 Q1	98·7
1985 Q2	100·3
1985 Q3	100·4
1985 Q4	100·6
1986 Q1	101·3
1986 Q2	102·9
1986 Q3	104·1
1986 Q4	105·5
1987 Q1	106·0
1987 Q2	107·9
1987 Q3	110·0
1987 Q4	110·9
1988 Q1	112·2
1988 Q2	113·2
1988 Q3	115·2
1988 Q4	116·3
1989 Q1	117·6
1989 Q2	118·0
1989 Q3	118·2
1989 Q4	118·6
1990 Q1	119·5
1990 Q2	120·0
1990 Q3	119·4
1990 Q4	117·9
1991 Q1	116·6
1991 Q2	116·2

Annual	
1970	80·9
1971	82·4
1972	85·4
1973	90·7
1974	89·9
1975	88·6
1976	90·0
1977	91·6
1978	94·3
1979	96·0
1980	93·1

	Annual
1981	91·0
1982	91·9
1983	94·3
1984	96·6
1985	100·0
1986	103·5
1987	108·7
1988	114·2
1989	118·1
1990	119·2

[1]Class 13 of the 1980 SIC.

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give separate figures for the spending by *(a)* the Central Office of Information, *(b)* Her Majesty's Treasury, *(c)* the Department of National Savings, *(d)* Customs and Excise, *(e)* the Inland Revenue and *(f)* Her Majesty's Stationery Office on (i) television advertising, (ii) radio advertising, (iii) newspaper advertising and (iv) other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1991-92 and budgets for 1992-93.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer on 5 November 1991]:* The expenditure by these departments on advertising and other promotional material is as follows:

For expenditure by the Central Office of Information, I would refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given by the Economic Secretary on 30 April 1991 at columns *144-45*. The actual costs for 1990-91 were as follows: £51,360,000 on television advertising; £1,640,000 on radio advertising; £38,170,000 on press advertising; and £33,500,000 on other promotional material. The forecast for 1991-92 is as follows: £34,500,000 on television advertising; £1,000,000 on radio advertising; £32,600,000 on press advertising; and £34,200,000 on other promotional material.

Detailed decisions on estimated expenditure on advertising through the COI on behalf of other Government Departments for 1992-93 are for departmental Ministers.

For Her Majesty's Treasury, the expenditure for 1988-89 was £49,310, that for 1989-90 was £52,486, and that for 1990-91 was £43,581, none of which was on television or radio advertising. The latest estimate for 1991-92 is £84,193 none of which is likely to be spent on television or radio advertising. The advertising budget for 1992-93 has not yet been set. Comparable figures for earlier years are unavailable because of machinery of government changes and could be given only at disproportionate cost.

Her Majesty's Treasury is also running the advertising campaign in connection with the BT share offer, which began on 1 October 1991. This includes television, press and poster advertising. It is planned to end just before the close of the offer, which is on 4 December. The costs of the BT sale, including total marketing costs, will be reported to Parliament after the sale, in the normal way.

For expenditure by the Department of National Savings I would refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given by the Economic Secretary on 8 May 1991, at column *458*. The forecast for 1991-92 is now £6·1 million for television advertising and £2·9 million for press advertising, with the other figures unchanged. The advertising budget for 1992-93 has not yet been set.

Her Majesty's Customs and Excise have not used television, radio or newspaper advertising for promotional purposes. The available information on other promotional material is as follows: £21,000 in 1984-85; £29,000 in 1985-86; £28,000 in 1986-87; £29,000 in 1987-88; £47,000 in 1988-89; £31,000 in 1989-90; and £44,000 in 1990-91. The forecast for 1991-92 is £54,000. The advertising budgets for 1992-93 have not yet been set. These figures do not include recruitment advertising. Comparable figures for earlier years are unavailable.

Expenditure by Inland Revenue is as follows: £15,000 for newspaper advertising and £300,000 for other advertising in 1986-87; £15,000 for newspaper advertising and £350,000 for other advertising in 1987-88; £20,000 for newspaper advertising and £250,000 for other advertising in 1988-89; £30,000 for newspaper advertising and £400,000 for other advertising in 1989-90; £4,376,000 for television advertising, £2,155,000 for newspaper advertising and £679,000 for other advertising in 1990-91; and £20,000 for newspaper advertising and £300,000 for other advertising in 1991-92. The figures for 1990-91 include expenditure of £6·95 million on an advertising campaign to increase public awareness of the new arrangements for non-taxpayers to register for payment of bank and building society interest without deduction of income tax. The advertising budget for 1992-93 has not yet been set. Comparable figures for earlier years are not readily available and could be given only at disproportionate cost.

For expenditure by HMSO, I would refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given by the Economic Secretary on 8 May 1991, at column *460*. The forecast for 1991-92 is £539,000 for advertising in newspapers and journals and £589,000 for other promotional material. The budgets for 1992-93 have not yet been set.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total expenditure by *(a)* Her Majesty's Treasury, *(b)* the Central Office of Information, *(c)* Customs and Excise, *(d)* the Department of National Savings and *(e)* Her Majesty's Stationery Office on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1991-92 and budget for 1992-93.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* Expenditure on press and public relations is as follows:

The expenditure for HM Treasury in 1988-89 was £548,264, that in 1989-90 was £564,691 and that in 1990-91 was £510,489. The forecast for 1991-92 is £547,104. The budgets for 1992-93 have not yet been set. Comparable figures from 1979-80 to 1987-88 are unavailable due to machinery of Government changes and could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

For details of the expenditure by the Central Office of Information, I would refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given by the Economic Secretary on 29 April 1991, at columns *5-6*. The actual costs for 1990-91 were £57,365; the forecast for 1991-92 is £66,919. The budgets for 1992-93 have not yet been set.

The expenditure by Customs and Excise is as follows: £63,000 in 1984-85; £87,000 in 1985-86; £85,000 in 1986-87; £89,000 in 1987-88; £126,000 in 1988-89; £92,000 in 1989-90; £102,000 in 1990-91; and £86,000 in 1991-92. The budgets for 1992-93 have not yet been set. The figures for 1979 to 1984 are not available.

For details of the expenditure by the Department of National Savings I would refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given by the Economic Secretary on 3 May, at column *354*. The budget for 1992-93 has not yet been set.

HMSO has not recorded any expenditure on press and public relations.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the Treasury has sent unsolicited direct mail as part of the distribution of publicity material.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* Yes. On both the 1987 BP secondary sale and the current BT secondary sale, unsolicited direct mail was sent to potential investors inviting anyone considering applying for shares in the offer to register with the share information office.

Tax Exemption

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all the exemptions available from taxation for the agricultural industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 6 November 1991]:* The following reliefs and allowances are available to the agricultural industry:

The same general rules apply to the calculation of a farmer's business profits as apply to other traders. But in addition, a farmer may claim to average his business profits over two consecutive years of assessment where the difference between them is 30 per cent. or more.

The Agricultural Buildings Allowance gives relief for capital expenditure on agricultural buildings and structures at a rate of 4 per cent. per annum straight-line.

For inheritance tax provided certain conditions are met, agricultural property relief is available at two rates. The relief operates by reducing the value of the property bought into charge by 50 per cent. for land with vacant possession and 30 per cent. for let land.

Working farmers can qualify for capital gains tax reliefs in the same way as other traders. These include rollover relief, retirement relief, and holdover relief on gifts of business assets or shares in unquoted trading companies. Holdover relief is also available on gifts of agricultural property which would attract 50 or 30 per cent. relief from inheritance tax.

Independent Schools

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the financial value of the tax concessions given to independent schools by virtue of their charitable status.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 6 November 1991]:* This information is not available.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Drugs (Caribbean)

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures are being taken to tackle the drugs trade in the Caribbean.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The United Kingdom is active in promoting effective measures to tackle the drugs trade in the Caribbean, especially in the dependent territories. We have provided practical help, training and technical advice to enable countries to address every aspect of the threat. We have also recently undertaken a survey of drug trafficking and abuse problems in the anglophone eastern Caribbean. The survey makes a number of recommendations including: the provision of specialist equipment to the Trinidad and Tobago drugs squad; the appointment of a regional customs adviser and training officer; and advisory visits by the United Kingdom demand reduction task force. The action we are taking to implement these recommendations is a demonstration of Her Majesty's Government's continuing commitment to help the countries of the region deal with the scourge of drugs.

SCOTLAND

Cot Deaths

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what research he has commissioned into the causes, epidemiology and cure of cot deaths in Scotland;

(2) what research he has commissioned in Scotland on cot death syndrome.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: A variety of relevant research projects has been supported by the Scottish Office Home and Health Department throughout the 1980s at a cost of £230,000. In addition the Scottish Hospital Endowments Research trust has provided funding of £15,000 for one project.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what study he has made of New Zealand research into cot deaths and of the methods used in New Zealand to reduce the incidence of cot death.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: An expert group set up by the Chief Medical Officer for England and Wales has considered the New Zealand research along with other recent studies of cot death. Its recommendations were announced on 31 October 1991. The chief medical officer and the chief nursing officer in my Department will be writing to all doctors and other professionals in Scotland drawing attention to these recommendations.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what advice is issued by his Department on the way in which young babies should be laid to sleep to avoid cot death.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: No specific guidance on the sleeping position of infants has been issued in Scotland. However, I am aware of recent expert advice that avoiding the prone sleeping position when laying a baby to sleep reduces the risk of sudden infant death syndrome and will ensure that this information, and advice on other associated factors, is widely publicised.

Geriatric Provision

Dr. Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has undertaken any study of the future demographic trends in Lanarkshire in the light of proposed changes to geriatric provision in the area.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Demographic trends is one of many factors taken into acount in my consideration of proposals affecting the organisation of health care.

Contraceptive Advice

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the Scottish Office Home and Health Department maintains a register of centres providing specialist contraceptive advice for young people.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Such a register is not maintained centrally. Current guidance from the Scottish Office Home and Health Department about the provision of family planning services draws health boards' attention to the need for counselling facilities for young people.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which Scottish health boards provide a specialist contraceptive advice service for young people.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This information is not available centrally. It is for individual health boards to determine the pattern of provision of these services and the extent to which designated facilities are provided.

Respite Care

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will increase resources to allow health boards to increase respite care provision as an integral component of effective community care; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Although resources will not be separately identified for respite care, the Government recognise the importance of the development of respite care in the effective provision of community care, and health board allocations will reflect this.

Eye Tests

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will state the number of people in Scotland who received eye tests during the 12 months ending October 1991 and the numbers receiving eye tests in the 12 months prior to the abolition of free tests; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information on the total number of sight tests carried out during the 12 months ending October 1991 is not available. In the 12 months prior to 1 April 1989 1,168,610 sight tests were conducted.

Operations, Glasgow

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has on the numbers of patients in the Greater Glasgow health board area who, in the 12 months ending October 1991, have had to be admitted to NHS hospitals for similar operations to those which they have previously, within the same 12-month period, had performed at private hospitals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This information is not held centrally.

Parents Charter

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what calculation has been made of the additional staffing needs for Her Majesty's inspectorate under the parents charter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 6 November 1991]:* The proposals of the parents charter have implications for the work of Her Majesty's inspectorate. I am considering how these proposals are to be met in the context of the inspectorate's functions and responsibilities overall.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Custody Alternatives

9. **Mr. Macdonald:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what additional funding he intends to make available to the probation service and voluntary organisations for alternatives to custody projects for young people convicted of burglary and driving away a motor vehicle.

Mr. John Patten: The increase in probation service expenditure announced yesterday will enable the service to strengthen its work with these offenders. So too will the extra £1 million a year for the voluntary sector projects.

Bail Offenders

13. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on the offending patterns of persons on bail.

Mr. John Patten: Home Office researchers have been reviewing recent studies by the police and others of offending on bail. The findings will be made available soon.

Political Asylum

14. **Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultation with immigrant groups he has had in relation to his new rules on political asylum.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We made available a draft of new asylum rules when the Asylum Bill was published last Friday. We are in regular contact with interested organisations and will take account of whatever comments they may have.

20. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on any proposals he has to control immigration by those claiming political asylum.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: An Asylum Bill was published last Friday. At the same time we made available draft asylum rules. My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor made available draft appeals procedure rules. These measures will allow us to reduce substantially the current misuse of asylum procedures, while protecting the position of genuine refugees.

Dorset Police

15. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the level of police manpower for Dorset; and how his Department takes account of the additional resources needed for a county with a large number of seasonal visitors.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: At the end of August, there were 1,302 police officers in the Dorset Police, an increase of 14 per

cent. since the Government first took office. In allocating increases in establishments to forces, my right hon. Friend takes account of a wide range of factors which influence demands on the police, with the professional advice of Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary on circumstances peculiar to each force, such as the volume of seasonal visits.

Television Franchises

16. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has made any assessment of the financial viability of the regional television companies following the acceptance of the new franchises.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. The Broadcasting Act 1990 requires the ITC to be satisfied that the winning applicant would be able to maintain the licensed service throughout the period for which the licence would be in force. In reaching its decisions, the commission had access to confidential business plans submitted by the bidders.

Confessions

17. **Sir John Farr:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to introduce legislation to outlaw convictions based wholly or mainly on confessions in police custody.

Mr. John Patten: The use of uncorroborated confession evidence is within the remit of the Royal Commission on criminal justice announced to the House by my right hon. Friend on 14 March. We shall consider what changes may be needed in the light of the commission's findings.

Industrial Estates (Security)

18. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concerning schemes for improving security on industrial estates.

Mr. John Patten: We have received no representations concerning schemes for improving security on industrial estates. I understand, however, that an increasing number of businesses are now developing such schemes, often in consultation with the local police, following the example of the first such scheme developed on the North Lynn industrial estate in 1985.

Drug Dealers

19. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many drug dealers have been convicted in the past 12 months.

Mr. John Patten: A total of 2,001 people were convicted of the unlawful supply of controlled drugs in the United Kingdom during 1990 and 2,699 people were convicted of being unlawfully in possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply it to another.

Asylum

21. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations he has received about proposed changes in the methods of dealing with people who apply for asylum; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn).

Police Cells

22. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners are currently being held in police cells.

Mrs. Rumbold: There were 1,787 prisoners in police cells last night who should properly have been detained in prisons.

Security Forces (Murders)

23. **Mr. Trimble:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will make a statement on his policy concerning the guideline sentences for persons convicted of the murder of members of the security forces.

Mr. John Patten: Life imprisonment is the mandatory sentence when a person has been convicted of murder.

Channel Tunnel

24. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice he has received from the European Commission about the exercise of immigration control and passport checking procedures for channel tunnel journeys; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The European Commission has sent my right hon. Friend no advice of the kind to which my hon. Friend refers. Immigration controls and passport checking procedures will be applied to the channel tunnel in ways similar to those applied at the other major points of entry to the United Kingdom.

Bail

25. **Mr. Shersby:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what conclusions he has reached following his Department's research into the working of the Bail Act 1976; and if he will make a r j 5-1statement.

Mr. John Patten: We shall consider urgently the results of the Home Office review of the recent studies of offending on bail and announce our conclusions as soon as we can.

West Mercia Constabulary

26. **Mr. Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current strength of the West Mercia constabulary.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: At the end of August 1991 West Mercia constabulary was up to its establishment, with 2,029 officers, an increase of 277 officers, or 16 per cent., since the Government took office.

Prisons (Education)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the prison population had gained formal educational qualifications before entering prison.

Mrs. Rumbold: A national prison survey was conducted earlier this year, based on a 10 per cent. sample of the male

and a 20 per cent. sample of the female prison population. Preliminary results indicate that 57 per cent. of the prisoners sampled had some education qualifications when they came into prison. Of these, 8 per cent. had a vocational qualification, 36 per cent. had the equivalent of what was a GCE O-level as their highest qualification, and 8 per cent. had a higher qualification.

Prisons (Ethnic Groups)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the age profile of the prison population for each major ethnic group.

Mrs. Rumbold: The latest readily available information is given in the table.

Population[1] in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales on 30 June 1990: by ethnic origin and age.

Number of Persons

Age in years	*White*	*West Indian Guyanese African*	*Indian Pakistani Bangladeshi*	*Chinese Arab Mixed origin*	*Other, not recorded[2]*	*All persons*
14-16	326	24	9	11	12	382
17-20	6,855	636	222	225	220	8,158
21-24	8,215	1,105	198	195	199	9,912
25-29	7,602	1,465	205	182	179	9,633
30-39	7,726	1,323	368	183	223	9,823
40-49	3,930	304	172	75	85	4,566
50-59	1,378	123	83	22	26	1,632
60 and over	368	22	18	4	5	417
All ages	36,400	5,002	1,275	897	949	44,523

[1] Provisional Figures
[2] Including refusals.

Conservative Party Conference

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will request a report from the Chief Constable of Lancashire on the policing implications for Lancashire arising from the policing provision required at the 1991 Conservative party conference at Blackpool; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. It is for the chief officer of the force concerned to decide how a party conference should be policed, as with any other police operation.

Styal Prison

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what changes to the regime in the mother and baby unit at Her Majesty's prison Styal have been made following the transfer of two mothers whose babies are aged over nine months.

Mrs. Rumbold: The following changes have been made:
(i) Daily routines have been adjusted to ensure fewer household chores for the women in the unit thus allowing mothers more time with their babies.
(ii) Accommodation has been temporarily adapted to increase créche space.
(iii) Alternative accommodation has been found for pregnant women and this has increased space for the mothers and babies.
(iv) Toys appropriate for babies in the nine months to 18 months age range have been purchased. A larger playpen is being introduced in the education department to cater for the older babies of mothers who decide to undertake classes.

These are initial improvements. A steering committee, chaired by the area manager, will plan further developments ranging from regime enhancement to the expansion of accommodation.

National Transcommunications Ltd

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department by how many staff, by grade, the total complement at the former Independent Broadcasting Authority engineering division, has been reduced in the past two years; what has been the total cost of voluntary redundancies and early retirements; and by how much these changes are expected to reduce the total annual wages and salary bill.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The IBA carried out a reorganisation programme during 1990 and reduced its staff by about 170. When NTL was sold on 24 October, its overall staffing complement, including contract staff, was 779, the same as it had been on 1 January 1991, when the company was vested in the Crown. In that period, 42 staff, including contract staff, left and the same number joined. NTL has assumed the IBA's liabilities for retirement and death benefits for those employees who transferred to NTL from the IBA. Information on the costs is not readily available in the form requested.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what price it has been agreed, subject to contract, to sell National Transcommunications Ltd. to Mercury Asset Management; how many other bids were received; and what assurances he has sought or been given about plans to float off the company.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The sale of National Transcommunications Ltd., which was completed on 24 October 1991, raised immediate proceeds of £70 million, with the possibility of further proceeds of up to £20 million under specified circumstances in the event of a successful flotation of the company after 1993. The sale and purchase agreement also includes comprehensive clawback provisions intended to ensure that the Government receive a share of unexpectedly large profits made from sales of the company's property and intellectual property. National Transcommunications Ltd. was purchased by Mercury Asset Management plc on behalf of its fund management clients. In its bid, Mercury Asset Management stated its intention to prepare the company for flotation when it has sufficient track record in the private sector.

Following the sale launch in May this year, there were over 50 serious expressions of interest in the company, from a wide range of backgrounds, including manufacturers, banks, broadcasters, utilities and telecommunications companies. We shortlisted three indicative bidders who then had access to detailed information about

National Transcommunications Ltd.'s business. Two bidders, GEC and MAM, continued their preparations for bidding up until the final deadline. MAM's bid was made in the knowledge of that competition and we were entirely satisfied with it.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what amounts of money over what periods have been paid to Price Waterhouse and Deloittes in connection with the sale and restructuring of the former engineering division of the Independent Broadcasting Authority; and if he will detail by name and amount payments made to any other outside consultants with whom contracts were placed during this process.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Home Office placed contracts with the following outside consultants during the sale of NTL and preparations for the company to be sold:

Price Waterhouse
Norton Rose
Ernst and Young
Debenham, Tewson and Chinnocks
Mercer Fraser
Charles Barker

My right hon. Friend will report to the House on the final cost of the sale as soon as possible, but information about individual contracts and amounts paid is commercially confidential.

Prison Population

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State For the Home Department how many *(a)* remand and *(b)* convicted prisoners were unemployed before entering prison.

Mrs. Rumbold: In response to questions in the national prison survey, which was carried out at the beginning of this year, *(a)* 44 per cent. of remand and *(b)* 31 per cent. of convicted prisoners said that they were unemployed prior to imprisonment.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State For the Home Department how many prisoners are related to people who have also served a prison sentence.

Mrs. Rumbold: In response to questions in the national prison survey, which was carried out at the beginning of this year, 35 per cent. of convicted prisoners said that someone in their family had also served a prison sentence.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State For the Home Department how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female prisoners have dependent children; and what is known about who presently looks after them.

Mrs. Rumbold: In response to questions in the national prison survey, which was carried out at the beginning of this year, *(a)* 32 per cent. of male prisoners and *(b)* 47 per cent. of female prisoners said that they had dependent children living with them just before they came into prison.

Ninety one per cent. of male prisoners with dependent children said that it was either their current or ex-wives or partners who were looking after them, while only 2 per cent. reported a dependent child with foster parents or in care. By contrast, just 23 per cent. of female prisoners said that at least one of their children was being looked after by current or ex-husbands or partners. Most female prisoners (52 per cent.) said that at least one of their children was being looked after by other relations. Twelve per cent. said that a dependent child was with foster parents or in care.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State For the Home Department how many prisoners are married or were living with a partner before entering prison.

Mrs. Rumbold: In response to questions in the national prison survey, which was carried out at the beginning of this year, 50 per cent. of prisoners said that just prior to their imprisonment they were married or living with a partner.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* remand and *(b)* convicted prisoners were homeless before entering prison.

Mrs. Rumbold: In response to questions in the national prison survey, which was carried out at the beginning of this year, 17 per cent. of remand prisoners and 12 per cent. of convicted prisoners said that they had no permanent accommodation at the time they were imprisoned.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of *(a)* young offenders and *(b)* adults in prison have previously been in the care of the local authority.

Mrs. Rumbold: In response to questions in the national prison suvey, which was carried out at the beginning of this year, *(a)* 38 per cent. of young prisoners and *(b)* 23 per cent. of adult prisoners said that they had had experience of local authority care before the age of 16.

Court Hearings

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will ensure that in the period between making a statement and going into court a witness need not have his name declared to the defendant;

(2) if he will ensure that in the period between making a statement and going into court a witness need not have his address declared to the defendant.

Mr. John Patten: Under the Magistrates' Courts (Advance Information) Rules 1985 the prosecution may withold information, including statements giving the names of witnesses, to which the defence would otherwise be entitled where there is considered to be a risk of intimidation of the witnesses concerned. Last year we amended the Magistrates' Courts Rules 1981 to prevent the routine disclosure of witnesses' addresses in advance of trial or full committal proceedings.

Missing Persons

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the computerised national register for missing persons will start operating; what its staff complement will be; and what financial resources will be allocated to it.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The database which the missing persons bureau will use will be from part of the new police national computer. It is not possible at the moment to give a definite date for its introduction. The staffing and resources of the bureau are still under consideration.

West Midlands Serious Crimes Squad

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will now publish in full the report on the general practices of the former West

Midlands serious crimes squad submitted to him by the Police Complaints Authority under section 97(2) of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: This report was laid before both Houses of Parliament on 31 October and was published on 1 November.

Anti-racist Organisations

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what conditions are attached to grants from his Department to anti-racist organisations.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Home Office runs a number of grant programmes which aim to improve community relations by seeking to reduce racial discrimination and racial disadvantage. Section 11 grant and the new ethnic minority grant seek to assist the access of ethnic minorities to mainstream services. Grants made from the reduction of racial disadvantage grant budget mainly help business support agencies under the ethnic minority business initiative and projects working to build the capacity of the ethnic minority voluntary sector. Some funding for anti-harassment and anti-racial attack schemes is also provided under the safer cities programme. In addition, the Commission for Racial Equality, which is grant aided by the Home Office, is empowered under section 44 of the Race Relations Act 1976 to give financial or other assistance to any organisation that it deems to be concerned with the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups. Most race equality councils and a number of projects in various parts of the country are funded in this way.

Funding under these programmes is subject to a range of conditions, some of which relate specifically to a particular project or scheme and others which are common to many grant regimes. These include conditions on progress towards targets and objectives, the provision of reports and financial information, and requirements that grants must not be used for party political purposes or for purposes for which they were not intended.

Female Prisoners

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average length of time spent in custody by female life sentence prisoners released on licence in each of the last 10 years.

Mrs. Rumbold: The information requested is given in the table. The calculated averages exclude persons who have died in custody or have been discharged for other reasons. The information for all persons released on life licence is published annually in "Prison Statistics, England and Wales"—table 8.5 of the issue for 1989, Cm. 1221.

Average time served[1] under sentence in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales by females first released on life licence 1980-90

Year of release	Average time served (years)	Number of females released
1980	6·5	1
1981	8·1	3
1982	8·7	1
1983	8·6	2
1984	8·3	5
1985	9·2	5
1986	10·5	2
1987	10·1	3
1988	10·0	4
1989	8·0	4
[2]1990	9·6	3

[1] Excluding any time spent on remand in custody, in non-Prison Service establishments or following any subsequent recall.
[2] Provisional figure.

Mature Women (Health Care)

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the ministerial group on women's issues last considered the issue of health care for mature women; what report was issued; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The ministerial group on women's issues examines issues of concern to women where they overlap more than one Government Department. The group has not considered the specific issue of health care for mature women separately, as this is the responsibility of the Department of Health, but it has addressed a number of wider health-related issues.

Prison Deaths

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the deaths of all boys and girls under 21 years detained in Prison Department establishments in the last 30 years, or as early as records have been kept, stating in each case the names, ages and sex of the young person, whether he/she was sentenced or on remand, the establishment where he/she was detained and the cause of death.

Mrs. Rumbold: The table lists the information requested for each year since 1978. Information for earlier years is not readily accessible and could not be given except at disproportionate costs.

Death of prisoners under 21 in Her Majesty's Prison Service establishments 1978-1991[1]

Name	Age	Sex	Establishment	Inquest Verdict	[2]Status
1978					
Anderson M. J.	16	M	Hindley	Suicide	—
Evans D. C.	17	M	Risley	Unlawful killing	—
Clark C. L.	19	M	Gaynes Hall	Open	—
1979					
Ramsey A. W.	18	M	Liverpool	Suicide	—
Forbes D.	20	M	Lewes	Killed himself while balance of mind disturbed	—
Ridehalgh S.	17	M	Wetherby	Natural causes	—
Redmond M.	20	M	Haverigg	Misadventure	—

Name	Age	Sex	Establishment	Inquest Verdict	[1]Status
Lehair P.	20	M	Wormwood Scrubs	Unlawful killing	—
Badger J. D.	17	M	Brockhill	Open	—
Tomkins M. S.	20	M	Huntercombe	Misadventure	—
Merry K.	16	M	Latchmere House	Natural causes	—
Powdrill V.	16	M	Thorp Arch	Natural causes	—
1980					
Grzybkowski R. Z.	19	M	Brixton	Suicide	—
Brown A. B.	20	M	Ashford	Self Neglect	—
Underwood R. J.	18	M	Norwich	Unlawful killing	—
Whittaker D. J.	20	M	Buckley Hall	Accidental death	—
Ratcliffe M. C.	19	M	Swinfen Hall	Suicide	—
1981					
Phillips L. M.	18	M	Ashford	Natural causes	Remand
Shackleton I. A.	18	M	Medomsley	Misadventure	Sentenced
Smith M. A.	18	M	Aylesbury	Misadventure	Sentenced
Wren G.	16	M	Rochester	Suicide	Sentenced
1982					
Caldwell D. V.	17	M	Medomsley	Natural causes	Sentenced
Heather-Hays J. P.	18	M	Ashford	Lack of care	Sentenced
Gallagher G.	17	M	Thorp Arch	Natural causes	Remand
Cooper M. R.	17	M	Canterbury	Natural causes	Sentenced
Walmsley S.	19	M	Stoke Heath	Suicide	Remand
Nagel J. S.	20	M	Lowdham Grange	No inquest held	Sentenced
Grosvenor C.	18	M	Lewes	Killed himself	Sentenced
Howells K.	17	M	Usk	Natural causes	Sentenced
Kurn, D. W.	20	M	Canterbury	Suicide	Sentenced
1983					
Markham D. T.	19	M	Thorp Arch	Misadventure	Remand
Bowley S. G.	16	M	Manchester	Suicide	Sentenced
Abbott M. G.	20	M	Leeds	Suicide	Remand
Overton R. C.	20	M	Hull	Natural causes aggravated by lack of care	Sentenced
1984					
Farrington K.	18	M	Manchester	Natural causes	Sentenced
Deck P. J.	20	M	Winchester	Misadventure	Sentenced
Cash P.	17	M	Swansea	Suicide	Sentenced
Chana S. S.	19	M	Pentonville	Suicide	Sentenced
McLauchlan	19	M	Stoke Heath	Natural causes	Sentenced
Sankey R. J.	19	M	Swansea	Misadventure	Sentenced
Khan L.	17	M	Rochester	Misadventure	Sentenced
Deacon A. K.	20	M	Norwich	Natural causes	Sentenced
Rapter P. C.	19	M	Swansea	Misadventure	Sentenced
1985					
Barrowcliffe I. P.	18	M	Huntercombe	Accidental	Sentenced
Jackson J.	18	M	Wellingborough	Natural causes	Sentenced
Joseph E.	18	M	Hollesley Bay	Natural causes	Sentenced
Ramsden R. J.	20	M	Portland	Open	Sentenced
Harrison F. J.	18	M	Risley	Suicide	Remand
1986					
Cumston A.	19	M	Exeter	Suicide	Remand
Ducatt P. M.	19	M	Ashford	Suicide	Remand
McCaffarey D. M.	19	M	Liverpool	Open	Sentenced
Evans K.	19	M	Lewes	Accidental	Remand
Thomas P. J.	20	M	Risley	Suicide	Sentenced
1987					
Baird A.	20	M	Canterbury	Suicide	Remand
Bailes R. J.	20	M	Ashford	Suicide	Remand
Taylor S. D.	20	M	Stoke Heath	Suicide	Sentenced
Jones G. S.	17	M	Rochester	Suicide	Sentenced
Armstrong J. S.	18	M	Risley	Suicide	Sentenced
Denny K. J.	18	M	Onley	Natural causes	Sentenced
Sturgess N. S.	19	M	Stoke Heath	Suicide	Sentenced
Smith A. I.	19	M	Brockhill	Natural causes	Remand
Marchelak P.	20	M	Camp Hill	Suicide	Sentenced
1988					
McMahon F. B.	18	M	Rochester	Open	Remand
Wood D. P.	20	M	Risley	Suicide	Remand
Skey A.	17	M	Leeds	Suicide	Remand
Elliott M. G.	18	M	Leeds	Suicide	Remand

Name	Age	Sex	Establishment	Inquest Verdict	[1]Status
Ward M. P.	20	M	Manchester	Open	Sentenced
Marfleet D. T.	20	M	Finnamore Wood	Natural causes	Sentenced
Bromley C.	19	M	Shrewsbury	Suicide	Remand
Littlewood D. A.	19	M	Leeds	Suicide	Remand
Burt T. D.	17	M	Glen Parva	Suicide	Sentenced
Greechan C. K.	19	M	Leeds	Suicide	Remand
1989					
Greasby A.	19	M	Castington	Accidental	Sentenced
Barber W.	19	M	Wellingborough	Accidental	Sentenced
Beckett P.	18	M	Leeds	Suicide	Remand
Kewley L. J.	19	M	Risley	Open	Remand
Ellis R. J.	19	M	Lewes	Suicide	Sentenced
Dixon S. D.	18	M	Manchester	Suicide	Remand
Johal P.	18	M	Rochester	Suicide	Remand
McGowan J. P.	19	M	Hindley	Suicide	Remand
Larkman N. A.	18	M	Swansea	Suicide	Remand
Broome T.	19	M	Manchester	Suicide	Sentenced
Mason P. K.	19	M	Glen Parva	Suicide	Sentenced
1990					
Brook J.	20	M	Durham	Unlawful killing	Sentenced
Sullivan M.	19	M	Winchester	Open	Remand
Curry M.	18	M	Hindley	Suicide	Remand
McKinlay I. D.	18	M	Hindley	Suicide	Remand
Hook A. W.	18	M	Hindley	Suicide	Remand
Knight P. H.	15	M	Swansea	Open	Remand
Willerton S.	17	M	Leeds	Open	Remand
Simmonds L.	20	M	Hull	Suicide	Remand
Walsh C.	15	M	Glen Parva	Open	Sentenced
Smith L.	18	M	Brixton	Killed himself in circumstances brought about by lack of care	Remand
1991 (to 4 November)					
Clancy D. B.	19	M	Portland	Open	Sentenced
White L. M.	19	M	Feltham	Not yet held	Remand
Wright A.	20	M	Glen Parva	Not yet held	Remand
Horler J. L.	15	M	Feltham	Not yet held	Sentenced

[1] The table lists deaths from all causes.
[2] Information on the status of prisoners who died before 1981 is not readily accessible. Prisoners described as on remand include those who were convicted but awaiting sentence.

Football

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the average costs of policing each English Football League club per spectator for the past three football seasons in order from the highest to the lowest.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is not available.

Correspondence

Mr. Michael Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will arrange for a reply to be sent as soon as possible to the letter of the hon. Member for Worcestershire, South of 23 September concerning Statutory Instrument No. 1531.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: A reply was sent to my hon. Friend on 5 November 1991.

Merseyside Fire Authority

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether, following the Merseyside fire risk review of 1990, he has given the Merseyside fire and civil defence authority permission to vary the approved establishment scheme; what assessment he has made of whether the Home Office minimum standards of fire cover can be met by the Merseyside fire authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: No proposals have so far been submitted by the Merseyside fire and civil defence authority. Any which entailed the closure of fire stations or reduction in the number of operational firefighters or appliances would require our approval to ensure that nationally recommended minimum standards of fire cover continued to be met.

Extradition

Mr. Stanbrook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the progress made to date in bringing into effect the Extradition Act 1989, and in the revised arrangements with other states which are parties to the European convention on extradition and its protocols.

Mr. John Patten: The Extradition Act 1989 came into effect on 27 September 1989 and the United Kingdom ratified the European convention on extradition on 13 February 1991. It came into effect in the United Kingdom on 14 May 1991. The protocols to the convention have not been ratified.

Schools (Fire Standards)

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps his Department is taking to bring fire safety standards in schools and colleges up to those required under the EC framework directive on the safety and health of workers at work; which organisations are to be consulted about the new draft regulations; when these are expected to come into force; and who will be responsible for enforcing them.

Mr. John Patten: We propose to implement the fire safety requirements of European Community directive 89/391/EEC on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health of workers at work —known as the framework directive—and the related directive 89/654/EEC, known as the workplace directive, by making new regulations under section 12 of the Fire Precautions Act 1971. The new regulations will apply to places of work, including schools and colleges, to which the Fire Precautions Act applies. The regulations will come into force on 1 January 1993, and there will be a staged application in accordance with the directives.

The regulations are being drafted in consultation with other Government Departments, which will include the Department of Education and Science; and with representatives of local authorities' associations and other interested bodies.

In accordance with the directives, the regulations will place the primary responsibility for ensuring fire safety on employers. Regulations under the Fire Precautions Act are enforced by fire authorities and for crown premises by HM inspectorates of fire services. Detailed consideration is being given to how the regulations will be applied to places of work, including schools and colleges.

It is expected that a consultative document will be available in the spring for an extensive public consultation exercise.

Joyriding

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the number of deaths in *(a)* Liverpool and *(b)* Merseyside caused by joyriders in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The number of deaths of drivers or passengers of stolen vehicles was as follows:

Year	*Liverpool*	*Rest of Merseyside*
1986	—	4
1987	1	2
1988	1	—
1989	3	1
1990	— (2)[2]	—
1991[1]	2 (3)[2]	1

[1]To date.

[2]The figures in brackets show the numbers of pedestrians killed in incidents involving stolen vehicles.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has plans to take action against joyriders in the present Session of Parliament.

Mr. John Patten: We will be bringing forward a Bill in the present Session to introduce a new offence of aggravated taking.

Essex Constabulary

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers there were in the Essex constabulary in 1979 and at the last available date.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: At the end of August Essex police were within eight posts of their authorised establishment, with 2,881 police officers compared with 2,490 in December 1979—an increase of 16 per cent. As from 1 October, we have further increased the authorised establishment to 2,892.

Concessionary Television Licences

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concerning pensioners paying the full television licence fee while living in the same block of flats as others paying the concessionary fee; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: In the last 12 months we have received correspondence on this subject from two councils and one firm of solicitors. Since 1 April 1991 it has been the statutory responsibility of the BBC to determine eligibility for the concessionary licence.

Immigration

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration his Department has given to re-opening the possibility of applications from Commonwealth citizens who wish to seek British citizenship; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Commonwealth citizens may acquire British citizenship by naturalisation. I assume that the hon. Member has in mind the entitlements to registration as a British citizen that came to an end on 31 December 1987, in accordance with provisions of the British Nationality Act 1981. We see no reason to review those provisions.

Metropolitan Police

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many uniformed officers are in posts in the Metropolitan police at the latest available date.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: On 4 November 1991 there were 23,873 uniformed officers in the Metropolitan police.

Race Relations

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish details regarding the progress of race equality legislation within the EC; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Government are absolutely opposed to discrimination on grounds of race; and this position is reflected in all our discussions with our European partners on these matters.

The Government do not, however, regard EC legislation as the appropriate means for taking action to enhance racial equality. The exact legislative position in member states varies, and is a matter for them, taking account of their particular circumstances.

Magistrates Courts

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total number of magistrates courts that magistrates courts committees have decided to close in the last six months.

Mr. John Patten: Information about individual magistrates' courthouse closures has not been routinely collected by the Home Office which, under the Justices of the Peace Act 1979, has a responsibility in relation to closure proposals only if there is an appeal by the relevant paying local authority.

Prisoners (Suicides)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners under 21 years old have committed suicide in custody in each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: *[holding answer 6 November 1991]:* The information requested is set out in the table:

Deaths of prisoners aged under 21 at their own hand in Her Majesty's prison service establishments 1979-91[2]

	Number
1979	5
1980	3
1981	3
1982	4
1983	3
1984	6
1985	3
1986	5
1987	7
1988	9
1989	11
1990	9
1991[1]	[3]1

[1] (to 4 November).
[2] Includes all deaths which appear to have been deliberately self-inflicted, whether or not a verdict of suicide was recorded at the inquest.
[3] Inquests have yet to be held on 3 other prisoners under 21 who have died in 1991.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Concessionary Fares

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he would provide financial support for concessionary fares on buses and trains for every pensioner when he or she reaches retirement age.

Mr. Needham: The Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland is precluded by the provisions of the Sex Discrimination (NI) Order 1976 from making a distinction on age grounds between men and women. The qualifying age for concessionary half-fare travel by bus and rail in Northern Ireland is age 65 years for men and women and there are no plans to alter it.

Civil Defence

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the maximum level of radiation which the 3,000 Radiac meters used in civil defence in Northern Ireland can quantify; what protection is available at the sites where these meters will be operated; and what steps he has taken to ensure there is sufficient protection for civil defence staff against radiation.

Dr. Mawhinney: Radiac meters are capable of measuring up to 300 centigrays per hour. In the event of their use appropriate safety instructions are available for issue to personnel operating in the field.

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the Northern Ireland civil defence regional Government headquarters has a fully trained staff; whether the building is fully furnished with display equipment to enable the trained staff to process the information received regarding the situation in the Province and throughout Europe; and whether the staff are supplied with radiation graphs to record the situation at each sampling site in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Mawhinney: Staff have been designated and trained for the regional government headquarters building in Northern Ireland which is fully equipped with appropriate display and recording facilities for the purpose of monitoring information received from within the Province and elsewhere, including Europe.

Bill of Rights

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consideration is being given to the introduction of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Brooke: Human rights and civil liberties are already well protected by existing legislation in Northern Ireland. I am always willing to consider proposals for strengthening the existing safeguards and I am examining carefully the recommendations in the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Right's second report on religious and political discrimination and equality of opportunity (Cm. 1107). I am not, however, convinced that a Bill of Rights is required.

Industrial Development Board

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many employees of the Industrial Development Board are based overseas; and what are the total wages and expenses bills for these employees over the last financial year for which figures are available.

Mr. Needham: A total of 38 employees are based overseas. The total wages and expenses bills in 1990-91 was £980,067.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Industrial Development Board staff based in Northern Ireland travelled abroad on their duties during the last year for which figures are available; how many trips were involved; and what were the total costs and expenses involved.

Mr. Needham: The information does not exist in the precise form sought by the hon. Member. During 1990-91 however, 74 members of IDB staff based in Northern Ireland undertook 139 visits by air travel to destinations abroad at a cost of approximately £370,000.

Debenham's, Belfast

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the nature and extent of financial assistance given to Debenham's store to operate from Castle Court centre in Belfast.

Mr. Needham: No financial assistance has been given.

Public Bodies

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list *(a)* the members and chief executives of non-departmental public bodies in Northern Ireland, *(b)* the period of their appointments, *(c)* their current salaries where these are paid posts and *(d)* how many periods of appointment each such person has served, together with the names of their immediate predecessors.

Dr. Mawhinney: To provide the information in the form requested could be undertaken only at disproportionate cost.

However, as I informed the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) on 20 June, *Official Report* column *253*, information concerning appointments to non-departmental public bodies in Northern Ireland is given in "Public Bodies" and "Public Appointments: A Handbook for Women's Organizations", copies of which are available in the Library. Details of the historic membership of nine such bodies have also appeared in the *Official Report* as follows:

Organisation	*Date*	*Volume*	*Columns*
Northern Ireland Housing Executive	16 January 1991	183	512-3
Police Authority for Northern Ireland	16 January 1991	183	513
Northern Ireland Fire Authority	17 January 1991	183	577-9
Laganside Corporation	17 January 1991	183	578
Health and Social Services Boards	17 January 1991	183	579-80
Northern Ireland Sports Council	18 January 1991	183	607-10
General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland	21 January 1991	184	30
Drainage Council for Northern Ireland	21 January 1991	184	30-31
Education and Library Boards	31 January 1991	184	586-88

Nursery Education

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress is being made towards the integration of nursery education.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Government are committed to encouraging and facilitating integrated education where there is sufficient demand for it from parents. In recent years, however, priority has been given to the needs of children of compulsory school age and only limited expansion of grant-aided nursery provision has been possible. A number of grant-aided nursery schools enrol both Protestant and Roman Catholic children and some grant-maintained integrated schools have non-grant-aided nursery classes. Statistics on the denominational breakdown of nursery pupils are not available.

Personal Debt

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the latest per capita figure for personal debt, excluding mortgages, in Northern Ireland; and what was the equivalent figure in 1979.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available for Northern Ireland.

New Homes

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the latest available annual figure for new home starts in Northern Ireland; and what was the figure in 1979.

Mr. Needham: In 1990 the number of new home starts in Northern Ireland was 7,527. In 1979 the figure was 6,467.

Homelessness

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the latest available figure for homelessness in Northern Ireland; and what was the equivalent figure for 1979.

Mr. Needham: It is not possible to give a figure for the total number of homeless people in Northern Ireland at any specific point in time but I am advised by the chief executive of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive that at 1 November 1991 the number of households living in temporary accommodation secured for them under the homelessness provisions of the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1988 was 205.

Comparable figures for 1979 are not available.

Drug Addiction

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the latest available figure for drug addiction in Northern Ireland; and what was the equivalent figure for 1979.

Mr. Hanley: At 31 October 1991, 51 people were registered as drug addicts in Northern Ireland. The equivalent figure at 31 December 1979 was 12.

Benefits

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give the latest available figures for the number of people on *(a)* income support, *(b)* family credit and *(c)* disability benefit and the equivalent for 1979.

Mr. Hanley: Social Security operational matters are the responsibility of Mr. A. Wylie, chief executive of the Social Security Agency. He has written to the hon. Member and copies of his reply will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Terrorist-related Offences

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have been sentenced to life imprisonment in Northern Ireland since 1970 on terrorist-related offences; and what were their paramilitary affiliations at the time of conviction.

Dr. Mawhinney: Since 1970, 580 persons have been sentenced to life imprisonment for terrorist offences. At the time of conviction their paramilitary affiliation was as follows:

	Number
PIRA	223
OIRA	11
INLA	85
UVF	140
UDA/UFF	106
Other Loyalists	15

Bed-and-Breakfast Accommodation

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the latest available figure for the number of people in bed-and-breakfast accommodation in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: I understand from the chief executive of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive that at 1 November 1991, 92 households were living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation secured for them under the homelessness provisions of the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1988.

Devolved Government

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on progress towards devolved government in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Brooke: The broad aim of Government policy is to seek to return greater responsibility for the affairs of Northern Ireland to locally elected representatives, on a widely acceptable basis and within a wider framework of stable relationships. With that aim in mind, I am at present engaged in discussions with the four main constitutional political parties in Northern Ireland and the Government of the Republic of Ireland, to establish whether a basis can be found for fresh political talks.

EMPLOYMENT

Skilled Labour

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his assessment of the effect on the recruitment of skilled labour of the change in the real average earnings of manual workers in manufacturing industry compared with non-manuals employed in the rest of the private sector.

Mr. Jackson: The real average earnings of non-manual employees in the private sector outside manufacturing have risen relative to those of manual employees in manufacturing over several years. This may have assisted the transfer of labour to sectors of the economy in which employment is growing more rapidly. There is no evidence that it has led to difficulties in the recruitment of skilled labour.

Open-plan Offices

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment his Department has conducted of the success of open-plan Employment Service offices and the response of the staff and public; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Meals and Drinks Allowances

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what guidelines the wages inspectorate uses in determining what deductions are reasonable for meals and drinks; and what are the maximum amounts which employers can deduct for meals and drinks *(a)* when deductions for accommodation are also being made and *(b)* when no deductions for accommodation are being made.

Mr. Jackson: Wages inspectors aim to ensure that workers in wages council industries are paid at least minimum remuneration based on the hours they work, the minimum hourly rates determined by the councils and any limit on the amount which may be deducted for accommodation set by the council. They accept deductions for meals and drinks only if these are made by agreement. Workers are entitled to receive their minimum remuneration and not to take any meals or other goods provided by the employer unless they wish to do so. In any case, deductions will normally be accepted only if they do not exceed the cost to the employer of providing the meals and drinks in question.

Working Hours

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will place in the Library the most up-to-date information held by his Department on the link between long working hours and accidents.

Mr. Jackson: The HSE has recently commissioned an update of the publication "Shift Work and Health—A critical review of the literature" by Professor J. M. Harrington. This update, by J. M. Waterhouse, S. Folkard and D. S. Minors and provisionally entitled "Shiftwork, Health and Safety—An overview of the scientific literature 1978-1990" will be published shortly. I will arrange for a copy to be placed in the Library as soon as it is available.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the Government's policy on the European Community directive on working time; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), *Official Report*, 5 November 1991, columns *71-72*.

Mines Safety

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he last discussed safety in mines with *(a)* the European Commission and *(b)* the Council of Ministers.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) have regular discussions with the European Commission and the Council of Ministers on matters concerning health and safety in industry as a whole, including mining. A European directive detailing minimum health and safety requirements for mines is being prepared by the European Commission which will give an opportunity for more specific discussion on mining safety.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the total of fatal accidents and major injuries, respectively, in coal mines owned *(a)* by British Coal and *(b)* others, in the current year and in each of the preceding five years.

Mr. Jackson: The latest available information on accidents and injuries in coal mines is for 1990-91. The table gives the information for the period 1986-87 to 1990-91.

	Fatal		*Major injuries*	
	BCC	*Other coal mines*	*BCC*	*Other coal mines*
1986-87	15	3	952	30
1987-88	9	3	729	27
1988-89	18	2	685	25
1989-90	18	1	587	23
1990-91[1]	11	1	501	13

[1] Provisional

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many safety investigations have been carried out in the current year and two preceding years into cases where people have been asleep underground.

Mr. Jackson: There is no record of a safety investigation being carried out by HM mines inspectorate in respect of a person being found asleep underground.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Housing Benefit

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many housing benefit claimants in Liverpool are awaiting payment of outstanding housing benefit; what is the total sum involved; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The day-to-day administration of the housing benefit scheme is the responsibility of local authorities. The information requested is not therefore available.

Homes (Repossessions)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many unemployed persons claiming income support were dispossessed of their homes each year since 1979.

Miss Widdecombe: The information is not collected. However, income support help with mortgage interest may be paid direct to the lender where the claimant has arrears and it is in the family's interests to do so. Lenders do not normally repossess where direct payment arrangements are made. On 5 November at columns *94-95* my right hon. Friend the Minister of State announced that we shall be strengthening these arrangements to improve their effectiveness.

Nebulisers

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his most-up-to-date estimate of the number of cases and total cost of assistance by way of one-off payments for the purchase of nebulisers in the past five years.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is not available.

Severe Weather Payments

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many more pensioners will be eligible for severe weather payments arising from the ability to claim income support arising from the uprating statement.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State on 5 November. All pensioners who receive income support are eligible for a cold weather payment.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total of severe weather payments paid by benefit offices covering Nottingham, North constituency for each of the last five years; if he will break down this figure by week or payment; and if he will estimate the number of claimants involved.

Mr. Scott: The information is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available is in the Library.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the operation of the severe weather payments scheme proposed for the coming winter.

Mr. Scott: The cold weather payments scheme has been considerably improved for the coming winter. Payments of £6 for every period of cold weather will be paid automatically to eligible people as soon as a seven-day period of exceptionally cold weather is forecast by the Met Office or actually occurs. The capital rule has also been abolished, making approximately 400,000 more people eligible for payments.

In addition some improvements have been made to weather station linkages.

Mr. McKelvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the current cost of the information received from the meteorological service for the purpose of calculating cold weather payments.

Mr. Scott: The Meteorological Office charged this Department £5,984·32 to provide the information necessary for the calculation of cold weather payments for the winter 1990-91.

Income Support

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many income support claimants, according to the latest figures, are *(a)* single persons and *(b)* married

couples or living with partners, and in the case of *(b)*, how many are childless, or where they have children, what is the average size of family.

Miss Widdecombe: There are 3·48 million single people in receipt of income support of which 810,000 have child dependents. There are 690,000 married couples or couples living together of which 330,000 have child dependents. The average number of children in couples' families is 2·22.
Note:
For the purposes of this reply, the term "child" is taken to include dependents aged 16-19.
Source: ASE May 1990.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will supply the numbers for each client group claiming income support for each of the years since its introduction in Nottingham, North constituency.

Miss Widdecombe: I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, that the information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what plans he has to monitor the effects of the Income Support (General Amendment) Regulations, S.I., 1991, No. 1559, on new claimants who are not covered by transitional protection and not entitled to family credit;
(2) how many people he estimates will lose entitlement to income support and not be entitled to family credit as a result of the Income Support (General Amendment) Regulations, S.I., 1991, No. 1559;
(3) how many claimants currently receiving income support will need transitional protection as a result of the Income Support (General Amendment) Regulations, S.I., 1991, No. 1559; and what he anticipates the total cost of that transitional protection will be;
(4) how much his Department will save on payments of income support as a result of the reduction from 24 to 16 hours in the number of hours claimants can work.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* The reduction in the remunerative work rule from 24 to 16 hours in the income-related benefits comes into effect from April 1992. It is part of a package of measures which will result in many working families with children being better-off through easier access to family credit. The estimated cost of the change across the benefits is expected to be around £50 million in the first year reducing to about £25 million in the longer term.

Claimants who are working, or whose partners are working, between 16 and 24 hours a week and receiving income support at the point of change will not lose their entitlement to that benefit. Around 30,000 of them are likely to be families with children who will be entitled to more family credit than they would otherwise receive in income support. A similar number, about 30,000, will remain on income support under provisions giving them indefinite protection at an estimated cost of £30 million in the first year. It is expected that a further 35,000 parents, who are already working 16 hours or more and who are not yet on benefit, will come on to family credit in due course after April 1992, and that many more people will be attracted into work and on to family credit in the longer term and so become better off. However, because of likely behavioural changes it is not possible to forecast with any degree of accuracy what the net effect might be on claims for income support made after April 1992. We will be carefully monitoring the effects of the change in the remunerative work rule in all the income-related benefits.

Benefits

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he is taking to reduce the time between his uprating announcement and the first payment of the uprated benefits.

Miss Widdecombe: The uprating date was moved to April in 1986 to align changes in social security benefits as closely as possible with the tax year and the local authority financial year. In order to ensure that the new benefit rates are implemented smoothly and efficiently to all beneficiaries in April, it is still necessary to announce them the previous autumn.

Mortgage Interest

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has for meeting mortgage interests costs through housing benefit.

Miss Widdecombe: Help with mortgage interest is currently given through income support. We have no plans to extend these arrangements.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many questions he has not answered in the last year because of disproportionate costs.

Miss Widdecombe: In the last year 70 questions were not answered because of disproportionate cost.

National Insurance

Mr. Gerald Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will investigate the case of Mr. Derek Merralls of 48 Worlingham road, London: and if he will review his Department's policy with regard to the payment of unemployment benefit to employees from whom national insurance payments have been deducted by an employer but not paid into the national insurance fund by an employer.

Mr. Jack: The case of Mr. Derek Merralls and the Department's policy on the effect on unemployment benefit of non-payment of national insurance contributions by employers is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive of the Contributions Agency. She will write to my right hon. Friend and a copy will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

War Disability Pensions

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much the Government spend anually on war disability pensions; and how many staff are employed in his Department on this.

Miss Widdecombe: Net expenditure on war disablement pensions in the financial year 1990-91 was about £570 million. About 1,050 staff are employed on all aspects of war pensions work, including the welfare service.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the cost to his Department of the 90 per

cent. rebates paid to local authorities by central Government by way of the standard rebate scheme for those on war disability pensions.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is not available. Overall figures for the amount of subsidy for housing benefit and community charge benefit are held, but it is not possible to obtain a breakdown within that of subsidy paid in respect of particular groups.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the local authorities in the south, south-east and south-west which use their discretionary powers to increase the rebates paid to those on war disability pension to above the 90 per cent. rebate refunded by central Government; and what is the total cost to the community charge payers of each local authority which uses its discretionary powers in this way.

Miss Widdecombe: In the year 1990-91, 277 of the 370 local authorities in England reported that they excercised their discretionary power to disregard more than the statutory £10 of a war disablement pension. These local authorities are listed in the table. The most up-to-date information held of the total cost to local authorities of operating local schemes in respect of war disablement and war widows' pensions is for the 1989-90 financial year. In that year the costs incurred in respect of rate rebates was in the order of £4·3 million and in the order of £10 million in respect of rent rebates and allowances. It is not possible to break down these figures between war disablement and war widows' pensions.

Authorities in England operating a local scheme for war disablement pensions in 1990-91

Adur
Amber Valley
Ashfield
Aylesbury Vale
Barnet
Bassetlaw
Beverley
Blaby
Blackpool
Boston
Bracknell
Braintree
Brent
Brighton
Bromsgrove
Broxtowe
Bury
Canbridge
Canterbury
Carrick
Charnwood
Cheltenham
Chesterfield
Chiltern
Christchurch
Copeland
Cotswold
Craven
Creve and Nantwich
Darington
Daventry
Derbyshire Dales
Dover
Ealing
East Devon
East Hampshire
Eastleigh
East Yorkshire
Ellesmere Port
Allerdale
Arun
Ashford
Barking
Basingstoke
Bath
Birmingham
Blackburn
Bolton
Bournemouth
Bradford
Breckland
Brentwood
Bromley
Broxbourne
Burnley
Calderdale
Camden
Carlisle
Castle Point
Chelmsford
Cherwell
Chichester
Chorley
Congleton
Corby
Coventry
Crawley
Dacorum
Dartford
Derby
Doncaster
Dudley
East Cambridgeshire
East Dorset
East Hertfordshire
East Staffordshire
Eden
Elmbridge
Epping Forest
Erewash
Fareham
Forest Heath
Gedling
Glanford
Gosport
Grimsby
Hackney
Hambleton
Harborough
Harrow
Hastings
Havering
Hertsmere
Holderness
Hounslow
Huntingdon
Ipswich
Islington
Kensington and Chelsea
Kingswood
Knowsley
Lancaster
Lewes
Lichfield
Liverpool
Macclesfield
Maldon
Mansfield
Melton
Merton
Middlesbrough
Mid Sussex
Mole Valley
Newbury
New Forest
Northavon
North Cornwall
North East Derby
North Kesteven
North Tyneside
North West Leicestershire
Nottingham
Oldham
Peterborough
Portsmouth
Purbeck
Redbridge
Reigate Banstead
Richmondshire
Rochdale
Rochford
Rother
Rushcliffe
Rutland
Salisbury
Scarborough
Sedgefield
Sevenoaks
Solihull
South Bedfordshire
South Cambridgeshire
Southend on Sea
South Kesteven
South Norfolk
South Oxfordshire
South Shropshire
South Staffordshire
Southwark
Spelthorne
St Albans
St Helens
Stockton on Tees
Stratford on Avon
Suffolk Coastal
Swale
Tamworth
Teignbridge
Test Valley
Epsom and Ewell
Exeter
Fenland
Forest of Dean
Gillingham
Gloucester
Great Yarmouth
Guildford
Halton
Hammersmith
Harlow
Hartlepool
Havant
Hereford
Hinckley and Bosworth
Horsham
Hove
Hyndburn
Isles of Scilly
Kennet
Kingston upon Thames
Kirklees
Lambeth
Leicester
Lewisham
Lincoln
Luton
Maidstone
Malvern Hills
Medina
Mendip
Mid Bedfordshire
Mid Suffolk
Milton Keynes
Newark
Newcastle under Lyme
Northampton
North Bedfordshire
North Dorset
North Hertfordshire
North Shropshire
North Warwickshire
North Wiltshire
Nuneaton
Penwith
Poole
Preston
Reading
Redditch
Ribble Valley
Richmond upon Thames
Rochester on Medway
Rossendale
Rugby
Rushmoor
Salford
Sandwell
Scunthorpe
Sefton
Slough
Southampton
South Bucks
South Derbyshire
South Holland
South Lakeland
South Northants
South Ribble
South Somerset
South Tyneside
South Wight
Staffs Moorlands
Stevenage
Stockport
Stoke on Trent
Stroud
Sutton
Tameside
Tandridge
Tendring
Tewesbury

Thamesdown
The Wrekin
Thurrock
Torbay
Trafford
Vale of White Horse
Wakefield
Waltham Forest
Wansbeck
Watford
Wealden
West Devon
West Norfolk
West Wiltshire
Winchester
Wirral
Wolverhampton
Worcester
Wycombe
York

Thanet
Three Rivers
Tonbridge and Malling
Tower Hamlets
Tunbridge Wells
Vale Royal
Walsall
Wandsworth
Wansdyke
Waverley
Wellingborough
Westminster
West Oxfordshire
Wigan
Windsor and Maidenhead
Wokingham
Woodspring
Worthing
Wyre Forest

Child Support

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the organisations which have been invited to comment upon his consultation document "The Proposed Contents of the Child Support Regulations" to be made under the Child Support Act 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The organisations which have so far been sent a copy of the consultation document are as follows:
Action of Churches Together in Scotland (Law Department)
Association for Payment & Clearing Services
Association of British Chambers of Commerce
Association of County Councils
Association of Directors of Social Services
Association of District Judges
Association of District Councils
Association of London Authorities
Association of Magisterial Officers
Association of Metropolitan Authorities
Association of Scottish Chambers of Commerce
Barnardos
British Agencies for Adoption & Fostering
British Bankers Association
British Computer Society
Building Societies Association
Campaign for Justice in Divorce
Campaign for Work
Centre for Policy Studies
Chief Adjudication Officer (Chief Child Support Officer Designate)
Child Poverty Action Group
Child Support Agency (Chief Executive Designate)
Childrens Legal Centre
Childrens Society
Church Action on Poverty
Citizens Advice, Scotland
Commission for Racial Equality
Committee of Scottish Clearing Bankers
Confederation of British Industry
Confederation of British Industry (Scottish Region)
Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
Council of Her Majesty's Circuit Judges
Council on Tribunals
Derbyshire County Council
Disability Alliance
Equal Opportunities Commission
Faculty of Advocates
Families Need Fathers
Family Law Association of Scotland
Family Law Bar Association
Family Law Commission
Family Policies Studies Centre
Family Welfare Association
General Bar Council of England and Wales
Gingerbread
Gingerbread Scotland
Independent Tribunal Service
Inner London Magistrates' Courts Service
Justices' Clerks' Society
Law Society
Law Society of Scotland
Legal Action Group
London Boroughs Association
Lord President of the Court of Session
Magistrates' Association
Magistrates' Court Committee, Archway Road
Magistrates' Court Committee, Ashton-under-Lyme
Magistrates' Court Committee, Aylesbury
Magistrates' Court Committee, Barking
Magistrates' Court Committee, Barnet
Magistrates' Court Committee, Barnsley
Magistrates' Court Committee, Bedford
Magistrates' Court Committee, Bexleyheath
Magistrates' Court Committee, Birkenhead
Magistrates' Court Committee, Birmingham
Magistrates' Court Committee, Bishopsgate
Magistrates' Court Committee, Blackpool
Magistrates' Court Committee, Bolton
Magistrates' Court Committee, Bootle
Magistrates' Court Committee, Bradford
Magistrates' Court Committee, Bridgend
Magistrates' Court Committee, Bridgwater
Magistrates' Court Committee, Bristol
Magistrates' Court Committee, Bromley
Magistrates' Court Committee, Bury
Magistrates' Court Committee, Caernarvon
Magistrates' Court Committee, Cambridge
Magistrates' Court Committee, Cardiff
Magistrates' Court Committee, Carlisle
Magistrates' Court Committee, Chelmsford
Magistrates' Court Committee, Cheshire
Magistrates' Court Committee, Chesterfield
Magistrates' Court Committee, Church End
Magistrates' Court Committee, Coventry
Magistrates' Court Committee, Croydon
Magistrates' Court Committee, Doncaster
Magistrates' Court Committee, Dudley
Magistrates' Court Committee, Durham
Magistrates' Court Committee, Ealing
Magistrates' Court Committee, Esher
Magistrates' Court Committee, Exeter
Magistrates' Court Committee, Gateshead
Magistrates' Court Committee, Gloucester
Magistrates' Court Committee, Great Eastern Road
Magistrates' Court Committee, Gwent
Magistrates' Court Committee, Halifax
Magistrates' Court Committee, Harrow
Magistrates' Court Committee, Hastings
Magistrates' Court Committee, Havant
Magistrates' Court Committee, Haverford West
Magistrates' Court Committee, Hebburn (Tyne & Wear)
Magistrates' Court Committee, Herefordshire
Magistrates' Court Committee, Hertford
Magistrates' Court Committee, Huddersfield
Magistrates' Court Committee, Huyton
Magistrates' Court Committee, Ilford
Magistrates' Court Committee, Isle of Wight
Magistrates' Court Committee, Kingston upon Thames
Magistrates' Court Committee, Leeds
Magistrates' Court Committee, Leek
Magistrates' Court Committee, Leicester
Magistrates' Court Committee, Lincoln
Magistrates' Court Committee, Liverpool
Magistrates' Court Committee, Maidstone
Magistrates' Court Committee, Manchester
Magistrates' Court Committee, Middlesbrough
Magistrates' Court Committee, Middlesex
Magistrates' Court Committee, Mold
Magistrates' Court Committee, Morpeth
Magistrates' Court Committee, Newcastle upon Tyne
Magistrates' Court Committee, Newtown (Powys)
Magistrates' Court Committee, Northampton
Magistrates' Court Committee, North Humberside
Magistrates' Court Committee, North Shields
Magistrates' Court Committee, Nottingham
Magistrates' Court Committee, Oldham

Magistrates, Court Committee, Oxford
Magistrates' Court Committee, Poole
Magistrates' Court Committee, Preston
Magistrates' Court Committee, Reading
Magistrates' Court Committee, Richmond
Magistrates' Court Committee, Rochdale
Magistrates' Court Committee, Romford
Magistrates' Court Committee, Rotherham
Magistrates' Court Committee, St. Helens
Magistrates' Court Committee, Sale
Magistrates' Court Committee, Salford
Magistrates' Court Committee, Sheffield
Magistrates' Court Committee, Shrewsbury
Magistrates' Court Committee, Skipton
Magistrates' Court Committee, Solihull
Magistrates' Court Committee, Stockport
Magistrates' Court Committee, Suffolk
Magistrates' Court Committee, Sunderland
Magistrates' Court Committee, Swansea
Magistrates' Court Committee, Tottenham
Magistrates' Court Committee, Trowbridge
Magistrates' Court Committee, Truro
Magistrates' Court Committee, Uxbridge
Magistrates' Court Committee, Wakefield
Magistrates' Court Committee, Wallington
Magistrates' Court Committee Walsall
Magistrates' Court Committee, Walthamstow
Magistrates' Court Committee, Warwick
Magistrates' Court Committee, West Bromwich
Magistrates' Court Committee, Wigan
Magistrates' Court Committee, Wimbledon
Magistrates' Court Committee, Worthing
Magistrates' Court Committee, Wolverhampton
Marriage Council in Scotland
Mencap
National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux
National Children's Bureau
National Children's Homes
National Council for One Parent Families
National Council for the Divorced & Separated
National Council of Voluntary Child Care Organisations
National Council of Women of Great Britain
National Family Trust
National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
National Stepfamily Association
New Towns Association
Office of Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration
Office of the Social Fund Inspector
Office of the Social Security Commissioners
One Plus One (Strathclyde)
Policy Studies Institute
President of the Family Division
Relate (Marriage Guidance)
Save The Children
Scottish Association of Family Conciliation Services
Scottish Child and Family Alliance
Scottish Child Law Centre
Scottish Churches Committee
Scottish Committee of Council on Tribunals
Scottish Consumer Council
Scottish Council for Single Parents
Scottish Law Commission
Scottish Trades Union Congress
Scottish Women's Aid
Sheriffdom of Glasgow and Strathkelvin
Sheriffdom of Grampian, Highland and Islands
Sheriffdom of Lothian and Borders
Sheriffdom of North Strathclyde
Sheriffdom of South Strathclyde
Sheriffdom of Tayside, Central and Fife
Sheriffs' Association
Single Parents Under Attack
Social Security Advisory Committee
Society of Messengers-at-Arms and Sheriff Officers
Solicitors Family Law Association
Spastics Society
Trades Union Congress
Wages for Housework Campaign
Women's National Commission
Womens Aid Federation

Copies have also gone to a number of individual representatives of employers' and banking organisations.

A copy has been placed in the Library. Further copies are available in the Vote Office and from the Department of Social Security.

A separate consultation exercise is being held in Northern Ireland. Copies of the document have been sent to the following organisations.

Barnardos (Northern Ireland)
Belfast Law Centre
Building Societies Association
Catholic Family Care
Child Care (Northern Ireland)
Child Poverty Action Group (Northern Ireland)
Citizens Advice Bureau (Northern Ireland)
Confederation of British Industry (Northern Ireland)
Equal Opportunities Commission (Northern Ireland)
Enforcement of Judgements Office
Family Law Association (Northern Ireland)
Gingerbread (Northern Ireland)
Law Society (Northern Ireland)
Northern Ireland Bankers' Association
Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Northern Ireland Court Service
Northern Ireland Resident Magistrates Association
Northern Ireland Office of Law Reform
NSPCC (Northern Ireland)
Relate (Northern Ireland)
Save the Children (Northern Ireland)

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Water Protection

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to assess the impact of the code of good agricultural practice for the protection of water.

Mr. Curry: The main indications to date of the success of this recently published document have been the high demand for it and the warm welcome that it has received from the NRA and other interested organisations. Our officials will be discussing with these organisations how best to monitor its impact.

Wild-caught Birds

Mr. Gale: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will discuss the trade in wild-caught birds at the next meeting of the Council of Ministers.

Mr. Curry: A new Community directive on the protection of animals, including birds, during transport was agreed in the Agricultural Council on 21-22 October. Following pressure from the United Kingdom the directive requires additional rules to be established to address the welfare problems in the trade in wild birds. We will be pressing for an early decision on this matter. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment is also seeking to place the topic on the agenda for the Environment Council on 9 December 1991.

Salmon

Mr. Beith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) whether he will list all the bodies and individuals from whom he received formal or informal representations about the east coast salmon fisheries between the date when the report on the fisheries was first

delivered to his Department and the date of its publication; and whether he will list any further bodies or individuals whom he consulted on the matter;

(2) if he will list the changes made to the text of the report on east coast salmon fisheries between the day it was delivered to his Department and the day it was published.

Mr. Curry: We received very many representations on the matter of the statutory review of the east coast salmon net fisheries, dating from the undertaking to prepare a review which was given to Parliament during the passage of the Salmon Bill in 1986, until its presentation to Parliament in October 1991. There were, however, no consultations about the report or its contents which, as section 39 of the Act makes clear, are matters for my right hon. Friends the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Secretary of State for Scotland to consider and present to Parliament. As the report itself describes, scientists from the Fisheries Department of MAFF and the Scottish Office prepared a very detailed background document for us. The only significant change made to it after its receipt involved revisions to the text to reflect the 1990 catch data which later became available for the review area. This updating was mentioned to the House by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House on 22 July.

Common Agricultural Policy Products

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will bring up to date the information on sheepmeat and on common agricultural policy product sales in his written answers dated 28 April 1986, *Official Report*, columns *315-16*.

Mr. Curry: The following figures show the amount by which the average market price of sheepmeat fell short of the guide price during the marketing years 1986 to 1990:

Year	*Great Britain* p/kg	*Northern Ireland* p/kg
1986	42·2	33·5
1987	43·1	26·1
1988	69·7	38·7
1989	62·2	44·2
1990	83·7	87·2

The average market prices for sheepmeat for the week beginning 14 October are currently forecast as being below the seasonal guide price by 125p/kg for Great Britain and 89p/kg for Northern Ireland, but because of seasonal variations this is not an indication of the eventual figure for the marketing year.

The following table gives updated details of exports of selected common agricultural policy commodities to non-EC countries in 1990. Expenditure on export refunds in 1990 was 7,722 million ecu.

	'000 tonnes EC12
Wheat	16,635
Wheat flour	2,907
Barley	9,655
Malt	1,350
Rice	370
Sugar[1]	5,035
of which: raw sugar[1]	35
refined sugar	5,000
Olive oil	177
Oilseeds	59
Whole milk powder	502
Skimmed milk powder	324
Condensed milk	349
Butter and buttermilk	199
Beef and veal	647
Sheepmeat	6
Pigmeat	298
Poultrymeat	414
Eggs	100
Wine	1,168

[1] Includes raw sugar converted to white sugar equivalent: 1 tonne raw sugar = 0·92 tonnes white sugar.

Source: Eurostat.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will publish a table showing for the principal agricultural products regulated under the common agricultural policy the amount of levy payable on importation from non-EEC countries, the amount of the levy and any customs duties payable, the latest United Kingdom price, the intervention or threshold price, the target price and the world price.

Mr. Curry: Information on intervention, threshold and target prices was set out in the note deposited in the Library of the House giving details of the common agricultural policy prices settlement 1991-92. Details of customs duties are contained in the "Integrated Tariff of the United Kingdom", a copy of which is in the Library of the House. The remainder of the information requested is set out for the main commodities in tables 1 and 2. The world prices shown in table 1 are generally the lowest offer prices at the Community frontier underlying the Commission's calculation of variable import levies. I would remind the hon. Member that these are the lowest prices recorded and it is almost certain that higher prices on average would have to be paid for supplies if existing agricultural support policies were dismantled. The world prices shown do not necessarily relate to the same quality or presentation of products for which United Kingdom market prices are set out in table 2.

Table 1

Levy applicable in the United Kingdom and notional "World" price (a) on 26 October 1991 for the main traded agricultural commodities

	Levy (b) applicable in the UK (£/tonne)	*Notional "world" price (£/tonne)*
Common wheat	119	67
Barley	109	61
Maize	95	75
Rice	277	157
Sugar	(c) 340	170
Olive oil	468	1,043
Butter	(d) 1,984	637
Skimmed milk powder	920	630
Cheese (Cheddar)	1,794	956
Beef and veal	(e) 1,990	1,079
Pigmeat	521	754
Sheepmeat	(f) n/a	n/a
Poultrymeat	281	903
Eggs	274	679

Note:

(a) "World" prices have been calculated by subtracting the levy applicable on 26 October from the threshold/guide price. The beef price is also adjusted for duty. In the case of pigmeat, poultrymeat

and eggs, the "world" price has been taken as the sluicegate price for the headings defined in (b) below. The resulting estimate has been converted from ECU/t at the appropriate market rate of exchange of £0·806057=1 ECU.

(b) The rates of levy vary for different tariff headings. The rates quoted are: beef and veal—carcase; pigmeat—carcase; poultrymeat—70 per cent. chickens; rice—husked long grain; olive oil—virgin lampante: eggs—in shell.

(c) In practice the United Kingdom's imports from third countries are normally covered by the Lome Convention and enter the Community levy-free.

(d) A special lower rate of levy is applicable to imports of butter from New Zealand.

(e) Most imports of beef from third countries are subject to special arrangements allowing entry at reduced levy rates.

(f) Imports of lamb under voluntary restraint arrangements with principal suppliers and related agreements enter free of charge. Any imports outside these arrangements are subject to levies which cannot exceed the 20 per cent. tariff bound in the GATT.

Table 2

Selected average market/wholesale prices United Kingdom
Prices are for week ending 26 October 1991 unless otherwise stated

	£/tonne
Wheat (grower to merchant price, all purchases, England and Wales)	[1]125
Barley (grower to merchant price, all purchases, England and Wales)	[1]117
Maize (USA cif N. Europe)	[2]117
Rice (US long grain rice 10 per cent. maximum broken)	[3]657
Sugar (Refined bulk granulated)	583
Butter (Great Britain salted)	2,123
Skimmed Milk Powder	[4]1,450
Cheddar Cheese (English mild white creamery)	2,075
Fat Cattle (Great Britain all clean cattle, liveweight)	1,036
Beef (Scotch killed sides, Smithfield)	2,127
Fat Sheep (Certified Great Britain, estimated dressed carcase weight)	1,108
Fat Pigs (All pigs, deadweight)	963
Poultry Meat (Broilers, liveweight)	547
Eggs (Size 3, packer to producer price)	491
Olive oil	[5]—

Note: A wide range of price quotations exists for individual commodities depending on quality, presentation, stage of marketing etc. Those shown are intended generally to be illustrative of prices paid by wholesalers or received by producers. Some prices are highly seasonal.

[1]Week ending 24 October: prices are before deducting co-responsibility levy.

[2]Prices unquoted since 14 September. Average price listed latest average levy as at 24 October.

[3]Week ending 31 October.

[4]Average price for month of October.

[5]Prices range from £1,611-£3,683/tonne, with 'Lampante' Spanish Origin at £2,141/tonne.

Farms

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will publish a table showing the concentration of agricultural land holdings and the decline in the number of farmers since 1961 in the United Kingdom and other EC countries.

Mr. Curry: This information is not available in the form requested.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will publish a table showing the number of *(a)* holdings and *(b)* owners accounting for 25 per cent. and 50 per cent. of (i) farm land, excluding woodland and rough grazing, (ii) beef cattle, (iii) dairy cattle, (iv) cereals, (v) rapeseed and (vi) sugar beet.

Mr. Curry: The information requested is not readily available in the form requested. However, the following tables show for England and Wales, for 1990, the distribution of holdings by size in respect of each of items requested. Information on ownership is not available.

June 1990 England and Wales (excluding minor holdings)
Table 1. Holdings by crops and grass size groups

Hectares	*<50*	*50-<100*	*100-<200*	*200 and over*	*Total*
Holdings (thousands)	115·4	31·1	17·1	7·9	171·5
Crops and grass (thousands hectares)	2,035·3	2,197·9	2,348·5	2,707·6	9,289·3

Table 2. Holdings by beef cow size groups

Head	*1-9*	*10-39*	*40-49*	*50 and over*	*Total*
Holdings (thousands)	22·5	£7·1	2·0	4·3	45·8
Beef cows (thousand head)	87·7	347·5	86·8	357·9	879·9

Table 3. Holdings by dairy cow size groups

Head	*<50*	*50-69*	*70-99*	*100 and over*	*Total*
Holdings (thousand)	15·8	6·4	6·3	6·7	35·1
Dairy cows (thousand head)	425·1	373·1	518·6	1,007·6	2,324·4

Table 4. Holdings by total cereals (excluding maize) size groups

Hectares	*<40*	*40-<50*	*50-<10*	*100-<150*	*150 and over*	*Total*
Holdings (thousand)	38·2	3·9	10·4	4·3	4·5	61·3
Total cereals (thousand ha.)	571·1	172·6	739·8	527·8	1,116·5	3,127·8

Table 5. Holdings by oilseed rape size groups

Hectares	<10	10- <20	20- <50	50 and over	Total
Holdings (thousand)	2·8	4·1	4·7	1·5	13·1
Oilseed rape (thousand ha.)	18·9	58·5	144·3	121·5	343·2

Table 6. Holdings by sugar beet size groups

Hectares	<5	5- <20	20- <40	40 and over	Total
Holdings (thousand)	2·1	5·4	1·9	1·1	10·5
Sugar beet (thousand ha.)	6·3	57·8	51·7	78·3	194·1

Meat

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how the new regulations under the Food Safety Act 1990, to control illegal drug residues in meat, will be enforced.

Mr. Maclean: The new regulations will be enforced at slaughterhouses and on farm by members of the state veterinary service carrying out checks on meat and animals. Similarly, local authorities will be responsible for meat sold at retail outlets.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of the proportion of costs of implementing the environmentally sensitive areas policy constituted by *(a)* administration, *(b)* monitoring, *(c)* payments to farmers and *(d)* other costs.

Mr. Curry: Over the period 1986-87 to 1990-91, the payments to farmers in England have accounted for approximately 75 per cent. of the total costs of the ESA scheme, the balance being taken up by administration which includes conservation advice to participating farmers and monitoring to assess the economic and environmental impacts of the scheme. It is not possible to provide a precise breakdown between the administrative and monitoring costs, but they have been broadly equal.

Sheep and Goat Milk

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to announce standards for the commercial production of sheep and goat milk; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The European Commission has proposed a new Community-wide milk hygiene framework covering milk and milk products from cows, goats, sheep and buffaloes. This is intended to come into force on 1 January 1993. The Government are pressing for effective progress to be made in negotiations so that realistic standards can be introduced by this date or as soon as possible thereafter. In the meantime, the production and sale of goat and sheep milk continues to be subject to the general provisions of the Food Safety Act 1990, general food hygiene and labelling regulations and specific codes of practice.

DEFENCE

Sea Training Facilities

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what sea training facilities are currently available at HMS Wessex, HMS Sussex and HMS Claverhouse; and what is their current usage rate.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: HMS Wessex, HMS Sussex and HMS Claverhouse have River class minesweepers; HMS Itchen, HMS Arun and HMS Spey respectively. The time spent at sea is approximately 20 per cent. of the time available when allowance is made for the ships to undergo essential maintenance and repair. In addition to training at sea other essential training activities are conducted alongside.

Fishery Protection

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the Royal Navy has been able to meet the requirement for fishery protection in 1991-92; which ships are currently committed to the coastal division of the fishery protection squadron; and what plans he has to fulfil the fishery protection requirement in 1992-93.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Royal Navy fishery protection squadron is on target to meet the level of patrolling for 1991-92 agreed with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department. HMS Blackwater, Soberton, Brinton, Kellington, Sheraton and Iveston are currently assigned to the coastal division of the fishery protection squadron. Plans for fishery protection in 1992-93 have not yet been decided.

Minesweepers

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those River class minesweepers currently in service, together with their current squadron allocation and tasks.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The following River class minesweepers are in service:

HMS Blackwater, HMS Arun, HMS Carron, HMS Dovey, HMS Helford, HMS Humber, HMS Orwell, HMS Spey, HMS Waveney, HMS Itchen.

HMS Blackwater is employed on fishery protection duties with the fishery protection squadron, HMS Itchen is in refit and the remainder are allocated to the 10th mine counter-measures squadron and are used for sea training by the Royal Naval Reserve.

HMS Humber and Helmsdale

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when HMS Humber and HMS Helmsdale were commissioned; what was their planned length of service; and why they are to be placed in reserve.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: HMS Humber was commissioned on 7 June 1985; HMS Helmsdale was commissioned on 1 March 1986. It is not our practice to disclose the planned length of service for vessels. Placing HMS Helmsdale and HMS Ribble, but not HMS Humber, in reserve enables reductions in running costs to be made while retaining the ships, which can be prepared for operations at short notice, as part of our MCM capability.

Correspondence

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) on what date he replied to the letter from the hon. Member for Walsall, North dated 5 August 1991 concerning a service medal for a constituent; on what date his Department wrote directly to the constituent; on what date a copy of his Department's letter to the constituent was sent to the hon. Member; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make it his practice to reply directly to the hon. Member when he receives a letter from an hon. Member dealing with a constituent's cases.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to the hon. Member.

HEALTH

Ealing Health Authority

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the expenditure in real and cash terms by *(a)* Ealing health authority and *(b)* Ealing hospital since the inception of each; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Figures of total revenue expenditure recorded in the annual accounts of Ealing health authority since its establishment on 1 April 1982 are shown in the table. The information about Ealing hospital is not held centrally. My hon. Friend may wish to write to Lady Eccles of Moulton, the chairman of Ealing health authority, for details.

	£000 cash	*£000 at 1990-91 prices*
1982-83	34,522	53,674
1983-84	36,235	53,850
1984-85	39,602	56,008
1985-86	40,265	54,003
1986-87	44,131	57,230
1987-88	46,772	57,520
1988-89	53,102	60,862
1989-90	58,157	62,664
1990-91	62,729	62,729

Note: Figures for the earlier years have been expressed at 1990-91 prices by the use of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) deflator.

Road Accidents

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many hospitals imposed the charges for emergency treatment after road accidents, as laid down in sections 157 and 158 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 in each year since 1988; and what are the average charges;

(2) when *(a)* Guy's and *(b)* Lewisham hospitals introduced the charges for emergency treatment after road accidents, as laid down in sections 157 and 158 of the Road Traffic Act 1988; and what are the average charges for *(a)* Guy's and *(b)* Lewisham hospitals in each year since their introduction.

Mr. Dorrell: All health authorities and NHS trusts may collect an emergency treatment fee, at a flat rate of £19·30, for immediate medical attention required following a road traffic accident and they may also collect charges for any subsequent in or out-patient treatment, up to ceilings of £2,667 and £267 respectively. Provision for these charges was made in the Road Traffic Acts 1930, 1933 and 1934 and has been carried forward in later legislation by successive Governments. Motorists are legally required to insure against these charges and those for subsequent in and out-patient treatment are collected direct from insurance companies.

Bio Products Laboratory

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what measures the Bio Products Laboratory has introduced to conform to fair trading and fair competition practices as currently apply to the commercial plasma industry in the United Kingdom since 1 April;

(2) from what date the Bio Products Laboratory will start charging for whole blood and plasma derivative products such as Albumin and Factor VIII at prices that accurately reflect the total costs including blood and plasma collection, Factor VIII BSM royalty and product licence application fee costs;

(3) what measures are being taken to ensure the maintenance of a free market and free competition between the public and private plasma industry; and how clinical choice, pricing, research and development, investment and patient safety will be maintained.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It has been the policy of successive Governments that this country should be self-sufficient in blood products derived from plasma donated by our unpaid voluntary donors. This position is consistent with the more recent decision by the European Community to promote a policy of Community self-sufficiency based on voluntary blood donation.

We also recognise that doctors should be free to prescribe the most appropriate product for their patients in the light of the available clinical information. NHS clinicians may, therefore, prescribe blood products from commercial suppliers and not just those from the Bio Products Laboratory.

Within the overall policy we intend that BPL should compete fairly in terms of the service, quality, and price of its blood products.

For this reason we introduced cross-charging in 1989 and reversed the previous arrangements whereby BPL products were supplied free of charge in return for plasma. The removal of Crown immunity from 1 April 1991 brought the BPL products within the scope of the formal licensing arrangements under the Medicines Act.

Nottingham DHA

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by how much Nottingham district health authority overspent or underspent in each of the last five financial years; and what estimate he has of projected overspend in the current year.

Mr. Dorrell: District health authorities are financially accountable to their regional health authorities. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir Michael Carlisle, the chairman of Trent regional health authority, for details.

Health Benefits

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the certificates issued under the low income scheme for health benefits in 1990-91 were for *(a)* full exemption and *(b)* partial exemption.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: During the 1990-91 financial year the number of certificates issued totalled 887,722. Of these, 398,429 were for full exemption and 489,293 partial exemption.

Income Generation

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assistance is given to the private health sector arising from the work of the income generation unit; and what fees are paid for such services.

Mr. Dorrell: The income generation unit promoted closer co-operation between the NHS and the private sector. This development contributed significantly to the estimated £50 million contribution to NHS resources which was made by the income generation initiative in 1990-91.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much income has been generated in the NHS for each of the financial years 1989-90 and 1990-91 both in total and in the following areas, *(a)* commercial concessions to retailers and other businesses, *(b)* advertising facilities, *(c)* catering services, *(d)* sale of services, including health screening, child minding, waste disposal and heating, *(e)* car parking facilities and *(f)* the sale of goods, equipment and materials.

Mr. Dorrell: Information is not collected centrally in the form requested. The net benefit to the NHS from income generation activity in 1989-90 was £25·8 million and reports for 1990-91 are expected to reveal a net benefit of around £50 million.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the income generation projects undertaken by the Trent regional health authority which were developed and implemented with the help of the income generation unit, together with the amounts of income generated from each project.

Mr. Dorrell: The role of the income generation unit was to promulgate advice generally and Trent in common with other regions benefited from that advice. But as was the case with all regions, it was open to Trent to seek advice from the central unit at any time and on any matter as the need arose.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what forms of advice the income generation unit provides to hospital trusts.

Mr. Dorrell: The income generation unit gave advice to NHS trusts in the same way as it provided advice to all other authorities and units of the NHS.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give details of the national policy on income generation that has been formulated by the income generation unit.

Mr. Dorrell: The policy of the NHS is to promote the generation of secondary income from outside the NHS in any way feasible which is profitable, ethical and within the law, provided that the schemes are not in conflict with the broad aims of the NHS. The fundamental principle underpinning all income generation activity is that it should not adversely affect NHS patient care.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will arrange for the production and publication of an annual report on the work of the income generation unit.

Mr. Dorrell: The unit no longer exists.

Contraceptive Advice

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the Department of Health maintains a register of centres providing specialist contraceptive advice for young people.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No. It is for individual health authorities to determine and arrange provision of the family planning services appropriate to particular local needs. Health authorities have been asked to bear in mind the need for separate, less formal arrangements for young people.

Hospital Trusts

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out the starting salary for each chief executive of a hospital trust and the latest salary in each case.

Mr. Dorrell: NHS trust chief executives are employed by their trust board; their terms and conditions of service are a matter for them.

Incontinence Pads

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the average number of incontinence pads supplied daily free by local health authorities;

(2) if he will list the local health authorities which have been charging for incontinence pads; and if such payments continue.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not held centrally.

Liverpool Children's Hospital

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last visited the Royal Liverpool Children's hospital, Alder Hey; whom he met; and what subjects were discussed.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I visited the Royal Liverpool children's hospital, Alder Hey, on 21 June this year. During my visit I saw the recently upgraded oncology and haematology ward and the paediatric intensive care unit

and had the opportunity to meet many senior clinicians and members of the nursing staff, patients and parents to discuss the various methods of care and treatment.

Hospital Trusts

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out the names of those who have been appointed chief executives of hospital trusts and their previous position prior to being appointed chief executive.

Mr. Dorrell: The names of the chief executives of the NHS trusts which became operational on 1 April 1991 are given in the table. Second wave trusts, which will become operational on 1 April 1992, are now in the process of appointing chief executives. Matters relating to the appointment and employment of NHS trust chief executives are for NHS trust boards; information regarding chief executives' previous employment is not held centrally.

NHS Trust	*Chief Executive*
The Freeman Group of Hospitals	Mr. L. Fenwick
Newcastle Mental Health Services	Mr. L. Joyce
Northumbria Ambulance	Mr. L. Caple
United Leeds Teaching Hospitals	Mr. S. Ingham
St. James's University Hospital	Mr. I. Donnachie
Bradford Hospitals	Dr. M. Baker
Northern General Hospital	Mr. N. McKay
Lincolnshire Ambulance and Health Transport Service	Mr. M. Ruffles
Doncaster Royal Infirmary and the Montagu Hospital	Mr. D. Nicholson
Norfolk Ambulance	Mr. M. Willis
Anglian Harbours	Mr. P. Harrison
Southend Health Care	Mr. Stout *(acting)* Mr. Brackenbury *(designate)*
Royal London Hospital	Mr. M. Fairey
Royal Free, Hampstead	Mr. J. Cooper
Royal National Throat, Nose and Ear	Mr. A. Ranzetta
Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital	Mr. M. McGreevy
North Middlesex Hospital	Dr. K. Hirst
North Hertfordshire	Mr. R. Ewings
Mount Vernon Hospital	Mr. S. Ramsden
Hillingdon Hospital	Mr. P. Brown
Central Middlesex Hospital	Mr. A. Black
Guy's and Lewisham	Mr. P. Griffiths
Lifecare	Mr. I. Semple
Kingston Hospital	Mr. J. Langan
Homewood	Ms. E. Richardson
St. Hellier's	Mr. N. Sewell
Croydon Community	Ms. J. Hargadon
Epsom Health Care	Dr. T. Thomas
Royal Surrey County and St. Lukes	Mr. M. Forrer
Weston Area	Mr. R. Tucker
East Somerset	Mr. G. Mitchell
East Gloucestershire	Mr. J. Hammond
Cornwall Community Healthcare	Mr. D. Green
Cornwall and Isles of Scily Mental Handicap	Mr. A. Sandry
United Bristol Healthcare	Dr. J. Roylance
Northern Devon Healthcare	Mrs. J. Acred
South Devon Healthcare	Mr. A. Parr
Taunton and Somerset Hospital	Mr. E. McNally
Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases	Mr. C. Quinell
West Dorset Mental Health	Mr. D. Griffiths
West Dorset General Hospitals	Mr. N. Chapman
West Dorset Community Health	Mrs. V. White
Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre	Mr. C. Jones
First Community	Mrs. P. Tomlinson
Mental Health Foundation of Mid-Staffordshire	Mr. M. Murray
Rugby	Mr. P. Farenden
Walsall Hospitals	Mr. J. Roskill
Wirral Hospitals	Mr. F. Burns
The Royal Liverpool University Hospital	Mr. Fitzpatrick *(acting)* Mr. M. Stamp *(designate)*
St. Helens and Knowsley Hospital Services	Mr. K. Sanderson
Chester and Halton Community	Mr. C. Griffiths
The Cardiotheroracic Centre	Mr. J. Meade
Broadgreen Hospital	Mr. T. Cleator
Royal Liverpool Children's Hospital and Community Services	Mr. J. Butler
Mid Cheshire Hospitals	Mr. D. Young
Manchester Central Hospitals and Community Care	Mr. M. Ruane
Christie Hospital	Mr. M. Fry

Care Homes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his policy towards the three-tier care standards arrangement proposed by the Hertfordshire county council for care homes being leased to the private sector.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I understand that Hertfordshire county council has made no such proposal. The council commissioned a study of options for the future management of its residential care homes and those options are currently under consideration by the council's social services committee.

Local authority residential care homes should match the standards required of homes registered under the Residential Home Act. This standard should be available to all residents and is not linked to the ability of individual residents to meet the costs.

Drugs Testing

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what independent monitoring or evaluation of the data submitted by general practitioners and hospital doctors concerning the testing of new drugs is carried out by his Department's Committee on Safety of Medicines prior to the licensing of such drugs.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: A company is required to certify the accuracy of all the results from clinical trial data, submitted in support of a product licence application for a new drug. The Committee on Safety of Medicines, comprising eminent experts in the fields of medicine, science and pharmacy, carefully evaluates these data and has to be satisfied as to the safety, quality and efficacy of the drug in question before advising the Licensing Authority on whether or not a product licence should be granted.

Published guidelines require companies to establish procedures for the organisation, conduct, documentation and verification of clinical trials, and for the audit and archiving of clinical trial data.

Health Service Staff

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each national health service region *(a)* the number of female district general managers and *(b)* the district health authorities they manage.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* As at 6 November 1991 there were 10 female district general managers. The table shows the breakdown by region and what district they manage.

Region	District
North West Thames RHA	North Bedfordshire
North East Thames RHA	West Essex
	Hampstead
East Anglian RHA	Cambridge
North Western RHA	North Manchester
	Rochdale
South East Thames RHA	Hastings
South West Thames RHA	Croydon
South Western RHA	Frenchay
Trent RHA	Central Notts

Total number of female DGM's: 10

General Practioner Earnings

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on the average current earning levels of general practitioners.

Mr. Waldegrave *[pursuant to the reply, 5 November c. 101]:* In 1990-91, the first year of the new contract, estimated gross payments to general practitioners averaged some £5,951 per GP in excess of the intended level. We shall not know how much of this sum falls to be recovered under the normal balancing arrangements for dealing with over and underpayments until autumn 1992, when we have full information on GPs' practice expenses in 1990-91. I can well understand the profession's concern at the prospect of an overpayment of this order hanging over successive pay rounds. Nor would I want difficulties with the workings of the remuneration system to obscure the undoubted achievements of the new GP contract and the benefits that it is bringing to patients. So I believe it right to begin to address the issues now.

As a first step, I have considered carefully the different elements of the 1990-91 overpayment. The General Medical Services Committee has drawn attention to two factors—both concerning the handling of target payments in this first year of the contract—which they have suggested merit special treatment.

First, it is now clear that the Government's decision to bring higher target payments within average net income for nine months, as part of the staging of the award, interacted with the Doctors' and Dentists' Review Body's underestimate of the number of GPs who would achieve higher targets, to add a sum of £1,800 per GP to the overpayment. A separate decision to pay a "fifth target payment" to help maintain cash flow to individual GPs while the target payments system was being introduced added a further £300 to this. I have concluded that it would not be right for the Government to recover either of these sums. They result from special factors, unique to 1990-91, and can and should be excluded from the sum to be recovered, without prejudice to the normal principles of the balancing mechanism. So I have decided now to waive £2,100 of the 1990-91 overpayment as the profession has asked. This is equivalent to a sum of £63 million for Great Britain.

We shall need to return to the handling of the outstanding sum in the autumn of 1992, when we have further information. But in the meantime there are other issues for Government and the profession to address together. The latest information suggests that the fee scale set for 1991-92 is continuing to deliver a higher level of income than intended, although on a lesser scale than in 1990-91. Neither Government nor profession wishes to see the overpayment accumulate further, and we must therefore work together on evidence for the Doctors' and Dentists' Review Body to help them ensure that arrangements are brought properly into balance in 1992-93, when they determine the new level of income for that year.

We shall also need to take account of the experience of the first two years of the contract as we work together to develop it further. In looking to the future I shall wish to explore particularly the scope for developing the contract and remuneration system in ways that are more sensitive to local needs and circumstances. I also have in mind the further development of the performance-related elements of the contract, in the light of the Government's policy set out in the citizens charter. The profession may want to add other issues arising from their wide-ranging consultation on their document, "Building Your Own Future".

I therefore propose to invite the GMSC to work with Department of Health officials to agree proposals in time to put evidence to the DDRB for the 1992 pay round—when recovery of the 1990-91 overpayment falls due and all the necessary information will be available—covering:

(a) the handling of the overpayments already incurred—including the possibilities of accelerated repayment of the remaining amounts and of waiving an additional sum as part of a wider package; and

(b) the best way of developing incentive fee scales within the remuneration system, in pursuit of the policy objectives I have outlined.

I believe this represents a substantive response to the profession's understandable concerns. We have addressed those elements of the 1990-91 overpayment which clearly merit exceptional treatment and where we have enough evidence to act now. We have also set the framework for constructive discussion on the handling of the remaining pay issues in support of the GP contract through the 1992-93 pay round and beyond. I look to the profession for a similarly constructive response.

Food Hygiene

Mr. Pike: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the current position of food hygiene training requirements in relation to the Food Safety Act 1990; and on the relative operative date for these regulations.

Mr. Dorrell: I have been asked to reply.

Following comments made in response to our general consultative paper on food hygiene training, we have been considering what the scope of the regulations should be and will be announcing our conclusions in due course. No operative date has yet been fixed.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the registration of all food premises with local authorities in accordance with the Food Safety Act 1990 will become compulsory; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: I have been asked to reply.

Draft regulations on registration of premises used for a food business have been issued for public consultation. We shall be laying the definitive regulations shortly.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 8 November 1991

TRANSPORT

Motor Vehicles

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) whether he will publish the conformity of production exhaust emission standards for motor cars approved for use in the United Kingdom;

(2) when he intends to introduce MOT test standards based on conformity of production emission limits; and if he intends to use these in roadside spotcheck programmes.

Mr. Chope: The current United Kingdom conformity of production standard for CO emission from petrol-engined vehicles is 4·5 per cent. which is 1 per cent. more than the type approval standard to allow for manufacturing tolerance. This is the same as in the EC. These are the standards to which we are testing.

Road Schemes

Mr. Higgins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he proposes to publish the criteria for accepting requests made under the new compensation provisions of the New Road and Street Works Act 1991 for the purchase of properties affected by road schemes.

Mr. Chope: I believe my hon. Friend has in mind section 62 of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 which gives authorities discretion to acquire property seriously affected by public works. The criteria to be applied to the Department's road schemes are under consideration.

Rail Service, Leicester

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has yet reached a decision on the proposed passenger rail service to run from Leicester through the South Derbyshire coalfield to Burton on Trent, Toyota and Derby.

Mr. McLoughlin: I hope to make announcements about the allocation of resources for local public transport projects in 1992-93 shortly.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps are being taken to ensure that standards in the construction of the channel tunnel rail link meet the requirements for new railway construction laid down by the European Community.

Mr. Freeman: There are no such EC requirements.

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) when he expects to announce details of the arrangements for working up the new route for the new railway to the channel tunnel;

(2) if he will ensure that the study of the new rail link to be built to the channel tunnel includes full appraisal of the route needed for through running of international passenger and freight trains beyond London;

(3) when the status of Ove Arup will be clarified to enable the company once again to enter into discussions with the citizens of Mid-Kent on the alignment, environmental protection measures and other causes of concern of the channel link.

Mr. Freeman: My right hon. and learned Friend has asked British Rail to carry out the next phase of developing the route in close consultation with the Government and the private sector and take the lead in consulting the public. We shall announce more details of the arrangements as soon as we are able to. The work to be done will include examination of the implications of the route for international freight and passenger services to and from both London and beyond.

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will provide additional funds to British Rail to enable it to fulfil its obligation to purchase properties rendered unsaleable by their safeguarded railway corridor between Detling and Cheriton and to act as a buyer of last resort in compassionate cases.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail's offer remains open to buy any domestic property within the safeguarded zone between Detling and Cheriton. There are no present plans to broaden the terms of, or area covered by, the voluntary purchase scheme for this route section.

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of containers currently being carried on the European railway network could reach *(a)* London and *(b)* Liverpool (i) now and (ii) in 10 years' time on tracks currently operated by BR.

Mr. Freeman: BR's European container services to London and Liverpool can at present accept all standard ISO containers as well as 2·5m wide pallet containers and 12·2m long swap bodies. When the channel tunnel opens in 1993 BR will be able to accept between 90 and 95 per cent. of all containers in use on other European railways. In the longer term, the percentage will depend on future developments in the global container market.

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will meet the chairman of British Rail to discuss his invitation to anyone to take BR's freight operation off his hands; if he has any plans to assist towards that outcome; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: My right hon. Friend regularly meets the chairman of British Rail to discuss a variety of issues, including progress on his rail freight initiative. The Government intend to seek substantial privatisation of BR in the next Parliament. Meanwhile, my right hon. Friend wrote to the chairman on 9 October asking BR to give positive and sympathetic consideration to reasonable proposals from the private sector to introduce new freight or passenger services. We look forward to BR's response.

Queen Elizabeth II Bridge

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list the procedures to be followed by householders who live near the Queen Elizabeth II bridge

at Dartford, and who wish to process a claim for compensation for enhanced noise levels due to a faster throughput of traffic; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will publish the compensation entitlement of householders who live near to the Queen Elizabeth II bridge at Dartford, or the approach/exit roads thereto, and who find themselves affected by enhanced noise levels due to a faster throughput of traffic; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: Notices will be published soon in the local press describing the procedures for claiming compensation under part I of the Land Compensation Act 1973 for depreciation in value of property. Details of the procedure and conditions of eligibility are further described in a booklet "Your Home and Nuisance from Public Development", available from the Department's regional office at Federated house, Dorking. The claim period lasts six years commencing from a date 12 months after the new road was opened to traffic on 30 October 1991. Special provisions apply for those selling their houses within the first 12 months after completion of the works.

Under part I of the Land Compensation Act 1973, there is a right to claim compensation for depreciation of more than £50 in the value of land (including buildings) caused by specified physical factors (noise, vibration, smell, fumes, smoke and artificial lighting and the discharge on to the land in respect of which the claim is made of any solid or liquid substance) arising from the use (but not its construction) of a new or altered highway. If compensation is payable, reasonable valuation or legal fees incurred by claimants in making claims will also be paid. Interest is payable from the date the claim is received or the first claim day, whichever is later, until the compensation is paid.

Bus Passes

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to make a free bus pass available to all pensioners as of right; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: We have no plans to change the present arrangements. Local authorities already have powers to provide pensioners with free or reduced price bus travel. The decision on what to provide is one for the local authority in the light of local demand and the resources that they can make available.

ENERGY

Gas

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when reserves of British gas are likely to run out on current consumption levels.

Mr. Moynihan: The 1991 Brown Book (Development of the Oil and Gas Resources of the United Kingdom; a report to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Energy) showed the estimated remaining gas reserves of the UKCS to lie in the range 963-3345 billion cubic metres (bcm). Total consumption in 1990 was estimated at approximately 59 bcm. Over the last decade additions to reserves have exceeded consumption: the 1981 Brown Book showed estimated reserves in the range 750-2150 bcm. The United Kingdom will remain a major producer of gas well into the next century.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will identify the consumption levels of British gas for the next century in 10-yearly periods.

Mr. Moynihan: My Department published a range of scenarios of United Kingdom energy consumption (up to 2020) based on oil price assumptions supplied by the intergovernmental group on climate change in Energy Paper number 58. A copy of this paper has been placed in the Library of the House.

Coal-burning Schemes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the level of investment provided for research into and promotion of clean coal-burning schemes within the United Kingdom; and what proportion of the total energy budget this constitutes.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Both British Coal and my Department are supporting a wide range of research and development projects to develop cleaner coal technologies. The development of these technologies is a collaborative exercise and many of the projects also involve United Kingdom industry and overseas organisations such as the European Commission and the International Energy Agency. The value of contracts in the Department's current coal R and D programme are worth over £115 million with Department support of over £21 million. One of the most important of these projects is the development of British Coal's topping cycle technology which is taking place at Grimethorpe and its coal research establishment. Information on total spending by industry in the United Kingdom on energy-related research is not available to my Department.

Transmission Link

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what discussions he has had with the Energy Minister of the Republic of Ireland and the chairman of the National Grid Company concerning the proposals for an undersea transmission link between Wales and the Republic of Ireland, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what proposals there are to link the United Kingdom electricity grid with that of the Republic of Ireland.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: There have been no substantive discussions at ministerial level. However, I understand that the National Grid Company and the Electricity Board of Ireland are considering the matter; it is for them to assess the technical and commercial viability of the project.

Energy Sources

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what percentage of national energy needs are met from *(a)* coal, *(b)* oil, *(c)* windmills, *(d)* gas and *(e)* other sources; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: Figures for shares of primary energy consumption in 1990 are as follows:

Fuel	Percentage share Per cent.
Coal	31·3
Oil	35·5
Natural gas	24·1
Other[1]	9·1

[1] Nuclear and natural-flow hydro electricity, and net imports of electricity from France.

The amounts produced from wind power at present represent less than 0·05 per cent. of total primary energy consumption. However, following the 1990 and 1991 Renewables Orders under the non-fossil fuel obligation the regional electricity companies have been obliged to contract for wind power capacity, building up to the substantial level of 94·63 MW. This should considerably enhance the potential for bringing wind power into the electricity market on a competitive basis.

Spent Nuclear Fuel

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether any plutonium separated at Sellafield from the spent nuclear fuel discharged from the JAPCO TOKAI —1 Magnox nuclear plant has ever been co-processed with *(a)* spent fuel of similar irradiation from electricity board/nuclear board/Scottish Nuclear Magnox plants and *(b)* spent fuel of similar irradiation from BNFL's Magnox plants.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The policy of British Nuclear Fuels plc is to co-process civil spent fuel from its various home and overseas customers wherever it is operationally desirable to do so. In respect of material from BNFL's own reactors, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Member for South Worcestershire (Mr. Spicer) to the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) on 8 December 1988 at column *329*.

Windscale

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the current arrangements for storage of the filters from the Windscale pile number one damaged in the 1957 fire.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: This is a management matter for BNFL. However, I understand that the filters from Windscale pile number one which became contaminated as a result of the 1957 fire are stored along with other intermediate-level waste at Sellafield.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Private Bills

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council what proposals he has to abolish or reform the private Bills procedure.

Mr. McLoughlin: I have been asked to reply. Proposals will be published very shortly.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Residential Homes

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether residential homes are exempted from policies for exemption for competitive tendering for catering, cleaning and laundry services.

Mr. Hanley: This is a matter for HPSS boards to determine in accordance with my Department's instructions, which provide for exemption for residential homes "where these services are provided on site and clients are directly involved as an integral part of the therapeutic or rehabilitative process".

Civil Defence

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many RIMNET sites for civil defence are in existence in Northern Ireland; how many are fully operational; and what is the maximum level of radiation in centrigrays which they can quantify.

Dr. Mawhinney: Northern Ireland has one fully operational RIMNET site with a further four expected to be in operation by mid-1992. The maximum level of measurable radiation which such sites can quantify is 0·3 centigrays per hour.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many new police officers will be recruited during the next 12 months for front-line duties in the fight against crime as a result of the announcement on 9 October 1991; how many will be deployed in the Metropolitan police area; and if he will publish the names of provincial police forces who will be authorised to recruit additional officers giving details of the number in respect of each force.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. Friend will announce allocations of establishment increases to forces shortly.

Overseas Electors

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons living abroad were registered as electors on the most recent electoral register; how many of them lived in Belgium, Cyprus, France, Spain and South Africa; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: A total of 34,454 overseas electors are included on the electoral register for 1991-92. A breakdown of the total by parliamentary constituency is included in "Electoral Statistics 1991", published by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, a copy of which is in the Library. Information on the number of overseas electors living in particular countries abroad is not held centrally.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will obtain a copy of "United Kingdom, Deficient Policy and Practice for the Protection of Asylum Seekers" published by Amnesty International for his departmental library.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Home Office library already has a copy.

Belmarsh Prison

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of inmates at Belmarsh prison on 1 November.

Mrs. Rumbold: On 1 November there were 658 inmates in Belmarsh prison.

Stress-related Illnesses

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to develop health attention services for staff at prisons in England and Wales to deal with stress-related illnesses.

Mrs. Rumbold: The prison service has developed a stress management package for use by all its staff. Training in the use of this package is currently under way, and the aim is for the majority of staff to receive this training in 1992.

A servicewide scheme of post-incident care was launched in July this year providing care, support and expert counselling for staff suffering stress reactions following traumatic incidents at work. In addition, a lifestyle screening programme has been introduced which covers stress levels as well as other aspects of health. Prison service staff also have access to the confidential counselling services of the civil service occupational health service and the Home Office staff welfare service.

Category A Prisoners

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of prison inmates who have been taken off category A classification in prisons in England and Wales during the last 12 months.

Mrs. Rumbold: During the 12 months up to the end of October 1991, 71 category A inmates were downgraded to category B following review by the category A committee.

Prostitutes, Balham

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what requests he has had from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis for an increase in the number of police officers in the Tooting police division in the light of the presence of prostitutes in the Bedford hill area of Balham; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: It is for the Commissioner to decide how to allocate resources between divisions from the overall pool of officers available to him.

The Commissioner is aware of the problem of prostitution in Bedford hill and a local squad is dedicated to combating it. In addition, as a result of discussion with the local police consultative group, the police and Wandsworth council have within the last few weeks set up a working party to explore multi-agency approaches to tackling the problem.

Remand Prisoners

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the police stations and the numbers of remand prisoners being held at police stations in the Greater London area on 31 October.

Mrs. Rumbold: On 31 October a total of 166 prisoners were held in the following police stations in the Greater London area:

	Number
Albany Street	10
Bow Road	12
Brentford	5
Camberwell	13
Cannon Row	15
Croydon	5
Deptford	11
Earlsfield	1
Forest Gate	3
Gipsy Hill	3
Horseferry Road	24
Kennington	5
Lambeth	11
Lavender Hill	5
Mitcham	1
Muswell Hill	2
Ruislip	4
Snowhill	2
South Western	10
Teddington	2
Thames	8
Walthamstow	4
West End Central	10

I regret that it is not possible to identify separately remand and other classes of prisoner.

Prisoners (Police Cells)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners were being held in police cells in the Cardiff gaol catchment area in the week ending 26 October, how many were *(a)* sentenced and *(b)* remanded, and how many were aged 15, 16 or 17 years old.

Mrs. Rumbold: During the week ending 26 October the following number of prisoners who should have been held in Cardiff prison were held in police cells:

	Number
21 October	197
22 October	199
23 October	193
24 October	194
25 October	201

Information on prisoners in police cells is not collected at weekends. It is not now possible to differentiate between remand and other classes of prisoner or to identify the ages of prisoners held on those days.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what guidelines he proposes to govern the use of police cells for overnight stays involving young children and babies accompanying their parents while being questioned;

(2) what discussions he has had with the chief constable of South Wales concerning the children under the age of 10 years kept with their parents in police cells at Fairwater police station, Cardiff, on the night of Sunday 27 October; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: It is not proposed to issue guidelines. The police do not, in normal circumstances, allow children to remain with parents in cells. Every effort is made to place children with responsible adults relatives or friends, or to seek assistance from the social services department.

I understand from the chief constable of South Wales constabulary that at 2.20 pm on 27 October a man and woman, of no fixed abode, were arrested and taken to Fairwater police station where it was decided not to grant bail. They were accompanied by seven children. Between 3.45 and 10.55 pm the police made numerous attempts to find accommodation via the social services, but were unsuccessful. The children were therefore housed overnight with the parents in a cell with integral sanitation.

Commission for Racial Equality

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people are employed by the Commission for Racial Equality, and what is the cost per annum of running the board.

Mrs. Rumbold: On 5 November 1991, the Commission for Racial Equality employed 199 staff. The budget for the financial year 1991-92 is £14,055,000.

THE ARTS

Public Libraries

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Minister for the Arts how many public libraries were open for 45 hours or more per week in 1980; and what is the corresponding figure for 1991.

Mr. Renton: Direct comparisons are not available. Statistics prepared by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) show that 106 library authorities in England at 31 March 1981 had 761 service points (excluding mobile libraries) open for 45 hours or more per week. At 31 March 1990, the latest year for which statistics are available, 96 authorities reported 572 service points in the same category.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Company Directors

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the increase since 1979 in the real earnings, including fringe benefits, of directors of public companies.

Mr. Maude: I regret that the information is not available.

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide an up-to-date list of each television advertising campaign carried out, or to be carried out, by *(a)* Her Majesty's Treasury *(b)* the Central Office of Information, *(c)* the Department of National Savings, *(d)* Her Majesty's Customs and Excise, *(e)* the Inland Revenue and *(f)* the HMSO during 1991-92, and of each other publicity campaign costing more than £100,000, giving for each (i) the topic, (ii) the commencement date, (iii) the duration and (iv) the advertising, promotional and public relations companies involved.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* Advertising campaigns costing more than £100,000 carried out this year are given in the table. Campaigns that used television in addition to other media are marked with an asterisk. Those without an asterisk did not use television.

Topic	*Commencement Date*	*Duration*	*Company*
(a) Her Majesty's Treasury:			
*British Telecom Share Flotation	1 October 1991	2 months	J. Walter Thompson Dewe Rogerson Ltd.
(b) Central Office of Information carried out no publicity campaigns on its own account. The following campaigns were organised for other Departments:			
RAF Recruitment	May 1991	Ongoing	J. Walter Thompson
*Soldier Recruitment	24 June 1991	12 weeks	Delaney Fletcher Slaymaker Delaney & Bozell
Officer Recruitment	April 1991	Ongoing	Collett Dickenson Pearce
*Territorial Army Recruitment	19 September 1991	10 weeks	Delaney Fletcher Slaymaker Delaney & Bozell
Citizens Charter	23 July 1991	4 weeks	BMP DDB Needham Worldwide Ltd.
Customs and Excise Staff Recruitment	1 April 1991	12 months	Bernard Hodes
*Road Tax Evasion	1 April 1991	12 months	Waldron Allen Henry & Thompson/D'arcy Masius Benton & Bowles
Northern Ireland Electricity Privatisation	16 May 1991	7 months	Shandwick Consultants
*Teacher Recruitment	1 July 1991	23 weeks	Saatchi & Saatchi
Assessment Tests	7 April 1991	12 weeks	Bernard Hodes
Parents Charter	27 September 1991	9 weeks	BMP DDB Needham Worldwide Ltd.
Teacher Recruitment—Graduates	7 November 1991	5 weeks	Bernard Hodes

Topic	Commencement Date	Duration	Company
Launch of 'Investors in People' Scheme	17 October 1991	1 week	Gold Greenlees Trott
*TECS	1 April 1991	12 weeks	Gold Greenlees Trott
Career Development Loans	10 August 1991	6 weeks	Gold Greenlees Trott
*'Just the Job' booklet for unemployed	12 May 1991	4 weeks	D'arcy Masius Benton & Bowles
*'Just the Job' booklet for unemployed	12 September 1991	5 weeks	D'arcy Masius Benton & Bowles
Employment Service Staff Recruitment	1 April 1991	12 months	PA Advertising Ltd.
Energy Efficiency to reduce emissions by industry	October 1991	6 months	Laing Henry
Energy Efficiency to reduce emissions in the home	November 1991	4 months	Collett Dickenson Pearce & Partners
ECGD Insurance Services	April 1991	2 months	Leo Burnett Ltd.
Blood Donors	29 July 1991	7 weeks	FCO Ltd.
Health of the Nation Leaflet	5 June 1991	2 weeks	BMP DDB Needham Worldwide Ltd.
*Nursing Recruitment	26 September 1991	2 months	Laing Henry
Health Services for Women	30 June 1991	3 months	Laing Henry
Children's Act	14 October 1991	10 months	Laing Henry
Police Recruitment—Specials	April, August, October 1991	1 week	Riley Ltd.
*Crime Prevention	1 April 1991	2 months	Collett Dickenson Pearce & Partners
Passport Renewal	7 October 1991	2 months	BMP DDB Needham Worldwide Ltd.
Dangerous Drugs Bill	11 August 1991	3 days	FCO Ltd.
Electoral Registration	15 September 1991	4 weeks	FCO Ltd.
Smoke Alarms	19 October 1991	4 days	FCO Ltd.
Police Recruitment Graduates	June 1991	5 months	Riley Advertising
*Family Credit	2 September 1991	6 weeks	BMP DDB Needham Worldwide Ltd.
Companies Registration Compliance	October 1991	6 months	Golley Slater
Queens Award for Export/ Technology	April 1991	4 months	BMP DDB Needham Worldwide Ltd.
*Navy Recruitment	April 1991	Ongoing	Young & Rubicam
*Census 1991	4 April 1991	1 month	D'arcy Masius Benton & Bowles
*AIDS	May 1991	9 months	BMP DDB Needham Worldwide Ltd.
Ordnance Survey	26 June 1991	1 week	Leagas Delaney
Patent Registration move to Wales	April 1991	12 months	Ayer Barker Ltd.
*Scottish Electricity Share Flotation	26 March 1991	11 weeks	Citigate Advertising Faulds Advertising
*Child Road Safety Helmets	23 April 1991	3 weeks	Miller Leeves, Waldron Allen, Henry Thompson
Motorway Litter	19 April 1991	9 days	Miller Leeves, Waldron Allen, Henry Thompson
Drink/Drive	1 July 1991	1 month	Miller Leeves, Waldron Allen, Henry Thompson
Rear Seatbelts	1 June 1991	1 month	Miller Leeves, Waldron Allen, Henry Thompson
*Child Pedestrian Safety	21 October 1991	3 weeks	D'arcy Masius Benton & Bowles
*British Telecom Share Flotation	1 October 1991	2 months	J. Walter Thompson
Details of future campaigns have not been finalised.			
(c) Department of National Savings			
5th Issue Index-linked savings certificates	10 June 1991	4 weeks	McCann Erickson Advertising Ltd.
*Children's Bonus Bonds	8 July 1991	4 weeks	McCann Erickson Advertising Ltd.
*Income Bonds	5 August 1991 January 1992	4 weeks duration not finalised	McCann Erickson Advertising Ltd.
*Savings Certificates	February 1992	Duration not finalised	McCann Erickson Advertising Ltd.
Investment Account	18 August 1991	6 weeks	McCann Erickson Advertising Ltd.
Children's Bonus Bonds, Premium Bonds and Investment Account	1 November 1991	About 6 weeks	McCann Erickson Advertising Ltd.

Topic	Commencement Date	Duration	Company
(d) Her Majesty's Customs and Excise			
Customs and Excise Staff Recruitment	1 April 1991	12 months	Bernard Hodes
(e) Inland Revenue—none			
(f) Her Majesty's Stationery Office—none			

HEALTH

Care Homes

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce measures further to safeguard the welfare of residents in residential care and nursing homes.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I have today laid before Parliament regulations made under the Registered Homes Act 1984 that will require applicants for registration in respect of residential care and nursing homes to declare any criminal convictions they may have; and to provide proof of their identity on request. The first of these measures reinforces the administrative arrangements already in place under which authorities are advised to ask applicants about criminal convictions, and the police can be asked to make confirmatory checks against their records. Requiring proof of identity should help ensure applicants do not evade these and other checks by giving a false name.

These new requirements will strengthen the hand of registration authorities and help reduce the already small risk of unsuitable applicants becoming registered under the 1984 Act.

Abortions

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the private clinics licensed to perform abortions which have used, or were planning to use, a macerator to dispose of the bodies of aborted unborn babies, together with the means and place of disposal that each clinic is currently using;

(2) if he will list the private clinics licensed to perform abortions which are currently using a macerator to dispose of the bodies of aborted unborn babies.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This method of disposal is not now considered appropriate. It is being phased out as soon as possible in the few places where it is used. The Department is writing urgently to proprietors of approved places requiring them to use incineration and, where appropriate, to confirm that they have ceased to use maceration as a means of disposal. Compliance will be further monitored through the regular, unannounced inspections by the Department's medical, nursing and investigative officers.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines his Department issues to those places licensed to perform abortions regarding consultation with the mother concerning the disposal of her aborted unborn baby.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This is a matter for the woman concerned to take up with the proprietors of the approved place if she wishes to do so. Where the possibility of research arises, advice has been given about the need to discuss this with the woman so that she can decide whether or not to give consent.

General Practitioners (Overpayment)

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he proposes to take on the overpayment to general practitioners in 1990-91; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Butler) on 7 November at columns *259-60*.

Children Act 1989

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to make his first report to Parliament on implementing the Children Act 1989; and if he will introduce regular quarterly reporting on residential child care.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Children Act requires information received from local authorities and others to be laid before Parliament. We expect to lay a report before Parliament on the implementation of the Act by the end of 1992. The statistical return for the first year of operation of the Act should be available in 1993. There are no plans to introduce quarterly reporting on residential child care.

Dentistry

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists within the Trent regional health authority provided dental treatment under the NHS in *(a)* 1989 and *(b)* 1990; and what is the number now.

Mr. Dorrell: The information is given in the table.

1. General Dental Service Staff

	Number
September 1989	1,372
September 1990	1,395
June 1991	1,310

2. Hospital and Community Health Service Dental Staff[1]

	Number	Whole time equivalent
September 1989	211	180·2
September 1990[2]	211	177·2

[1] Figures include permanent paid and honorary staff but exclude hospital practitioners and clinical assistants.
[2] Latest available figure.

Legionnaire's Disease

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his oral answer to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill, of 5 November, columns 317-18,

how many cases of legionnaire's disease have been reported in Liverpool; when they were first notified to the authorities; where they are thought to have originated; why the outbreak was not made public; what action was taken to warn other patients and staff; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Five cases have been reported in Liverpool so far in 1991, of which two appear to be related and associated with the Broadgreen cardiothoracic centre.

Both these cases, reported in October, were brought to the attention of the local public health authorities and the Public Health Laboratory Service when the diagnoses were confirmed.

As soon as the first case was confirmed at the cardiothoracic centre samples were taken from the water systems. The results indicated that the infection could have originated from that source. Measures were therefore taken to treat the water system immediately.

Confirmation of one case of legionnaire's disease cannot definitely be associated with any particular source. By the time that the second case was confirmed at the cardiothoracic centre appropriate control measures had been taken. There was therefore no need to alert the public.

Following confirmation of the second case letters were sent to the general practitioners of all patients treated at the centre since it opened in July and also to all other hospitals in the area, alerting them to the possibility of the diagnosis. All staff at the centre are being screened for any signs of infection so that prompt treatment can be provided if required. To date no further cases have been identified.

Health Records (Confidentiality)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last discussed with the Data Protection Registrar the matter of health record confidentiality and the pros and cons of providing non-statutory guidance on the matter.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 15 October at column *137*.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prosecutions have been initiated by his Department for the violation of health records confidentiality; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department has not initiated any such prosecutions. The confidentiality of health records is protected by the law of confidence and not the criminal law. Any breach of the duty of confidence may be actionable by the patient or the relevant authority. Unauthorised use or disclosure of personal health information by health authority staff would also be regarded as a serious disciplinary matter.

Voluntary Organisations

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to reverse the decision to encourage project grants at the expense of core grants under section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* We have no such plans. We are aiming to reduce the 80 per cent. of the section 64 general scheme budget currently spent on core grants in order to increase the scope for pump-priming and innovative projects, but the greater part of the budget will continue to go on core funding subject to three yearly review. It is necessary to strike the right balance and this is consistent with the approach of the report "Scrutiny of Government Funding of the Voluntary Sector" published in April 1990.

Income Generation

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the income generated by each regional and district health authority for the financial years 1989-90 and 1990-91 as recorded in the short-term programme/outturn and report process.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 7 November 1991]:* The available information is given in the table.

Figures for 1990-91 are not yet available.

1989-90	*£ Thousand*
Northern	837
Yorkshire	805
Trent	2,240
East Anglian	815
North West Thames	2,111
North East Thames	5,121
South West Thames	473
Wessex	1,382
Oxford	1,683
South Western	2,365
West Midlands	1,357
Mersey	1,875
North Western	2,075
South East Thames	2,147
	[1]25,286

[1] A further £1·5 million came from special health authorities.

Incontinence Pads

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the statutory provisions governing charges for incontinence pads by local health authorities.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 7 November 1991]:* The position on charging for NHS services is set out in section 1(2) of the National Health Service Act 1977 which states that such services must be

"free of charge except in so far as the making or recovery of charges is expressly provided for by or under any enactment, whenever passed".

The provision of incontinence pads by NHS community services to people who are not NHS in-patients is a matter for the discretion of health authorities.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what medical assessment is used to decide how many incontinence pads are supplied free daily.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 7 November 1991]:* This is a matter to be determined by individual health authorities. The Department has issued general guidance to health authorities on this matter following a national review of incontinence services, earlier this year.

EMPLOYMENT

Pay Statistics

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish a table showing the percentage increase since 1979 for the median average, upper and lower deciles of full-time adult rates as *(a)* female hospital ward orderlies, *(b)* female welfare workers, *(c)* local authority male manual workers, *(d)* male and female non-manual workers in banking and finance, *(e)* male and female non-manual workers in legal services and *(f)* male and female manual workers in manufacturing.

Mr. Jackson: The available information is published in parts B, C and D of the "New Earnings Survey" reports for 1979 and 1991, copies of which are in the Library.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish a table showing the percentage increase since 1979 for the median, average, upper and lower deciles of full-time adult rates as *(a)* male hospital porters, *(b)* male and female primary school teachers, *(c)* male locomotive drivers and motormen, *(d)* footplate staff, *(e)* NHS male ancillary staff and *(f)* NHS male maintenance staff.

Mr. Jackson: The available information is published in parts B and D of the "New Earnings Survey" reports for 1979 and 1991, copies of which are in the Library.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will publish the percentage increase in real earnings in *(a)* manufacturing and *(b)* non-manufacturing of (i) manual and (ii) non-manual males and females respectively in the lowest decile, the lower quartile, the higher quartile and the highest decile, with the median and average figures for 1970 to 1979 and 1979 to the most recent available date;

(2) whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table in the same form as that contained in his reply dated 15 November 1989, *Official Report*, column *279*, bringing that information up to date and in each case distinguishing between manufacturing and non-manufacturing; and if he will provide corresponding figures for *(a)* the periods 1970 to 1973 and 1974 to 1983 and *(b)* females over each period.

Mr. Jackson: The available information on average gross weekly earnings is published in the "New Earnings Survey" reports for the years concerned (in tables 10,11,18 and 21 for 1970, in tables 29, 32, 49 and 52 for 1973, and in tables 54, 57, 74 and 77 for 1974, 1979, 1983 and 1991), apart from figures for employees in non-manufacturing for 1991 which are given in the following table. Estimates of decile, quartile and median earnings for those in non-manufacturing are not available for 1991.

Information on the retail prices index (all items) to convert 1979 figures to 1991 prices is published in table 6.4 of the latest "Employment Gazette" for April 1991, and in table 26 of the annual supplement to "Economic Trends" for April of earlier years.

Copies of the publications are available in the Library.

Average gross weekly earnings of full-time employees on adult rates, whose pay was not affected by absence, who do not work in manufacturing industries

	April 1991 £
Manual men	246·7
Manual women	156·4
Non-manual men	374·6
Non-manual women	238·8

Industrial Tribunals

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the current waiting time for cases to reach a hearing by industrial tribunals within *(a)* the Barnsley, East constituency and *(b)* South Yorkshire; and what were the comparable waiting times in each of the last five years.

Mr. Forth: I regret that the information is not in the form requested. The following table shows the percentage of cases coming to first hearing at the industrial tribunals in the Leeds region, which includes Barnsley and the South Yorkshire area, within six, eight, 10, 12, 20 and 26 weeks respectively of receipt of the application. The figures for the period 1 April to 6 November 1991 are provisional. The figures for the period 1 April 1986 to 31 March 1987 are for the Sheffield regional office which served the South Yorkshire area until its amalgamation with Leeds in 1987.

	Under (weeks)						
	6	*8*	*10*	*12*	*16*	*20*	*26*
1 April 1991 to 6 November 1991	1	3	14	38	72	82	91
1 April 1990 to 31 March 1991	3	15	33	50	75	89	96
1 April 1989 to 31 March 1990	5	26	49	66	87	94	97
1 April 1988 to 31 March 1989	2	11	32	64	80	88	94
1 April 1987 to 31 March 1988	4	22	41	58	79	86	90
1 April 1986 to 31 March 1987	9	20	39	54	72	83	89

Mining Accidents

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list, for each coal mine in England and Wales, and for each year since 1985, the number of recorded accidents which have taken place in the course of the employment of coal miners.

Mr. Forth: The information in the following tables is for the years 1987-88 to 1990-91. Statistics for earlier years could be provided only by incurring disproportionate cost. The tables list injuries notified to HSE in respect of all persons employed within the curtilage of the coal mine.

Name	Type	Fatal	+3 day	Major injury	Total
1990-91					
Agecroft	CM	0	4	1	5
Allerton Bywater	CM	0	68	3	71
Annesley/Bentinck	CM	0	53	6	59
Apedale	LM	0	1	0	1
Asfordby	CM	0	14	2	16
Askern	CM	0	37	8	45
Bagworth	CM	0	25	1	26
Barnburgh	CM	0	1	0	1
Barnsley Main	CM	0	27	7	34
Barnsley Main	CM	0	27	0	27
Bentley	CM	0	58	7	65
Betws	CM	0	11	3	14
Bevercotes	CM	0	69	5	74
Bickershaw Complex	CM	0	15	6	21
Bilsthorpe	CM	0	80	8	88
Blaenant	CM	0	4	2	6
Blenkinsop	LM	0	2	0	2
Bolsover	CM	0	56	10	66
Brawds Level	LM	0	1	0	1
Brodsworth	CM	0	7	5	12
Bryngias	LM	0	0	1	1
Calverton	CM	1	56	7	64
Clipstone	CM	0	40	10	50
Cotgrave	CM	0	33	5	38
Coventry	CM	0	179	11	190
Creswell	CM	0	91	5	96
Darrell	LM	0	1	0	1
Daw Mill	CM	0	129	13	142
Dawdon	CM	0	53	7	60
Dearne Valley	CM	0	11	3	44
Deep Navigation	CM	0	27	4	31
Denby Grange	CM	0	11	8	19
Dinnington	CM	0	2	6	8
DOE LEA	LM	0	1	0	1
Donisthorpe/Rawdon	CM	0	1	0	1
Draycott Cross	LM	0	2	0	2
Easington	CM	1	118	15	134
Ellington Combine	CM	1	142	9	152
Frickley/SE	CM	0	34	6	40
Gascoigne Wood	CM	0	99	3	102
Gedling	CM	0	37	10	47
Goldthorpe	CM	0	25	5	30
Graig-y-Llyn	LM	0	1	0	1
Green Clough	LM	0	1	0	1
Grimethorpe	CM	0	16	10	26
Harworth	CM	1	85	9	95
Hatfield/Thorne	CM	0	37	3	40
Houghton Main	CM	0	34	8	42
Kellingley	CM	0	144	6	150
Kiveton	CM	0	47	7	54
LEA Hall	CM	0	73	6	79
Little Sheriff	LM	0	1	0	1
Littleton	CM	0	89	6	95
Lonnen Drift	LM	0	0	1	1
Mainband	LM	0	2	1	3
Maltby	CM	0	73	10	83
Manton	CM	0	36	8	44
March Hywell No. 2	LM	0	0	1	1
Markham Main	CM	1	35	3	39
Markham	CM	0	87	8	95
Moorside	LM	0	2	0	2
Murton	CM	0	60	12	72
North Selby	CM	1	111	13	125
Oak	CM	0	1	0	1
Ollerton	CM	0	82	5	87
Parklands No. 5	LM	0	1	0	1
Parkside	CM	0	8	9	17
Penallta	CM	0	36	7	43
Pentwyn No. 3	LM	0	1	0	1
Podmore Hall	LM	0	0	2	2
Point of Ayr	CM	0	22	6	28
Prince of Wales	CM	0	71	9	80
Quaker House	LM	0	0	1	1
Quaker House	LM	0	1	0	1
Renishaw Park Mine	CM	0	1	0	1
Riccall	CM	0	35	6	41

Name	Type	Fatal	+3 day	Major injury	Total
Rossington	CM	0	23	0	23
Rufford	CM	0	76	6	82
Scranton	LM	0	0	1	1
Sharlston	CM	0	74	3	77
Sherwood	CM	0	48	1	49
Shirebrook	CM	0	100	5	105
Shireoaks/Steetly	CM	0	4	0	4
Silverdale	CM	0	47	11	58
Silverhill	CM	1	46	7	54
Silverwood	CM	0	29	7	36
Stillingfleet	CM	1	72	11	84
Sutton Manor	CM	0	19	5	24
Taff Manor	CM	0	23	1	24
Thoresby	CM	0	86	12	98
Thurcroft	CM	0	53	2	55
Tower	CM	1	44	5	50
Treeton	CM	0	15	0	15
Trentham	CM	0	69	19	88
Tyn Wern	CM	0	1	0	1
Tyn-Y-Craig	CM	0	1	0	1
Vane Tempest/Seaham	CM	0	54	2	56
Venallt	LM	1	0	0	1
Warsop Main	CM	0	7	3	10
Waunhir No. 2	LM	0	1	1	2
Waunhir No. 2	LM	0	1	0	1
Wearmouth	CM	0	71	11	82
Welbeck	CM	0	50	12	62
Westoe	CM	1	62	11	74
Whitemoor	CM	0	37	8	45
Whittle	LM	0	0	1	1
Wistow	CM	1	27	5	33
Woodside Drift	LM	0	1	0	1
Woody Close Drift	LM	0	1	0	1
Wrytree Farm Drift	LM	0	3	0	3
Ystrad Anthracite	LM	0	1	1	2

Name	Type	Fatal	3 Day	Major	Total
1989-90					
Acres Nook	—	—	3	—	3
Agecroft	CM	0	36	4	40
Allerton Bywater Mine	CM	0	51	5	5
Amber Valley Mine	LM	0	—	1	1
Annesley/Bentinck	CM	1	82	4	5
Apedale 1-4	—	—	1	—	1
Apedale 5-6	—	—	1	—	1
Asfordby	CM	0	19	6	25
Askern Mine	CM	0	36	3	39
Baddesley	CM	0	2	1	3
Bagworth/Ellistown	CM	0	54	5	59
Bank Top 2	—	—	3	—	3
Barnburgh Mine	CM	0	4	1	5
Barnsley Main Mine	CM	0	34	4	38
Barras Hill Mine	LM	0	—	1	1
Bentley Mine	CM	0	45	12	57
Betteshanger	CM	1	6	2	9
Betws Mine	CM	0	18	6	6
Bevercotes	CM	1	86	6	92
Bickershaw Complex	CM	1	25	3	29
Bilsthorpe	CM	0	69	13	82
Bilston Glen Collier	CM	0	—	1	1
Blaenant Mine	CM	0	46	10	10
Blenkinsopp Caste Mine	—	—	2	—	2
Blidworth	CM	0	—	1	1
Bolsover Mine	CM	0	71	8	79
Brodsworth	CM	0	17	5	22
Brynglas Mine	LM	0	—	1	1
Calverton	CM	0	70	9	79
Castle	LM	0	—	1	1
Cefn Mawr No. 2 Mine	LM	1	—	1	2
Clipstone	CM	0	53	9	62
Clrghyll Drift Mine	LM	0	1	1	2
Cotgrave	CM	1	43	2	46
Coventry	CM	0	162	10	172
Craugau Mine	—	—	1	—	1
Cresswell	CM	1	125	7	133

Name	Type	Fatal	+3 Day	Major	Total
Cwmgwili New Drift Mine	CM	0	—	1	1
Darrell Mine	LM	0	—	1	1
Daw Mill	CM	0	119	9	128
Dawdon Mine	CM	1	94	0	1
Dearne Valley Mine	CM	0	11	3	14
Deep Navigation Mine	CM	0	35	10	10
Denby Grange Mine	CM	0	13	13	13
Dinnington Mine	CM	0	15	2	17
Doe Lea Mine	—	—	15	—	15
Donisthorpe/Rawdon	CM	0	46	7	53
Draycott Cross	—	—	1	—	1
Drovers Drift Mine	LM	0	—	1	1
Easington Mine	CM	0	128	13	13
Ellington Combine Mine	CM	0	161	10	10
Florence	CM	0	10	6	16
Frickley/SE Mine	CM	0	13	6	19
Gascoigne Wood Mine	CM	0	122	7	7
Gedling	CM	0	47	8	55
Glo Mynydd Mine	—	—	1	—	1
Goldthorpe Mine	CM	0	—	3	3
Goldthorpe Mine	—	—	35	—	35
Graig-Y-Fforest No. 2	LM	0	—	1	1
Grimethorpe Mine	CM	0	32	8	40
Hall of Auchincross	LM	0	—	1	1
Harworth	CM	0	65	13	13
Hatfield/Thorne Mine	CM	1	60	5	66
Hem Heath	CM	0	42	11	53
High Street	LM	0	—	1	1
High Moor Mine	CM	0	16	4	20
Holditch	CM	0	3	1	4
Houghton Main Mine	CM	1	56	2	59
Kellingley Mine	CM	0	98	10	10
Kiveton Park Mine	CM	0	25	3	28
Kiveton Mine	CM	0	22	2	24
Lea Hall	CM	0	91	12	103
Letty Phillip	LM	0	—	1	1
Little Sheriff	—	—	4	—	4
Littleton	CM	0	65	11	76
Longannet	CM	0	—	15	15
Lyn	—	—	3	—	3
Mainband Mine	LM	0	5	3	8
Maltby Mine	CM	0	90	9	99
Maltby Parkgate Mine	CM	0	3	1	4
Mansfield	—	—	5	—	5
Manton Mine	CM	0	37	12	49
Markham Main Mine	CM	0	51	10	61
Markham Mine	CM	0		15	15
Merthyr Vale Mine	CM	0	16	3	3
Monktonhall Colliery	CM	0		1	1
Moorside Mine			2		2
Murton Mine	CM	1		13	14
Murton Mine	CM	1	80	13	14
North Selby Mine	CM	0	38	10	10
Oak Mine	LM	0	1	1	1
Oakdale Mine	CM	0	11	2	2
Ollerton	CM	1	87	2	3
Pantygasseg			1		1
Parklands No. 5	LM	0	4	1	5
Parkside	CM	2	3	5	10
Penallta Mine	CM	0	28	5	5
Podmore Hall			2		2
Point of Ayr	CM	0	11	3	14
Prince of Wales Mine	CM	1	56	10	11
Riccall Mine	CM	0	24	6	6
Rossington Mine	CM	1	32	10	43
Royston Drift Mine	CM	0	2	1	3
Rufford	CM	0	127	4	4
Scranton Mine			1		1
Shadfen Park Drift Mine	LM	0	3	1	1
Sharlston Mine	CM	0	54	4	4
Sherwood	CM	0	68	10	10
Shirebrook Mine	CM	1	115	7	123
Shireoaks/Steetley Mine	CM	0	10	2	12
Silverdale	CM	0	37	7	44
Silverhill	CM	0	48	1	1
Silverwood Mine	CM	1	58	7	66
Stillingfleet Mine	CM	0	93	16	16
Sutton	CM	0	8	2	2

Name	Type	Fatal	+3 Day	Major	Total
Sutton Manor M7	CM	0	17	1	18
Taff Merthyr Mine	CM	0	36	6	6
Thoresby	CM	0	111	7	7
Thurcroft Mine	CM	0	66	6	72
Tower Mine	CM	1	52	6	7
Treeton Mine	CM	0	—	4	4
Vane Tempest/Seaham	CM	0	99	12	12
Viaduct "A" LM	LM	0	—	1	1
Warsop Main Mine	CM	0	20	2	22
Waunhir No. 2 Mine	LM	0	1	2	2
Wearmouth Mine	CM	0	144	10	10
Welbeck	CM	0	65	4	4
Westoe Mine	CM	0	94	8	8
Whitemoor Mine	CM	0	28	5	5
Whittle Mine	LM	0	—	1	1
Wistow Mine	CM	0	29	5	5
Ystrad Anthracite Mine	LM	0	2	1	3

Name	Type	Fatal	+3 day injury	Major	Total
1988-89					
Annesley/Bentinck	CM	0	60	11	71
Asfordby	CM	1	23	8	32
Betteshanger	CM	0	34	5	39
Bevercotes	CM	0	133	9	142
Bagworth/Ellistown	CM	1	96	4	101
Bilsthorpe	CM	0	84	5	89
Blidworth	CM	0	35	4	39
Calverton	CM	0	78	8	86
Clipstone	CM	1	82	7	90
Cotgrave	CM	0	70	6	76
Creswell	CM	0	110	5	115
Donisthorpe/Rawdon	CM	0	93	9	102
Gedling	CM	0	84	13	97
Hawroth	CM	1	89	13	103
Linby	CM	0	0	1	1
Mansfield	CM	0	0	3	3
Ollerton	CM	0	127	11	138
Rufford	CM	0	95	8	103
Sherwood	CM	0	57	5	62
Silverhill	CM	0	57	4	61
Sutton	CM	0	28	2	30
Thoresby	CM	0	127	5	132
Welbeck	CM	0	73	8	81
Allerton Bywater	CM	0	54	10	64
Denby Grange	CM	0	37	4	41
Gascoigne Wood	CM	1	91	2	94
Kellingley	CM	1	143	9	153
North Selby	CM	0	51	5	56
Park Mill	CM	0	11	3	14
Prince of Wales	CM	0	83	11	94
Riccall	CM	0	8	4	12
Sharlston	CM	0	53	1	54
Stillingfleet	CM	1	45	10	56
Whitemoor	CM	0	23	5	28
Wistow	CM	0	8	3	11
Woolley/Redbrook	CM	0	1	1	2
Dawdon	CM	0	53	13	66
Easington	CM	0	35	12	47
Ellington Combine	CM	0	30	12	42
Murton	CM	0	40	8	48
Vane Tempest	CM	0	16	7	23
Wearmouth	CM	0	49	12	61
Westoe	CM	0	29	12	41
Osmond Croft	LM	0	0	1	1
Abernant	CM	0	0	1	1
Betws Mine	CM	0	16	7	23
Blaenant	CM	2	38	5	45
Britannia	CM	1	0	0	1
Carway Fawr	CM	0	2	2	4
Cwmgwili New Drift	CM	0	0	1	1
Cynheidre	CM	0	18	7	25
Deep Navigation	CM	0	39	8	47
Merthyr Vale	CM	0	75	5	80
Oakdale	CM	0	26	9	35
Penallta	CM	0	30	5	35

Name	Type	Fatal	+3 day injury	Major	Total
Taff Merthyr	CM	1	53	8	62
Tower Mine	CM	0	50	5	55
Marine	CM	0	60	3	63
Blaengrennig No. 2	LM	0	0	1	1
Brynglas	LM	0	0	2	2
Darrell	LM	0	0	1	1
Dynant Fach No. 2	LM	0	0	1	1
Ffynonau Duon No. 3	LM	0	0	1	1
Letty Phillip	LM	0	0	1	1
Oak	LM	0	0	1	1
Ystrad Anthracite	LM	0	2	1	3
Askern	CM	0	34	4	38
Barnburgh	CM	0	36	1	37
Bentley	CM	0	20	7	27
Brodsworth	CM	0	30	10	40
Dinnington	CM	0	16	3	19
Frickley/SE	CM	0	18	7	25
Goldthorpe	CM	0	38	7	45
Hatfield/Thorne	CM	0	40	6	46
High Moor	CM	0	28	4	32
Kiveton Park	CM	0	31	3	24
Maltby	CM	0	88	8	96
Maltby Parkgate	CM	0	8	3	11
Manton	CM	0	40	7	47
Manvers Complex	CM	0	0	1	1
Markham Main	CM	0	67	5	72
Shireoaks/Steetley	CM	1	48	6	55
Silverwood	CM	0	73	6	79
Thurcroft	CM	0	39	4	43
Treeton	CM	0	42	7	49
Barnsley Main	CM	0	43	1	44
Bolsover	CM	0	58	4	62
Dearne Valley	CM	0	10	6	16
Grimethorpe	CM	0	55	12	67
Houghton Main	CM	0	81	11	92
Markham	CM	0	130	15	145
Royston Drift	CM	0	27	2	29
Shirebrook	CM	0	153	9	162
Warsop Main	CM	0	65	8	73
South Kirby/Ferrymo	CM	0	1	2	3
Doe Lea	LM	0	5	2	7
Strathfield	LM	0	1	2	3
Baddesley	CM	0	54	4	58
Bickershaw	CM	0	30	15	45
Coventry	CM	0	140	13	153
Daw Mill	CM	0	107	4	111
Florence	CM	1	15	12	28
Hem Heath	CM	3	81	6	90
Holditch	CM	0	16	5	21
Lea Hall	CM	0	54	5	59
Littleton	CM	0	17	7	24
Parkside	CM	0	20	7	27
Point of Ayr	CM	0	19	6	25
Silverdale	CM	1	34	3	38
Sutton Manor M7	CM	0	5	6	11
Acres Nook	LM	0	2	1	3
Bank Top No. 2	LM	0	1	1	2
Castle	LM	0	0	1	1
Ashington	CM	0	0	2	2
Woody Close Drift	LM	0	0	1	1
Wrytree Farm Drift	LM	0	3	1	4

Name	Type	Fatal	+3 Day	Major	Total
1987-88					
Abernant Mine	CM	0	—	6	6
Acres Nook	LM	0	—	1	1
Agecroft	CM	0	—	3	3
Allerton Bywater Mine	CM	0	—	6	6
Annesley	CM	0	15	6	21
Annesley/Bentinck	CM	0	99	1	100
Arkwright Mine	CM	0	—	3	3
Asfordby	CM	0	7	2	9
Ashington Mine	CM	0	24	3	27
Askern Mine	CM	0	—	10	10
Baddesley	CM	0	35	9	44

Name	Type	Fatal	+3 Day	Major	Total
Bagworth/Ellistown	CM	1	107	11	119
Bank Top No 2	LM	1	—	1	2
Barnburgh Mine	CM	0	—	3	3
Barnsley Main Mine	CM	0	—	7	7
Barrashill Drift	LM	—	1	—	1
Bentinck	CM	0	16	1	17
Bentley mine	CM	0	—	6	6
Betteshanger	CM	0	126	5	131
Betws Mine	CM	0	—	8	8
Bevercotes	CM	0	—	12	12
Bickershaw Complex	CM	0	—	9	9
Bilsthorpe	CM	0	—	6	6
Birch Coppice	CM	—	1	—	1
Blaenant Mine	CM	0	—	8	8
Blenkinsopp Drift	LM	—	7	—	7
Blidworth	CM	0	—	5	5
Bodyst Uchaf Mine	LM	0	—	1	1
Bolsover Mine	CM	0	—	10	10
Brodsworth	CM	0	—	3	3
Bryngias Mine	LM	0	—	2	2
Bwlch Ton Mine	LM	0	—	1	1
Cadley Hill	CM	—	42	4	46
Calverton	CM	0	89	10	99
Carway Fawr Mine	CM	0	—	6	6
Clipstone	CM	0	—	15	15
Cotgrave	CM	0	98	7	105
Coventry	CM	0	108	7	115
Coventry	CM	0	—	1	1
Creswell	CM	0	—	10	10
Cynheidre Mine	CM	0	—	7	7
Darran Mine	LM	0	—	1	1
Daw Mill	CM	0	104	8	112
Dawdon Mine	CM	0	136	7	143
Dawdon Mine	CM	0	—	13	13
Dearne Valley Mine	CM	0	—	2	2
Deep Navigation Mine	CM	0	—	11	11
Denby Grange Mine	CM	0	—	7	7
Dinnington Mine	CM	0	—	7	7
Drovers Drift Mine	LM	0	—	1	1
Dynant Fach No. 1 Mine	LM	0	—	1	1
Dynant Fach No. 2 Mine	LM	0	—	1	1
Easington	—	—	121	13	134
Ellington Combine Mine	CM	0	130	11	141
Farmwood Mine	LM	0	—	1	1
Fforch-y-garran Mine	LM	1	—	0	1
Florence	CM	0	—	6	6
Frickley/SE Mine	CM	0	—	6	6
Gascoigne Wood Mine	CM	0	—	4	4
Gedling	CM	0	95	9	104
Goldthorpe Mine	CM	0	—	6	6
Greenland Drift	LM	—	1	—	1
Grimethorpe Mine	CM	0	—	5	5
Harworth	CM	0	—	2	2
Hatfield/Thorne Mine	CM	0	—	9	9
Hem Heath	CM	0	—	10	10
High Street	LM	0	—	2	2
High Moor Mine	CM	1	—	7	8
Holditch	CM	0	—	2	2
Houghton Main Mine	CM	0	—	5	5
Kellingley Mine	CM	0	—	2	2
Kiveton Park Mine	CM	1	—	2	3
Lady Windsor/Abercyn	CM	0	—	2	2
Lea Hall	CM	0	—	7	7
Letty Philip	LM	0	—	1	1
Linby	—	—	77	—	77
Littleton	CM	0	—	12	12
Maltby Mine	CM	0	—	7	7
Maltby Parkgate Mine	CM	0	—	2	2
Mansfield	CM	0	—	5	5
Manton Mine	CM	0	—	6	6
Manvers Complex Mine	CM	0	—	3	3
Marine Mine	CM	0	—	1	1
Markham Main Mine	CM	0	—	8	8
Markham Mine	CM	0	—	19	19
Merthyr Vale Mine	CM	0	—	6	6
Murton Mine	CM	0	167	10	177
Murton Mine	CM	0	—	10	10
Newstead	CM	0	—	4	4

Name	Type	Fatal	+3 Day	Major	Total
North Selby Mine	CM	0	—	3	3
Nostell Mine	CM	0	—	1	1
Oakdale Mine	CM	0	—	4	4
Ollerton	CM	1	—	9	10
Parc Level	LM	0	—	1	1
Park Mill Mine	CM	1	—	2	3
Parklands No. 5	LM	0	—	1	1
Parkside	CM	0	—	9	9
Penallta Mine	CM	0	—	3	3
Point of Ayr	CM	0	—	6	6
Prince of Wales Mine	CM	1	—	7	8
Quaker House	LM	0	—	1	1
Rawdon Complex	CM	1	41	5	47
Redbrook Mine	CM	0	—	2	2
Renishaw Park Mine	CM	0	—	2	2
Rhaeadr No. 2 Mine	LM	0	—	1	1
Rheola	LM	0	—	1	1
Riccall Mine	CM	0	—	4	4
Rossington Mine	CM	0	—	10	10
Royston Drift Mine	CM	0	—	2	2
Rufford	CM	0	—	6	6
Shadfen Park	LM	1	1	1	2
Sharlston Mine	CM	1	—	1	2
Sherwood	CM	0	—	9	9
Shirebrook Mine	CM	0	—	15	15
Shireoaks/Steetley Mine	CM	0	—	6	6
Silverdale	CM	0	—	7	7
Silverdale	CM	0	—	7	7
Silverhill	CM	0	—	3	3
Silverwood Mine	CM	0	—	3	3
Six Bells Mine	CM	0	—	2	2
Snowdon	CM	0	—	2	2
Snowdon	CM	0	5	2	7
South Kirkby/Ferrymoor	CM	0	—	4	4
Stillingfleet	CM	0	—	5	5
Sutton	CM	0	—	5	5
Sutton Manor M7	CM	0	—	6	6
Sutton Manor M7	CM	0	—	6	6
Taff Merthyr Mine	CM	0	—	8	8
Thoresby	CM	0	—	12	12
Thurcroft Mine	CM	0	—	1	1
Tower Mine	CM	0	—	10	10
Treeton Mine	CM	0	—	6	6
Vane Tempest/Seaham	CM	0	83	5	88
Warsop Main Mine	CM	0	—	4	4
Waunhir No.2 Mine	LM	0	—	1	1
Wearmouth Mine	CM	0	197	9	206
Welbeck	CM	0	—	11	11
Westoe Mine	CM	0	121	14	135
Wheldale Mine	CM	0	—	4	4
Whitemoor Mine	CM	0	—	1	1
Wistow Mine	CM	0	—	6	6
Woodside Drift	LM	—	1	2	3
Woody Close Drift Mine	LM	0	—	1	1
Woolley/Redbridge Mine	CM	0	—	11	11
Wrytree Farm Drift Mine	LM	1	5	0	6

Youth Unemployment

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list *(a)* the number of training places available to the young unemployed and *(b)* the range of opportunities available to the young unemployed in the Barnsley, East constituency.

Mr. Jackson: The information is not available in the form requested.

In 1991-92 Barnsley and Doncaster training and enterprise council (TEC) has contracted with local training providers on a training week basis. In the Barnsley local authority district the number of training weeks available will allow for an average in training level of 2,550 places for the remainder of this year.

The TEC has confirmed that it is confident of meeting the Government's guarantee to young people and in doing so is providing a wide range of training opportunities which they believe will meet known local needs.

The Government have guaranteed that all young people who are under 18 and not in full-time education or a job and are seeking training are offered and, if necessary, re-offered a suitable youth training (YT) place. The Government remain committed to ensuring that the YT guarantee is met.

In the Barnsley, East constituency the employment service offers opportunities to take a job, join a jobclub, or attend jobsearch seminar, restart course, job review workshop, or a job preparation course. There are varying eligibility criteria for these opportunities.

WALES

BA Engine Maintenance Plant

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the Director General of Fair Trading and others concerning the reference to the Office of Fair Trading of the sale of British Airways aero-engine maintenance plant at Nantgarw to assess its effect on competition on the market for servicing and supply of aero-engines; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: As is normal practice when proposed mergers have implications for Wales, the Welsh Office has been consulted by the Office of Fair Trading.

Industrial and Maritime Museum

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the chairman of the court of governors of the National Museum of Wales concerning the future expansion of the Wales Industrial and Maritime museum; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Initial discussions about the National Museum of Wales' plans for the Welsh Industrial and Maritime museum have taken place between officials. The proposals are being considered along with other plans for developments in Cardiff bay.

Cardiff Bay Barrage

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Countryside Council for Wales concerning the exclusion of the Cardiff bay site of special scientific interest from the special protection area under the European Community wild birds directive for the lower Severn estuary.

Mr. David Hunt: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and I reached our decision following careful consideration of a proposal submitted by the then Nature Conservancy Council, one of the predecessor bodies to the Countryside Council for Wales. The council has been fully consulted about the future of Cardiff bay in the context of the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many written representations he has received concerning the groundwater effects of the proposed Cardiff bay barrage as part of the public consultation exercise running from 25 September to 25 December.

Mr. David Hunt: None, but we are not yet half way through the three-month consultation period which ends on 31 December.

Children in Hospital

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to issue a new circular on the welfare of children in hospital; and what factors have led to this timetable for its issue.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: We expect to issue new guidance on the welfare of children in hospital by the end of the year. This timetable arises from the need to revise existing guidance.

SCOTLAND

Parents Charter

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the rights given to parents under the parents charter if they consider that performance of the Scottish Office in education is inadequate.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The parents charter relates to parents' rights in respect of the direct provision of education for their children, which in large part is the responsibility of education authorities. Parents will have new rights, through school boards, to have their interests taken into account when a school is inspected by Her Majesty's inspectors of schools.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how frequently Her Majesty's inspectorate will inspect *(a)* nursery, *(b)* primary and *(c)* secondary schools under the parents charter proposals.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Under the parents charter all schools will be required to produce a document setting out their educational plans and targets for two years ahead, and to report on progress over the previous two years.

Future levels of inspection will be set in the context of this enhanced system for quality assurance. Inspections will be undertaken more frequently where that is necessary and a greater emphasis will be placed on follow-up inspections. For next year, I anticipate that the number of schools inspected is likely to be about 25 to 30 per cent. higher than in the current Session.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what rights the parents charter gives in nursery education.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The provision of nursery education is not a statutory requirement: it is a matter for individual education authorities to consider in the light of the needs and priorities of their areas. I expect, however, that education authorities will wish to apply the principles of the parents charter, wherever appropriate, for the benefit of parents of pupils at nursery schools.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will indicate the level of financial provision he intends to make for new environmentally sensitive area designations between now and the end of the 1992-93 financial year.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend proposes to make available £1·5 million for the designation, subject to parliamentary approval, of new environmentally sensitive areas in Scotland in the financial year 1992-93. Provision will also be made for further development of existing first round areas and for continuing payments in existing and new areas after 1992-93.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many environmentally sensitive areas he expects to designate between now and 1 April 1993.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Government believe that environmentally sensitive areas offer significant benefits to farming and conservation. My right hon. Friend therefore

intends to designate further areas in Scotland in 1992 and 1993 and has sought advice from his statutory advisers. He will announce the areas in due course.

Health Records (Confidentiality)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what actions he is taking for the protection of health records confidentiality in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of Tuesday 15 October at column *146*.

DEFENCE

MV Polar Circle

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence by which date a decision has to be made about the future lease or purchase arrangements for MV Polar Circle after the 1991-92 season.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Under the terms of the charter contract, an option to purchase Polar Circle or to extend the charter can be taken by the Government at any time before 24 January 1992.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what modifications he expects to be required on MV Polar Circle prior to her departure for Antarctica.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Polar Circle requires modifications to add military communications equipment, to embark hydrographic equipment, and to provide suitable aviation facilities.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the charter for MV Polar Circle is *(a)* a bareboat charter or *(b)* a time charter.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Polar Circle has been leased on a bareboat charter.

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how long is the lease taken out on the MV Polar Circle; if it remains his policy to retain a naval vessel in Falklands waters beyond April 1992; and if he will consider renaming MV Polar Circle, HMS Endurance for the duration of its lease.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Polar Circle is currently under charter to the Royal Navy for a minimum of seven and a maximum of eight months to replace HMS Endurance for this season's deployment to the Antarctic. For the period of her present charter she will be commissioned as HMS Polar Circle. If she were to be accepted into the Royal Navy on a permanent basis, we would then consider the name she could carry through her service life. The Government have made clear their commitment to carry out for the foreseeable future the tasks formerly undertaken by HMS Endurance. Other naval vessels will continue to be deployed in support of our defence commitments in the Falklands Islands.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy in respect of the maintenance of a long-term naval presence in Antarctica.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Government are committed to maintaining for the foreseeable future the programme of work previously carried out by HMS Endurance.

Post-service Training

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information is made available to service personnel regarding access to training after leaving the services.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave him on 22 November 1990 at columns *207-8*. The employment service booklets are currently being revised, and we are also working with the employment service on the production of a guide detailing services available to personnel after they have left the armed forces. This will be issued to all personnel prior to discharge.

Redundancies

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* Army service personnel, *(b)* Royal Air Force service personnel and *(c)* Royal Navy personnel have applied for voluntary redundancy; and whether he has any plans to make further offers of voluntary redundancy.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Applications for selection for redundancy in 1992-93 have been received from over 5,000 Army personnel. We also expect to invite Army personnel to apply for redundancy in both 1993-94 and 1994-95.

The RN expects shortly to invite applications for redundancy in 1992-93.

It is not yet clear whether any redundancies will be needed in the RAF.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of those Army personnel who have applied for voluntary redundancy are *(a)* private soldiers, *(b)* NCOs and *(c)* officers; and what proportion of those Army personnel who have applied for voluntary redundancy come from (i) the Corps of Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, (ii) the Royal Corps of Signals and (iii) the Corps of Royal Engineers.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Some 85 per cent. of the applicants for voluntary redundancy are NCOs and 15 per cent. are officers.

Ten per cent. of applicants are from the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, 5 per cent. are from the Royal Signals and 7 per cent. are from the Corps of Royal Engineers.

Private soldiers in the Army are not invited to apply for redundancy.

Defence Estate (Repairs)

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total maintenance backlog of *(a)* unavoidable and essential repairs and *(b)* urgent repairs on the defence estate as of 1 April 1991.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The total maintenance backlog on the defence estate at 1 April 1991 is estimated to be:

	£ million
(a) Unavoidable and essential	494
(b) Urgent	150
Total	644

Armoured Divisions

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the percentage change in the capability of British armoured divisions in *(a)* the last four years and *(b)* the last nine years, respectively.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information is not held in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Towers

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the masts or towers over 500 ft tall owned by his Department which have been fitted with white strobe lights to conform to the recommendations of the Civil Aviation Authority, and the similar installations without such strobe lights.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The only mast owned by the MOD and over 500 ft tall to have been fitted with this type of hazard beacon is that at Aird Uig on the Isle of Lewis. The small number of remaining masts will be fitted as and when the existing obstacle lights become due for replacement.

Greenham Common

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether compensation has yet been paid to the commoners of Greenham common for their rights.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Yes.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the public opinion surveys carried out by his Department since 11 July 1991.

Mr. Archie Hamilton *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* The information requested is as follows:

Royal Navy—	Creative Development Research	To monitor the effectiveness of advertising material.
Royal Navy—	Advertising Monitor	
RAF—	Creative Development	

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give separate figures for the spending by his Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1991-92 and budgets for 1992-93.

Mr. Archie Hamilton *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* The information requested is as follows:

	(a) Television advertising	*(b)* Radio advertising	*(c)* Newspaper advertising	*(d)* Other promotional material	Total
1979-80	2·28	0·04	5·75	0·14	8·21
1980-81	0·54	0·17	6·10	0·85	7·66
1981-82	0·01	0·04	4·20	1·04	5·29
1982-83	0·01	0·07	3·90	1·03	5·01
1983-84	Nil	0·07	5·30	1·90	7·27
1984-85	0·49	0·02	6·86	1·50	8·87
1985-86	1·82	0·02	6·82	1·03	9·69
1986-87	0·73	0·22	8·07	1·17	10·19
1987-88	0·55	0·03	7·68	2·52	10·78
1988-89	2·86	0·18	9·56	4·44	17·04
1989-90	4·18	0·26	13·36	6·21	24·01
1990-91	2·88	0·22	9·21	8·62	20·93
1991-92	3·10	0·55	6·82	2·59	13·06
1992-93	Budgets not yet finalised				

Notes:
1. All figures are expressed in £(pounds) million.
2. 1991-92 figures are the latest estimates available.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide an up-to-date list of each television advertising campaign carried out, or to be carried out, by his Department during 1991-92, and of each other publicity campaign costing more than £100,000, giving for each *(a)* the topic, *(b)* the commencement date, *(c)* the duration and *(d)* the advertising, promotional and public relations companies involved.

Mr. Archie Hamilton *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* The information requested is as follows:

Royal Navy

Production of a television recruiting advertisement and television advertising campaign.	16 September to 17 November 1991	Young and Rubican Ltd. advertising agency responsible for television advertising campaign. advertisement produced by Paul Weiland Films.
Production of a radio recruting advertisement and radio advertising campaign.	14 October to 30 November 1991	Young and Rubican Ltd. advertising agency responsible for radio advertising campaign, advertisement produced by Central Office of Information.
Production of a cinema recruiting advertisement and cinema advertising campaign.	Spring 1992 (actual dates not yet known)	Young and Rubican Ltd. advertising agency to be responsible for cinema advertising campaign. advertisement produced by Paul Weiland Films.

Army

Production of a television/cinema recruiting advertisement and television/cinema advertising campaign.	24 June to 14 July 1991 3 August to 15 October 1991	Advertisement produced by Sid Roberson Films. Delaney, Fletcher, Slaymaker, Delaney & Bozell advertising agency responsible for advertising campaign.
Press campaign in support of the above.	8 July to 2 September 1991	
Press recruitment campaign.	3 November to 8 November 1991	Delaney Fletcher Slaymaker Delaney & Bozell advertising agency responsible for advertising campaign.

Territorial Army

1. A combined television/press recruitment campaign highlighting the range of weekend activities in the Territorial Army.	7 October to 4 November 1991 February 1992 (actual dates not yet known)	Advertisement produced by Ridley Scott Associates. Delaney Fletcher Slaymaker Delaney & Bozell advertising agency responsible for advertising campaign.
2. A press campaign to recruit specialist personnel.	16 September to 14 October 1991 February 1992 (actual dates not yet known)	Delaney Fletcher Slaymaker Delaney & Bozell advertising agency. Purcell Miller Tritton responsible for production of posters in support of 1 and 2 above.

Tri-Service

1. Press campaign to thank employers for releasing Volunteer Reserve Forces personnel for service during the Gulf crisis.	18 June to 23 June 1991	Young and Rubican Ltd. advertising agency.
2. Campaign to increase public awareness of Volunteer Resaerve Forces and employers' support for them.	4 weeks in December 1991 and January 1992 (actual dates not yet known)	

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Burma

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans exist to challenge at the credential meeting the right to a seat for the current regime in Burma in the United Nations General Assembly.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: None.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received concerning the involvement of the security forces of the Burmese Government with the trade in narcotics; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: No such representations have been made. We vigorously condemn all drugs trafficking and any groups in Burma involved in this pernicious trade.

Thailand

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received concerning the human rights implications of evictions by the Thai Government of people from their homes in the Dong Yai forest, Buriram Province in Northern Thailand, to facilitate logging operations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have received no such representations.

Foreign Affairs Council

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a statement on the outcome of the Foreign Affairs Council on 4 November.

Mr. Hurd: A meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council took place in Brussels on 4 November. My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and I represented the United Kingdom.

The Council issued a statement reconfirming its commitment to a substantial, balanced and global conclusion of the Uruguay round this year. It urged the Commission to make effective use of every opportunity to achieve progress in the negotiations. In particular the Council drew attention to the need to make good use of the forthcoming EC/US summit on 9 November to narrow differences between the EC and United States in the interests of a successful completion of the round.

The Council reviewed the situation in Yugoslavia and agreed a package of measures subject to a political decision by EC Ministers today. The measures comprise suspension of the EC/Yugoslavia trade and co-operation agreement and of Yugoslavia's inclusion in the EC's PHARE programme, and exclusion of Yugoslavia from the generalised system of preferences and from participation in ministerial meetings of the Group of 24. The Council also agreed in principle that any restrictive measures toward Yugoslavia as a whole should be accompanied by positive measures towards those republics co-operating with the peace process. There was agreement in principle that the United Nations Security Council should be invited to examine measures to tighten the arms embargo and to consider an oil embargo.

The Council discussed Cambodia in the light of the successful outcome of the Paris conference and invited the Commission to make proposals on future Community relations.

The Council reviewed the draft European coal and steel community protocol in the association agreement negotiations with Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland and decided to remit the question to the Committee of Permanent Representatives for further examination.

An EC/Jordan Co-operation Council took place after the Foreign Affairs Council. A lunch between EC and Arab Maghreb Union Foreign Ministers was held in the margins of the Foreign Affairs Council. There was no agreement to any change to existing EC measures against Libya.

Political Union

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a statement on the outcome of the ministerial meeting of the intergovernmental conference on political union on 4 November.

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and I attended a ministerial meeting of the intergovernmental conference on political union on 4 November. The meeting discussed the presidency's proposals for increased co-operation on interior and justice matters. A number of member states, in particular Germany, wish the Community to take responsibility for all co-operation in this area. That includes police co-operation, immigration and asylum policy. I agreed that the countries of Europe must work more closely together to combat illegal immigration and asylum and organised crime. Valuable work already goes on, and must be strengthened. But I made clear that we do not believe that bringing these areas into Community competence was necessary or desirable.

There was also a discussion of the presidency's proposed amendments to the social chapter of the treaty of Rome. I said that the Community needed a social dimension, but did not need any treaty change to achieve it. I again pointed to the undesirability of trying to introduce measures in the social area, especially in industrial relations, which might cut across national practices and which could lead to unsustainable costs across the Community.

These and other issues relating to the intergovernmental conference on political union will be discussed further at a meeting of Foreign Ministers to be held in Noordwijk in the Netherlands on 12 to 14 November.

An inter-institutional meeting between the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament was held on 5 November, following the 4 November ministerial meeting. My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs represented the Government.

ENVIRONMENT

Noise (Working Party Report)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the action he proposes to take arising from the noise review working party report published in October 1990.

Mr. Baldry: The Government's policy on noise was set out in the White Paper "This Common Inheritance" and reflects much of the thinking of the noise review working party. My speech to the Noise Council seminar on 15 May and that of my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside to the Institution of Environmental Health Officers on 10 September summarised progress.

A number of the working party's recommendations have already been implemented and the Government are actively working on others. Some of the main noise measures that have been taken are as follows.

The Environmental Protection Act 1990 has clarified local authority responsibilities for noise control and increased the maximum fine for statutory noise nuisance from business premises to £20,000. The Government are funding a pilot neighbourhood noise awareness scheme at Forest Hill, and are grant-aiding a neighbour mediation scheme in Bristol and a noise awareness project for school children in Nottingham. One of the eligible categories for grant under this year's environmental grant fund is for the formation of schemes to develop noise awareness/mediation. The Government are in contact with audio manufacturers to discuss good practice for audio users.

We have issued for comment guidance for environmental health officers and the police on existing powers to control noisy parties. In addition the Government have set up a working party to consider whether there is a need for further measures to control noisy parties. A draft code of practice on pop concerts has been published.

The Building Regulations governing noise within buildings are to be amended to include for the first time in England and Wales noise insulation for flat conversions which will be as close as possible to standards for new buildings. Comments on our proposals have been received and it is planned that regulations will be laid by early December with a view to their coming into force next June.

The Government have published a consultation document on tighter noise requirements for car alarms fitted to motor vehicles first used from August 1992. The main proposal is that the length of alarm be reduced from five minutes to 30 seconds and audible arming signals be banned. Responses to the consultation exercise are being considered. Also we shall be reviewing the new powers to control burglar alarms taken by London local authorities to determine whether there is a case for extending them nationwide.

The Government have recently issued draft guidance for consultation on control of noise at surface mineral workings and we shall shortly be issuing draft planning policy guidance for consultation on noise and new development, to update and expand existing advice. This will include noise from roads, aircraft, railways and industry. It will also take forward the working party's several recommendations about the need to establish action levels or exposure bands for controlling new development.

The Government plan to carry out research in 1992-93 to assess whether the current noise standard for noise insulation for new roads is still appropriate. We hope shortly to announce our conclusions on the report of the committee set up under the chairmanship of Dr. Mitchell to consider a noise insulation standard for new railway lines. The Government will consult on a draft of the regulations before they are made. A proposed revised planning procedure for new railway lines has been announced.

The Government have issued a consultation paper on control of noise at aerodromes. The main proposal is a new power to designate aerodromes—where informal consultation proves inadequate—to introduce formal consultative arrangements with the local authority. The extension of abatement orders to helicopters take-off and aerodrome ground running has been canvassed. The consultation period runs until end of the year. Also the Government recently announced that the amount of low flying by military jet aircraft is to decrease by about 30 per cent. over the next three years. The index for measurement of aircraft noise has been replaced by a more satisfactory measure.

Government policy on noise is underpinned with appropriate research and our programme has been re-aligned with priorities identified by the noise review working party. Forthcoming research includes a national noise attitude study, a model for human response to transportation noise, assessment and prediction of industrial noise, and low frequency noise.

Listed Buildings (Fittings)

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether a painting on an overmantel which rests on a mantelpiece in a listed building forms part of the fittings and fixtures for which his Department has control over their destination.

Mr. Yeo: Section 1(5)*(a)* of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, in defining the term "listed building", provides that for the purposes of the Act any object or structure fixed to the building shall be treated as part of the building, and therefore are subject to listed building controls.

Whether a particular item is regarded as a fixture or a chattel will depend on the individual facts of each case; the test to be applied to listed buildings is the same as for other property. The courts have held that the issues to be considered are the degree to which an object is physically attached to a building, and the purpose for which it was attached.

Private Tenancies

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many private sector tenancies were available annually, within the United Kingdom, for each year since 1979;

(2) what number of private sector tenancies were available annually within *(a)* England and *(b)* Yorkshire and Humberside, for each year since 1979.

Mr. Yeo: The available information relates to the number of private sector tenants who had been living in their accommodation for less than a year, as estimated from annual labour force surveys (LFS). Since some households will have moved more than once in the previous year, the total number of tenancies that became available each year will have been higher than the numbers shown in the table.

Private renters resident under one year

thousands

	Great Britain	*England*	*Yorks and Humberside*
1981	440	390	30
1983	500	430	40
1984	540	470	30
1985	490	420	50
1986	490	420	40
1987	560	490	50
1988	580	520	60
1989	510	480	40
1990	580	540	50

Notes:

1. The table shows moves in the 12 months before the time of interview, which was at some point between March and April each year.
2. The LFS is a sample survey so the estimates are subject to sampling errors. For Great Britain and England the estimates are probably accurate to about 20,00 households either way up to 1983 and 30,000 either way from 1984 on. For Yorkshire and Humberside they are probably accurate to between 5,000 and 10,000 either way.
3. The LFS was biennial until 1983 and there was no survey in 1980 or 1982.

Grant-aided Work

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what monitoring his Department has done with regard to the quality of grant-aided work in relation to paragraph 109 of DoE circular 12/90; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: As paragraph 109 of circular 12/90 explains, the quality of grant-aided work is ultimately a matter between the applicant and the building contractor. That paragraph also makes clear that payment of grant is conditional upon the works being executed to the satisfaction of the local housing authority, and that authorities should not certify as satisfactorily completed any works displaying an unacceptable quality of workmanship, or where the objectives of the grant are not met. Monitoring of the quality of grant-aided work is therefore already undertaken by local authorities and there is no need for the Department to be involved.

Development

Mr. Colin Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what representations he has received from the Association of District Councils on the effectiveness of current legislation in enabling the control of development with particular reference to development which constitutes a departure from the structure plan;

(2) what advice he gives to local planning authorities when they are considering applications which involve development which constitutes a departure from the structure plan.

Mr. Yeo: No such representations have been received. A local planning authority which is considering a planning application that involves development constituting a departure from the structure plan should follow the procedures in the Town and Country Planning (Development Plans) (England) Direction 1981. Advice is given to authorities in Department of the Environment circular 2/81.

Environmental Protection Act (Prosecutions)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many successful prosecutions have been brought against duty bodies under part IV of the Environmental Protection Act 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: Information on the number of litter abatement orders obtained and litter abatement notices served on duty bodies is not held centrally. However, the Tidy Britain Group, with the encouragement of my Department, undertook a survey of all local authorities in July this year to monitor the implementation of part IV of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. None of the 331 respondents reported that prosecutions had been brought against them, although 13 authorities said that they had been notified of an intention to bring a prosecution under part IV.

Information on the number of duty bodies prosecuted in 1991 for failing to comply with a litter abatement order or a litter abatement notice under sections 91 and 92 of the Act will be available along with the publication of the annual series of criminal statistics in late 1992.

The number of prosecutions is not a reflection of the success of the measures in the Act, which are designed primarily as deterrents.

Phipps Bridge Estate

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will assist the London borough of Merton to rebuild the Phipps Bridge estate following the proposals submitted to his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: I understand that Merton is preparing new proposals for tackling the problems of this estate. My Department will do whatever it can to assist a satisfactory outcome.

Control of Pollution Act

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what provisions to make regulations under the Control of Pollution Act 1974 have not been implemented.

Mr. Baldry: Sections 6, 11, 18, 21, 23, 29, 45, 73, 94, 102 and 103. The reasons for non-implementation vary, but they include provisions being superseded by the Water Act 1989 and the Environmental Protection Act 1990, and the fact that some of the provisions related to reserve powers.

Parliamentary Properties

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the office properties in the Westminster area for which he is currently negotiating leases for parliamentary use.

Mr. Yeo: It would be inappropriate to provide this information while negotiations are still taking place.

Stop Notices

Mr. Michael Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the appropriate ministerial order will be made to implement section 9 of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 dealing with stop notices.

Sir George Young: Shortly.

Severn Estuary Protection Areas

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) when he expects to submit the lower Severn estuary special protection area to the European Commission under the wild birds directive;

(2) when he expects to submit the middle Severn estuary special protection area application to the European Commission environment directorate.

Mr. Baldry: The former Nature Conservancy Council's proposal for the designation of the lower Severn estuary as a special protection area for birds is under consideration within Government. The case for designation will be decided jointly by my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for the Environment and the Secretary of State for Wales. The European Commission will be notified of the decision in due course.

Noxious Waste

Mr. Ashton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) when he intends to announce his decision on the proposed byelaws submitted to him by Bassetlaw district council regarding the transport of noxious waste; and if he will make a statement;

(2) when his Department expects to reply to the last five letters from Bassetlaw district council from 4 June 1990 to 19 September 1991 concerning the adoption of byelaws under section 82 of the Public Health Act 1936 relating to the transportation of noxious substances and removal through streets of offensive matter or liquid.

Mr. Baldry: The council was informed on 3 October that as much priority as possible was being given to its application given the present very high workload on the part of my Department which is responsible for local environmental issues.

Falmouth School of Art and Design

Mr. Mudd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will issue an article 14 direction in the matter of the planning application by Falmouth school of art and design.

Mr. Yeo: It is not necessary for my right hon. Friend to do so. There will be sufficient time for him to decide whether issues of more than local importance are involve which would justify calling in the applications, since I understand that they will not be decided by Carrick district council until 11 December.

"Cheshire 2001"

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to set up an inquiry at an early date into the proposals entitled "Cheshire 2001: A Strategy for the Future", submitted by Cheshire county council and Chester district council.

Sir George Young: The Secretary of State for the Environment has already held an examination in public on the Cheshire replacement structure plan—"Cheshire 2001", and there has been a full public consultation on his proposed modifications to the plan. He is considering all representations including those by Cheshire county council and the City of Chester before reaching his final decision.

Pollution Inspectorate

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the manpower resources of the pollution inspectorate.

Mr. Trippier: I gave details of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution (HMIP) staffing to the House earlier today.

In January I announced that HMIP had been allocated over 80 new posts, to enable it to expand to 313 staff by 1 April 1992. I indicated that HMIP's resources would be kept under review in the light of its responsibilities for implementing the new system of integrated pollution control (IPC) under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

I have now authorised a further increase of around 50 staff, raising HMIP's 1992-93 complement to over 360 staff, effective from April 1992. This compares with a total of 133 staff in post when HMIP set up in April 1987, and underlines the Government's commitment to the highest standards of environmental protection.

Recruitment of the additional pollution inspectors is in progress, with over 1,600 applications for the posts. This shows a high level of interest in HMIP and its responsibilities for protecting the environment.

HMIP's manpower requirements for later years will be kept under review as IPC is progressively implemented and the inspectorate's workload increases further.

The following table gives details of HMIP's complement and staff-in-post figures since its formation in April 1987.

There are currently (1 November 1991) 270 staff in post.

HMIP staffing 1987-1992[1]

	Complement	*Staff in post*
April 1987[2]	199	133
April 1988	[3]183	157
April 1989	194	165
April 1990	212	172
April 1991	248	232
April 1992 previously	313	—
now increased to: over	[4]360	—
November 1991		270

Notes:

[1]All figures exclude the former Radioactive Waste Policy and Administration Division, which transferred from HMIP to the DOE Directorate of Pollution Control and Waste in November 1990 (28 staff).

[2]Date of formation of HMIP.

[3]Drop in complement due to transfer of waste policy functions and 11 staff to DOE Waste Management Division in 1987-88.

[4]Provisional figure.

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will give separate figures for the spending by his Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1991-92 and budgets for 1992-93.

(2) what was the total expenditure by his Department on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1991-92 and budget for 1992-93.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* The information in respect of paid publicity and associated staff costs for my Department (including agencies) is:

	£ million
1985-86	3·5
1986-87	4·2
1987-88	4·8
1988-89	6·9
1989-90	31·5
1990-91	7·5
1991-92	[1]8·6

[1] Estimate.

Expenditure is not broken down between different publicity media and information relating to financial years 1979-80 to 1984-85 inclusive is not readily available and could not be obtained without disproportionate cost. Budgets for 1992-93 have not yet been set.

Housing Expenditure

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a series in *(a)* cash prices, *(b)* 1990-91 prices and *(c)* as a proportion of gross domestic product, Government capital spending on housing both net and gross of receipts.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* The available information, consistent with the new public expenditure planning total introduced in 1990, is as follows.

Government capital expenditure on housing—England

	Cash (£ million)		*1990-91 prices (£ million)*		*Percentage of GDP*	
	gross[1]	*net*[2]	*gross*[1]	*net*[2]	*gross*[1]	*net*[2]
1984-85	2,623·0	2,576·0	3,732·1	3,665·2	0·8	0·8
1985-86	2,564·8	2,460·1	3,458·4	3,317·2	0·7	0·7
1986-87	2,422·4	2,290·3	3,162·4	2,989·9	0·6	0·6
1987-88	2,446·0	2,322·4	3,028·5	2,875·5	0·6	0·5
1988-89	2,389·1	2,246·8	2,759·9	2,595·5	0·5	0·5
1989-90	2,451·6	2,324·5	2,659·6	2,521·7	0·5	0·5
1990-91	3,121·4	3,042·9	3,121·4	3,042·9	0·6	0·5
1991-92 estimate	3,707·1	3,614·1	3,464·6	3,377·7	0·6	0·6

[1] Housing Corporation gross capital expenditure (including use of receipts), local authority capital (excluding authorities' self-financed expenditure), and other capital expenditure (including, in 1991-92 only, Housing Action Trusts).

[2] As [1] less Housing Corporation receipts.

Gross Government capital expenditure on housing does not include local authorities' self-financed expenditure and net expenditure does not take account of authorities' receipts which increased from £1,630 million in 1984-85 to £3,300 million in 1988-89 and in 1990-91 were an estimated £2,450 million.

Information on a comparable basis for years before 1984-85 can be derived only at disproportionate cost. However, figures for earlier years on the old planning total basis are contained in public expenditure White Papers published prior to 1990.

PSA Services

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he proposes to make any changes to the running costs cash limit on PSA services vote in 1991-92.

Sir George Young *[pursuant to his answer, 6 November c.159-60]:* I will be making a further £8,844,000 available in 1991-92 for cash incentive schemes, to help council tenants buy their own homes in the private sector, and at the same time release permanent housing for homeless families, who might otherwise be in bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

This will involve an increase in the DOE/LACAP non-voted cash limit from £3,007,648,000 to £3,016,492,000.

Cash incentive schemes have been successful both in freeing family-sized local authority properties for use by homeless families and in helping local authority tenants who want to buy to realise their ambition. They offer excellent value for money for local authorities and their tenants.

These extra funds must be used in the present financial year. The demand from tenants has been high and this extra money will ensure even greater benefit for them and for homeless families needing a permanent home.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Trade Statistics

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will publish a table showing for each year since 1961 and the current year to date the ration of United Kingdom exports of manufactures to the United States of America to imports of manufactures from the United States of America, the comparable figures for United Kingdom trade with Germany and Japan, and the figures for German and Japanese trade with the United States of America; and if he will give the real exchange rate in each case based on relative export prices, in terms of a common currency.

Mr. Sainsbury: This information can be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

Industrial Competitiveness

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to what extent the cost competitiveness of British industry has correlated with the export performance of British industry in manufactured goods since 1983; and what information he has on price elasticities for France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States of America over the same period.

Mr. Sainsbury: Export performance depends not only on cost competitiveness but on non price factors such as quality, reliability and delivery. Between 1983 and 1990, United Kingdom cost competitiveness in the manufacturing sector (measured by relative unit labour costs) improved by 1·3 per cent. and the volume of United Kingdom manufactured exports rose by 63·1 per cent.

Information on price elasticities is available from a variety of sources.

New Cars Report

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to publish the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on the prices of new cars and the distribution system.

Mr. Redwood: The MMC's report on the supply of new cars is currently being considered by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. The report will be published as soon as is practicable.

Balance of Trade

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish a table of crude balances of visible trade in sterling terms at current prices and exchange rates since 1988 for Belgium and Luxembourg, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the United States of America and the United Kingdom; and if he will provide similar information for invisible trade for each year since 1974.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer to the answers I gave to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan on 18 October at col. *286* and on 15 October at cols. *129-32*.

Latin America

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will list the British manufactured goods exported to the top 10 Latin American countries importers for each year since 1975, expressing the value of such exports in 1991 moneys;

(2) if he will give a list of the top 10 Latin American countries exporters to Britain for each year since 1975, indicating the type of products imported by Britain and their value in 1991 moneys.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer to the answers I gave to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan on 16 October at columns *169-73*.

Nord-Pas de Calais

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has on the number and types of British companies establishing themselves in Nord-Pas de Calais, in order to avail themselves of continental loading gauge freight facilities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: I have no information on the number of types of British companies which are locating in the Nord-Pas de Calais.

I cannot say whether the continental loading gauge facilities would play any part in such companies' decisions. It is for companies themselves to establish what opportunities offer them the most attractive prospects and where to establish.

British Telecom

Dr. Bray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will take steps to ensure that prior to the sale of further shares in British Telecom the

management of the company honours commitments given at the time of privatisation to continue to discuss changes to staff terms and conditions with its trade union representatives.

Mr. Redwood: The Government made clear at the time of privatisation that the commercial management of BT was for the company and that the Government would not use their shareholding to intervene in such matters. This remains the position.

Internal Market Council

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Internal Market Council held in Brussels on Thursday 7 November.

Mr. Redwood: I attended the Internal Market Council on 7 November. The Council reviewed progress towards completion of the single market measures. The United Kingdom asked for faster progress on measures relating to the food industry and was promised by the Commissioner that 10 draft directives and amendments to directives covering issues like colorants, additives and food hygiene would be brought before the council over the next six months. The Council noted the Commission's review of implementation which praised the United Kingdom, Denmark and some other countries for their good implementation record, but which asked Italy to speed up implementation of a large number of outstanding measures.

The Council failed to agree on the three outstanding vehicle type approval draft directives which would complete the set of 44 directives needed to allow whole vehicle type approval under Community rules. There was a majority around the table in favour of the directives, but France, Italy and Spain blocked progress at the meeting because they are unhappy with the arrangements related to implementation of the agreement on Japanese car imports into the Community. The Commission, the United Kingdom and other countries in the majority urged the manufacturers' case for these type approvals. It was hoped that the problem could be resolved by the December Internal Market Council.

The Council expressed interest in a presidency/United Kingdom suggestion of a means of making progress on the draft irradiation directive and remitted the suggested outline compromise position from the presidency and the United Kingdom to a working party.

The Council confirmed a common position on the Impact 2 technology programme following its substantial amendment in recent months. The United Kingdom made a statement saying that it was very important that moneys in this programme were not used in a way which damaged competitive technologies and companies operating commercially in the marketplace.

Much of the time of the Council was given over to the draft sweeteners directive. A common position was finally agreed using a Commission compromise which allows Germany to ban the use of sweeteners in domestically brewed traditional beers while creating common rules for other food and drink products in the Community regulating the proportion of sweetener that can be included in their production. The United Kingdom had to defend the position of the low and no alcohol beer industry in the United Kingdom which uses sweeteners as the French proposed an amendment which would have banned the use of sweeteners in all such beers. Support for the presidency compromise eventually materialised which protected the United Kingdom interest as well as the German.

There was no substantial discussion on a draft proposal for a pension funds directive which is broadly satisfactory from a United Kingdom point of view, and there was agreement that the European Parliament was behaving unreasonably in withholding its opinion on the insurance directive in protest against the lack of progress on social legislation in the Council.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Burma

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consultations he has had about aid to Burma with other Governments; and what information he has about changes in aid provided to Burma by other Governments.

Mrs. Chalker: After the repression of the democracy movement in 1988, Britain participated actively in consultations among EC partners, which resulted in agreement to suspend all bilateral aid to Burma except for humanitarian and emergency aid. Other major donors took similar action although some continued to implement existing commitments.

We continue to liaise with other major donors on a regular basis, both through diplomatic missions in Rangoon, and through consultations in international as well as EC fora.

A comparison of official development assistance to Burma for 1988 and 1989 (the latest year for which figures for all countries are available) is given in the following table.

In 1990 the United Kingdom figure was £89,000.

Net official development assistance to Burma (Myanmar)

£ millions

Donor	*Amount*	
	1988	*1989*
Australia	4·6	2·6
Austria	n.a.	n.a.
Belgium	0·0	0·0
Canada	1·4	0·4
Denmark	0·2	0·1
Finland	1·4	2·9
France	5·5	0·5
Germany	20·8	2·8
Ireland	n.a.	n.a.
Italy	0·2	0·1
Japan	145·7	44·0
Netherlands	0·6	0·0
New Zealand	n.a.	n.a.
Norway	0·0	0·1
Sweden	n.a.	0·1
Switzerland	0·4	0·2
United Kingdom	2·2	0·7
United States	5·6	1·2
	186·6	55·7

Source: Geographical Distribution of Finacial Flows to Developing Countries 1986-89. (OECD Publications).

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensions

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the percentage increase in state retirement pension for each year since 1979; and what was the percentage increase in *(a)* prices and *(b)* average earnings in each of those years.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is given in the table.

Uprating date	*(A) Rate of Retirement Pension*	*(B) Percentage increase in rate of Retirement Pension*	*(C) Percentage increase in Retail Prices Index*	*(D) Percentage increase in average earnings*
November 1979	25·30	—	—	—
November 1980	27·15	16·5	15·3	17·9
November 1981	29·60	9·0	12·0	11·5
November 1982	32·85	11·0	6·3	8·3
November 1983	34·05	3·7	4·8	7·3
November 1984	35·80	5·1	4·9	6·5
November 1985	38·30	7·0	5·5	8·6
July 1986	38·70	1·0	1·7	5·7
April 1987	39·50	2·1	4·4	5·4
April 1988	41·15	4·2	3·9	8·4
April 1989	43·60	6·0	8·0	9·7
April 1990	46·90	7·6	9·4	9·3
April 1991	52·00	10·9	6·4	8·6

Notes.

(1) Column C gives the percentage increase in the Retail Prices Index (all items) between uprating dates. These figures *cannot* be used as uprating factors—an earlier period of price movements must be used as a proxy so that sufficient time is available, for administrative purposes, to ensure timeous payment of the new rates. For example, the increase in April 1991, 10·9 per cent., represents the percentage change in the RPI from September 1989 to September 1990.

(2) Column B gives the percentage increase in the Retirement Pension between uprating dates (the uprating factor).

(3) Column A gives the rate of Category A Retirement Pension for a single person.

(4) Column D gives the percentage increase in Average Earnings—New Series Index (whole economy) seasonally adjusted.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the average annual rate of turnover of staff in his Department's offices dealing directly with the public for each of the last five years; and what were the different rates between clerical and executive grades.

Miss Widdecombe: Information is not readily available in the form requested. The table shows (1) the resignation rate for all DSS staff for the three years 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91; earlier years are not available for DSS alone; and (2) the turnover rate for 1990-91 for the units now comprising the Benefits and Contributions Agency field operations.

	(1) Resignations, all DSS			*(2) Turnover field operations 1990-91*
	1988-89	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	
	Percentage			
All grades	8·1	7·8	5·2	[1]9·1
EO/LOI	3·0	2·7	1·4	2·7
AO/LOII	8·8	7·8	4·8	6·9
AA	18·0	20·1	14·9	25·8

[1] up to and including UG6

Notes.

1. Turnover is defined as resignations, retirements, deaths, dismissals, transfers to other government departments and the termination of fixed-term contracts.
2. There are technical difficulties in deriving accurate turnover figures for 1990-91 because of the effect of restructuring in preparation for Agency status. These figures are the best available at present.

Pensions

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of current gross average earnings is represented, in the United Kingdom and in each European Community country, by the *(a)* basic pension, *(b)* earnings-related supplement, and *(c)* total state pension for (i) a single pensioner and (ii) a pensioner with a dependent spouse of pension age.

Mr. Jack: It is not possible to compare pension arrangements between EC member states in the manner requested by the hon. Member. Only four countries within the EC—the United Kingdom, Denmark, Netherlands and the Republic of Ireland—pay a flat-rate state pension. Other countries operate earnings-related schemes whereby each person's pension is directly related to his own earnings level during his working life and accordingly has a different and individual relationship to national average earnings.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will allow those state pensioners in receipt of small occupational pensions to relinquish those pensions so that they can claim income support and the passported benefits;

(2) what measures his Department is taking to ensure that those state pensioners who have a small occupational pension are not penalised by the benefit rules such that they are worse off than those without an occupational pension.

Miss Widdecombe: Many pensioners who have both a state retirement pension and an occupational pension are entitled to income support. They, like all income support

recipients, automatically qualify for maximum housing benefit and community charge benefit which are the passported benefits for which this Department is responsible.

A pensioner whose occupational pension takes his total income above the level at which income support would be payable should still be better off than a person in similar circumstances who qualifies for income support. This is due to the effect of the tapers in housing benefit and community charge benefit which enable the pensioner to keep some of that extra income. The tapers are applied to any income above the applicable amount appropriate to a particular case and the resulting figure is offset against the maximum benefit payable. In housing benefit the taper is 65 per cent. and in community charge benefit it is 15 per cent.

It would not be permissible, however, for any claimant to give up an income in order to claim public money to which he or she is not properly entitled.

Income Support

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the likely impact of SI, 1991, No. 1559 on reducing future entitlement to income support and the numbers eligible; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) on 7 November.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what savings on income support payments are expected from reduced mortgage interest repayments arising from SI 1991 No. 1520.

Miss Widdecombe: SI 1991 No. 1520 amends the Family Credit (General) Regulations 1987 and will make it easier for working parents to claim family credit by reducing the number of hours they need to work from 24 to 16 hours a week from April 1992.

We estimate that up to 5,000 parents with a mortgage, who are receiving income support and working 16 or more hours a week in April 1992, will become eligible for family credit and be better off. In addition, up to 10,000 working families with children are likely to continue to receive help with their mortgage in income support under special protection arrangements, on top of any family credit they receive.

As these families will be either better off or no worse off, there is expected to be a benefit cost, rather than a saving, as a result of this amendment.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of the total number of persons, including dependants, in receipt of income support; how many are currently subject to deductions in their income support on grounds of fuel, rent, water, poll tax, social fund, or other reasons amounting to *(a)* less than £1 a week, *(b)* £1 to £2 a week, *(c)* £2 to £3 a week, *(d)* £3 to £4 a week, *(e)* £4 to £5 a week, *(f)* £5 to £7 a week, *(g)* £7 to £10 a week and *(h)* over £10 a week; and what percentage each of these totals represents as a proportion of the total number dependent on income support.

Miss Widdecombe: The information available is shown in the table.

Total number of people dependant on income support 7,022,222

Ranges of deductions	*Fuel*	*Rent arrears*	*Water*	*Social fund*	*Other*
£0·01 to £0·99					
Number	100	—	201	2,099	2,000
Percentage	0·001	—	0·003	0·030	0·028
£1·00 to £1·99					
Number	701	46,636	5,989	24,168	13,477
Percentage	0·010	0·664	0·085	0·344	0·192
£2·00 to £2·99					
Number	1,796	100	5,792	48,027	24,071
Percentage	0·026	0·001	0·082	0·684	0·343
£3·00 to £3·99					
Number	5,295	—	12,373	72,609	10,376
Percentage	0·075	—	0·176	1·034	0·148
£4·00 to £4·99					
Number	6,095	—	14,093	62,563	4,094
Percentage	0·087	—	0·201	0·891	0·058
£5·00 to £6·99					
Number	20,086	—	4,002	82,164	25,960
Percentage	0·286	—	0·057	1·170	0·370
£7·00 to £9·99					
Number	49,848	—	200	56,919	6,792
Percentage	0·710	—	0·003	0·811	0·097
£10·00 and over					
Number	98,590	—	100	34,454	11,889
Percentage	1·404	—	0·001	0·490	0·169

Source: Income Support Annual Statistical Inquiry 1990.
Notes:
1. A person may appear in more than one deduction group.
2. A person may have more than one deduction in either the fuel or others deduction groups but will be counted only once in that group.
3. The figures represent the number of people in each of the deduction groups.
4. Percentages shown are the number in each category as a percentage of the total number of people dependant on income support.
5. Information on Community Charge arrears was not collected at the time of the inquiry.

Fraud

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Secuurity if he will consider introducing a system for prosecuting social security fraud involving civil penalties along the lines of those provided for in the Taxes Act; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: In 1989 an efficiency scrutiny into social security fraud recommended the continued use of prosecution powers in the Social Security Act 1986, or the Theft Act 1968 in more serious cases. We have no plans to change these arrangements. Civil proceedings may also be taken to recover an overpayment of benefit from a fraudulent claim.

Social Fund

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to collect information at district office level on *(a)* the number of applications made for the various components of the social fund, *(b)* the number refused and accepted, *(c)* the grounds for refusal and *(d)* the numbers of loans recovered.

Miss Widdecombe: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Open-plan Offices

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals his Department has to study the effects of a system of open-plan offices and facilities along the lines of those introduced by the Employment Service; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Office facilities for the reception of customers is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many housing benefit claimants *(a)* in Nottingham and *(b)* in the United Kingdom are awaiting payment of outstanding housing benefit; what is the total sum involved; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is not available.

Pensioners

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in what form his Department holds information on projected numbers of individuals likely to draw a state earnings-related pension in future years.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department does not hold this information in any form because it is not required in order to estimate the future total cost of the additional pension.

Severe Disability Premium

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will now take steps to implement the recommendations of the Social Security Advisory Committee to provide transitional protection for those people who will no longer qualify for severe disability premium after 11 November; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Steps have already been taken. Regulations which came into force on 11 November provide preserved rights for those who secured the premium, or took steps to secure it, through joint tenancies or co-ownerships before 21 October 1991.

Benefit Rates

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a schedule of social security benefit rates for 1991-92 and 1992-93.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is in the table.

Schedule of main proposed Social Security Benefit Rates from April 1992
(weekly rates unless otherwise shown)

Attendance Allowance

	Old rates 1991	*New rates 1992*
Higher rate	41·65	43·35
Lower rate	27·80	28·95

Child Benefit

	Old rates 1991	*New rates 1992*
Only, elder or eldest for whom child benefit is payable[1]	9·25	9·65
Each subsequent child[1]	7·50	7·80

[1] October 1991 rate

Child's Special Allowance

	Old rates 1991	*New rates 1992*
See note on Child Dependency Increase	10·70	10·85

Community charge benefit

	Old rates 1991	*New rates 1992*
Personal allowances		
single		
18 to 24[1]	31·40	33·60
25 or over	39·65	42·45
lone parent—18 or over	39·65	42·45
couple—one or both over 18	62·25	66·60
dependent children		
under 11[1]	13·60	14·55
11 to 15[1]	20·00	21·40
16 to 17[1]	23·90	25·55
18[1]	31·40	33·60
Premiums		
family[1]	8·70	9·30
lone parent	10·05	10·60
pensioner		
single	13·75	14·70
couple	20·90	22·35
pensioner (enhanced)		
single	15·55	16·65
couple	23·35	25·00
pensioner (higher)		
single	18·45	20·75
couple	26·20	29·55

	Old rates 1991	New rates 1992
disability		
single	16·65	17·80
couple	23·90	25·55
severe disability		
single	31·25	32·55
couple (one qualifies)	31·25	32·55
couple (both qualify)	62·50	65·10
disabled child	16·65	17·80
carer	10·80	11·55
Allowance for personal expenses for claimants in hospital		
higher rate	13·00	13·55
lower rate	10·40	10·85
Capital		
upper limit	16,000·00	16,000·00
amount disregarded	3,000·00	3,000·00
child's limit	3,000·00	3,000·00
Tariff income		
£1 for every complete £250 or part thereof between amount of capital disregarded and capital upper limit		
Earnings disregards		
where disability premium awarded	15·00	15·00
various specified employments	15·00	15·00
lone parent—not in receipt of IS	25·00	25·00
where the claimant has a partner	10·00	10·00
single claimant	5·00	5·00
Other income disregards		
maintenance disregard	—	15·00
war disablement pension and war widow's pension	10·00	10·00
voluntary and charitable payments	10·00	10·00
student loan	10·00	10·00
student's covenanted income	5·00	5·00
income from boarders: disregard the fixed amount (£20) plus 50 per cent. of the balance of the charge	20·00	20·00
Expenses for subtenants		
furnished or unfurnished	4·00	4·00
where heating is included, additional	8·05	8·60

[1] October 1991 Rate.

Dependency increases

	Old rates 1991	New rates 1992
Adult Dependency Increases		
For spouse or person looking after children, with:		
retirement pension on own insurance, invalidity pension, unemployability supplement and, if beneficiary over pension age, unemployment benefit	31·25	32·55
non-contributory retirement pension, invalid care allowance and severe disablement allowance	18·70	19·45
sickness benefit if beneficiary over pension age	29·95	31·20
unemployment benefit	25·55	26·60
maternity allowance/sickness benefit	24·50	25·50
Child Dependency Increases		
For each child, with:		
retirement pension, widows benefit, invalidity benefit, invalid care allowance, severe disablement allowance, higher rate industrial death benefit, unemployability supplement and sickness/ unemployment benefit if beneficiary over pension age	10·70	10·85

Note: The Overlapping Benefits Regulations provide for the rate of child dependency increases, guardian's allowance and child special allowance to be adjusted where the increase or allowance is payable for the eldest eligible child for whom child benefit is also payable. The weekly rate of the increase or allowance is reduced by the differential (less the 75p derived from the October increase in child benefit) between the rate of child benefit payable for the oldest eligible child and that payable for a subsequent child.

Disability Living Allowance

	Old rates 1991	New rates 1992
Care component		
Higher	—	43·35
Middle	—	28·95
Lower	—	11·55
Mobility component		
Higher	—	30·30
Lower	—	11·55

Disability Working Allowance

	Old rates 1991	New rates 1992
Adult credit		
Single people	—	42·40
Couples/Lone parents	—	58·80
Child credit		
Under 11	—	10·40
11 to 15	—	17·25
16 to 17	—	21·45
18	—	29·90
Applicable amount (ie taper threshold)		
Single people	—	39·95
Couples/Lone parents	—	66·60
Capital		
Upper limit	—	16,000·00
Amount disregarded	—	3,000·00
Child's limit	—	3,000·00
Tariff income		
£1 for every complete £250 or part thereof between amount of capital disregarded and capital upper limit		
Disregards		
Maintenance disregard	—	15·00
War disablement pension and war widow's pension	—	10·00
Voluntary and charitable payments	—	10·00
Student loan	—	10·00
Student's covenanted income	—	5·00
Income from boarders: Disregard the fixed amount (£20) plus 50 per cent. of the balance of the charge		
Expenses for subtenants		
Furnished or unfurnished	—	4·00
Where heating is included, additional	—	8·60

Earnings Rules

	Old rates 1991	New rates 1992
Invalid Care Allowance	30·00	40·00
Unemployment Benefit (daily rate)	2·00	2·00
Unemployment Benefit (maximum weekly amount)	52·00	54·00
Therapeutic earnings limit	39·00	40·50
Industrial injuries unemployability supplement permitted earnings level (annual amount)	2,028·00	2,106·00
War pensioners' unemployability supplement permitted earnings level (annual amount)	2,028·00	2,106·00
Adult dependency increases with sickness benefit where claimant is		
(a) under pension age	24·50	25·50
(b) over pension age	29·95	31·20
maternity allowance	24·50	25·50
unemployment benefit where claimant is		
(a) under pension age	25·55	26·60
(b) over pension age	31·25	32·55
retirement pension, invalidity pension, severe disablement allowance, unemployability supplement where dependant		
(a) is living with claimant	41·40	43·10
(b) still qualifies for the tapered earnings rule	45·09	45·09
retirement pension, invalidity pension and unemployability supplement where dependant not living with claimant	31·25	32·55
severe disablement allowance where dependant not living with claimant	18·70	19·45
invalid care allowance	18·70	19·45
Child dependency increases level at which CDIs payable with long-term benefits are affected by earnings of claimant's spouse or partner		
for first child	110·00	115·00
for each subsequent child	14·00	15·00

Family credit

	Old rates 1991	New rates 1992
Adult credit	38·30	41·00
Child credit	9·70	10·40
11 to 15	16·10	17·25
16 to 17	20·05	21·45
18	27·95	29·90
Applicable amount (ie taper threshold)	62·25	66·60
Capital		
upper limit	8,000·00	8,000·00
amount disregarded	3,000·00	3,000·00
child's limit	3,000·00	3,000·00
Tariff income		
£1 for every complete £250 or part thereof between amount of capital disregarded and capital upper limit		
Disregards		
maintenance disregard	—	15·00
war disablement and war widow's pension	10·00	10·00
voluntary and charitable payments	10·00	10·00
student loan	10·00	10·00
student's covenanted income	5·00	5·00
income from boarders:		
disregard the fixed amount (£20) plus 50 per cent. of the balance of the charge	20·00	20·00
Expenses for subtenants		
furnished or unfurnished	4·00	4·00
where heating is included, additional	8·05	8·60

Guardian's allowance

	Old rates 1991	New rates 1992
See note on Child Dependency Increase	10·70	10·85

Hospital downrating

	Old rates 1991	New rates 1992
20 per cent. rate	10·40	10·85
40 per cent. rate	20·80	21·70

Housing Benefit

	Old rates 1991	New rates 1992
Personal allowances		
single		
16 to 24[1]	31·40	33·60
25 or over	39·65	42·45
lone parent		
under 18[1]	31·40	33·60
18 or over	39·65	42·45
couple		
both under 18	47·30	50·60
one or both over 18	62·25	66·60
dependent children		
under 11[1]	13·60	14·55
11 to 15[1]	20·00	21·40
16 to 17[1]	23·90	25·55
18[1]	31·40	33·60
Premiums		
family[1]	8·70	9·30
lone parent	10·05	10·60
pensioner		
single	13·75	14·70
couple	20·90	22·35
pensioner (enhanced)		
single	15·55	16·65
couple	23·35	25·00
pensioner (higher)		
single	18·45	20·75
couple	26·20	29·55
disability		
single	16·65	17·80
couple	23·90	25·55
severe disability		
single	31·25	32·55
couple (one qualifies)	31·25	32·55
couple (both qualify)	62·50	65·10

	Old rates 1991	New rates 1992
disabled child	16·65	17·80
carer	10·80	11·55
Allowance for personal expenses for claimants in hospital		
higher rate	13·00	13·55
lower rate	10·40	10·85
Non-dependant deductions rent rebates and allowances aged 18 or over and in remunerative work		
gross income: low inc threshold to £99.99	13·50	8·00
gross income: £100 to £129.99	13·50	12·00
gross income: £130 or more	13·50	18·00
others, aged 18 or over		
or on Income Support and over 25	5·70	4·00
Low earnings threshold	62·15	65·00
Service charges for fuel		
heating	18·05	8·60
hot water	1·00	1·05
lighting	·65	·70
cooking	1·00	1·05
all fuel	10·70	11·40
Amount ineligible for meals		
three or more meals a day		
single claimant	14·20	15·20
each person in family aged 16 or over	14·20	15·20
each child under 16	7·15	7·65
less than three meals a day		
single claimant	9·45	10·10
each person in family aged 16 or over	9·45	10·10
each child under 16	4·70	5·05
breakfast only—claimant and each member of family	1·75	1·85
Capital		
upper limit	16,000·00	16,000·00
amount disregarded	3,000·00	3,000·00
child's limit	3,000·00	3,000·00
Tariff income		
£1 for every complete £250 or part thereof between amount of capital disregarded and capital upper limit		
Earnings disregards		
where disability premium awarded	15·00	15·00
various specified employments	15·00	15·00
lone parent—not in receipt of IS	25·00	25·00
where the claimant has a partner	10·00	10·00
single claimant	5·00	5·00
Other income disregards		
maintenance disregard	—	15·00
war disablement pension and war widow's pension	10·00	10·00
voluntary and charitable payments	10·00	10·00
student loan	10·00	10·00
student's convenanted income	5·00	5·00
income from boarders:		
disregard the fixed amount (£20) plus 50 per cent. of the balance of the charge	20·00	20·00
Expenses for subtenants		
furnished or unfurnished	4·00	4·00
where heating is included, additional	8·05	8·60

[1] October 1991 Rate.

Income support

	Old rates 1991	New rates 1992
Personal allowances		
single		
under 18—usual rate[1]	23·90	25·55
under 18—higher rate payable in specific circumstances	31·40	33·60
18 to 24[1]	31·40	33·60
25 or over	39·65	42·45
lone parent		
under 18—usual rate[1]	23·90	25·55
under 18—higher rate payable in specific circumstances[1]	31·40	33·60
18 or over	39·65	42·45
couple		
both under 18	47·30	50·60
one or both over 18	62·25	66·60
dependent children		
under 11[1]	13·60	14·55
11 to 15[1]	20·00	21·40
16 to 17[1]	23·90	25·55
18[1]	31·40	33·60
Premiums		
family[1]	8·70	9·30
lone parent	4·45	4·75
pensioner		
single	13·75	14·70
couple	20·90	22·35
pensioner (enhanced)		
single	15·55	16·65
couple	23·35	25·00
pensioner (higher)		
single	18·45	20·75
couple	26·20	29·55
disability		
single	16·65	17·80
couple	23·90	25·55
severe disability		
single	31·25	32·55
couple (one qualifies)	31·25	32·55
couple (both qualify)	62·50	65·10
disabled child	16·65	17·80
carer	10·80	11·55
Maximum amounts for accommodation and meals in residential care homes		
old age	160·00	175·00
very dependent elderly	185·00	205·00
mental disorder (not handicap)	170·00	185·00
drug/alcohol dependence	170·00	185·00
mental handicap	195·00	215·00
physical disablement		
(a) (under pension age)	230·00	245·00
(b) (over pension age)	160·00	175·00
others	160·00	175·00
maximum Greater London increase	23·00	25·00
nursing homes		
mental disorder (not handicap)	255·00	270·00
drug/alcohol dependence	255·00	270·00
mental handicap	260·00	275·00
terminal illness	275·00	280·00
physical disablement		
(a) (under pension age)	290·00	305·00

	Old rates 1991	New rates 1992
(b) (over pension age)	255·00	270·00
others (including elderly)	255·00	270·00
maximum Greater London increase	33·00	35·00
Amounts for meals where these cannot be purchased within the accommodation (Daily Rate)		
breakfast	1·10	1·10
midday meal	1·55	1·55
evening meal	1·55	1·55
Allowances for personal expenses for claimants in		
private and voluntary residential care and nursing homes personal expenses	11·40	12·20
dependent children		
(a) under 11	4·65	5·00
(b) 11 to 15	6·85	7·35
(c) 16 to 17	7·95	8·50
(d) age 18	11·40	12·20
hospital		
higher rate	13·00	13·55
lower rate	10·40	10·85
local authority (Pt III) accommodation	10·40	10·85
the Polish home Ilford Park		
max amount for accommodation and meals	160·00	175·00
personal expenses for claimant	15·10	16·15
personal expenses for partner	15·10	16·15
personal expenses for dep children		
(a) under 11	4·65	5·00
(b) 11 to 15	6·85	7·35
(c) 16 to 17	7·95	8·50
(d) 18	13·55	14·50
Housing costs		
Deduction for non-dependants aged 18 or over and in remunerative work		
gross income: low inclusive threshold to £99·99	13·50	8·00
gross income: £100 to £129·99	13·50	12·00
gross income: £130 or more	13·50	18·00
others, aged 18 or over,		
or on Income Support and over 25	5·70	4·00
Low earnings threshold	62·15	65·00
Deduction for direct payments		
arrears of housing, fuel and water costs	2·00	2·15
deductions for recovery of fines (introduced for first time from April 1992	—	2·15
Deductions for arrears of Community Charge		
single claimant or claimant's partner	2·00	2·15
joint couple debtors both on IS	3·15	3·35
Maximum rates for recovery of overpayments		
ordinary overpayments	6·00	6·45
where claimant convicted of fraud	8·00	8·60
Reduction in benefit for strikers	21·00	22·50
Capital		
upper limit	8,000·00	8,000·00
amount disregarded	3,000·00	3,000·00
child's limit	3,000·00	3,000·00
Tariff income		
£1 for every complete £250 or part thereof between amount of capital disregarded and capital upper limit		

	Old rates 1991	New rates 1992
Disregards		
standard earnings	5·00	5·00
higher earnings	15·00	15·00
war disablement pension and war widow's pension	10·00	10·00
voluntary and charitable payments	10·00	10·00
student loan	10·00	10·00
student's covenanted income	5·00	5·00
income from boarders:		
disregard the fixed amount (£20) plus 50 per cent. of the balance of the charge	20·00	20·00
Expenses for subtenants		
furnished or unfurnished	4·00	4·00
where heating is included, additional	8·05	8·60

Industrial death benefit

	Old rates 1991	New rates 1992
Widow's pension		
higher rate	52·00	54·15
lower rate	15·60	16·25

Industrial disablement pension

	Old rates 1991	New rates 1992
18 and over, or under 18 with dependants		
100 per cent.	84·90	88·40
90 per cent.	76·41	79·56
80 per cent.	67·92	70·72
70 per cent.	59·43	61·88
60 per cent.	50·94	53·04
50 per cent.	42·45	44·20
40 per cent.	33·96	35·36
30 per cent.	25·47	26·52
20 per cent.	16·98	17·68
Under 18		
100 per cent.	52·00	54·15
90 per cent.	46·80	48·74
80 per cent.	41·60	43·32
70 per cent.	36·40	37·91
60 per cent.	31·20	32·49
50 per cent.	26·00	27·08
40 per cent.	20·80	21·66
30 per cent.	15·60	16·25
20 per cent.	10·40	10·83
Maximum life gratuity (lump sum)	5,640·00	5,870·00
Unemployability Supplement	52·00	54·15
plus where appropriate an increase for early incapacity		
higher rate	11·10	11·55
middle rate	6·90	7·20
lower rate	3·45	3·60
Maximum reduced earnings allowance	33·96	35·36
Maximum retirement allowance	8·49	8·84
Constant attendance allowance		
exceptional rate	68·00	70·80
intermediate rate	51·00	53·10
normal maximum rate	34·00	35·40
part-time rate	17·00	17·70
Exceptionally severe disablement allowance	34·00	35·40

Invalidity allowances and benefits

	Old rates 1991	New rates 1992
Invalid Care Allowance	31·25	32·55
Invalidity Benefit		
Invalidity pension	52·00	54·15
Invalidity allowance		
higher rate	11·10	11·55
middle rate	6·90	7·20
lower rate	3·45	3·60

Maternity and one parent benefits

	Old rates 1991	New rates 1992
Maternity Allowance	40·60	42·25
One parent benefit	5·60	5·85

Pneumoconiosis, byssinosis, workmen's compensation (supplementation) and other schemes

	Old rates 1991	New rates 1992
Total disablement allowance and major incapacity allowance (maximum)	84·90	88·40
Partial disablement allowance	31·25	32·55
Unemployability supplement	52·00	54·15
plus where appropriate increases for early incapacity		
higher rate	11·10	11·55
middle rate	6·90	7·20
lower rate	3·45	3·60
Constant attendance allowance		
exceptional rate	68·00	70·80
intermediate rate	51·00	53·10
normal maximum rate	34·00	35·40
part-time rate	17·00	17·70
Exceptionally severe disablement allowance	34·00	35·40
Lesser incapacity allowance		
maximum rate of allowance	31·25	32·55
based on loss of earnings over	41·65	43·35

Retirement Pension

	Old Rates 1991	New Rates 1992
Category A or B	52·00	54·15
Category B (lower)—husband's insurance	31·25	32·55
Category C or D—non-contributory	31·25	32·55
Category C (lower)—non-contributory	18·70	19·45
Additional pension (Increased by 4·1 per cent.)	—	—
Increments to basic and additional pension contracted out deductions (from pre April 1988 earnings) and graduated retirement benefit (Increased by 4·1 per cent.)	—	—
Contracted out deductions (CODS) and increments to CODS (from post April 1988 earnings) (3 per cent. paid by scheme, 1·1 per cent. by state)	—	—
Graduated retirement benefit (unit) (pence)	6·81	7·09
Addition at age 80	0·25	0·25

Severe disablement allowance

	Old rates 1991	New rates 1992
Basic rate	31·25	32·55
Age-related addition (from December 1990)		
Higher rate	11·10	11·55
Middle rate	6·90	7·20
Lower rate	3·45	3·60

Sickness benefit

	Old rates 1991	New rates 1992
Over pension age	49·90	51·95
Under pension age	39·60	41·20

Social fund

	Old rates 1991	New rates 1992
Maternity payment	100·00	100·00
Capital limit		
aged under 60	500·00	500·00
aged 60 and over	1,000·00	1,000·00

Statutory maternity pay

	Old rates 1991	New rates 1992
Earnings threshold	52·00	54·00
Lower rate	44·50	46·30

Statutory sick pay

	Old rates 1991	New rates 1992
Earnings threshold	52·00	54·00
Lower rate	43·50	45·30
Standard rate	52·50	52·50

Unemployment Benefit

	Old rates 1991	New rates 1992
Over pension age	52·00	54·15
Under pension age	41·40	43·10
Occupational pension abatement	35·00	35·00

War pensions

	Old rates 1991	New rates 1992
Disablement pension (100 per cent. rates)		
private or equivalent	84·90	89·00
officer (£ per annum)	4,427·00	4,650·00
Age allowances		
40-50 per cent.	6·00	6·25
over 50 but not over 70 per cent.	9·25	9·65
over 70 but not over 90 per cent.	13·25	13·80
over 90 per cent.	18·50	19·30
Disablement gratuity (base figures for calculation purposes only)		
specified minor injury	5,640·00	5,870·00
unspecified minor injury	3,102·00	3,228·50
Unemployability allowance		

	Old rates 1991	New rates 1992
personal	55·25	57·50
adult dependency increase	31·25	32·55
a. increase for first child	9·70	9·75
b. increase for subsequent children	10·70	10·85
Invalidity allowance		
higher rate	11·10	11·55
middle rate	6·90	7·20
lower rate	3·45	3·60
Constant attendance allowance		
exceptional rate	68·00	70·80
intermediate rate	51·00	53·10
normal maximum rate	34·00	35·40
part-time rate	17·00	17·70
Comforts allowance		
higher rate	14·60	15·20
lower rate	7·30	7·60
Mobility supplement	32·35	33·70
Allowance for lowered standard of occupation (maximum)	33·96	35·36
Exceptionally severe disablement allowance	34·00	35·40
Severe disablement occupational allowance	17·00	17·70
Clothing allowance (£ per annum)		
higher rate	115·00	120·00
lower rate	73·00	76·00
Education allowance (£ per annum) (maximum)	120·00	120·00
War widow's pension (private)		
widow	67·60	70·35
childless widow under 40	15·60	16·25
age allowance		
(a) age 65 to 69	7·75	8·05
(b) age 70 to 79	14·95	15·55
(c) age 80 and over	22·20	23·10
children's allowance		
(a) increase for first child (adjusted for child benefit increase)	13·65	13·75
(b) increase for subsequent children	14·65	14·85
Orphan' pension		
(a) increase for first child (adjusted for child benefit increase)	15·10	15·30
(b) increase for subsequent children	16·10	16·40
Unmarried dependant living as spouse (maximum)	65·55	68·30
Rent allowance (maximum)	25·75	26·80
Adult orphan's pension (maximum)	52·00	54·15
Widower's pension (maximum)	67·60	70·35

Widow's Benefit

	Old Rates 1991	New Rates 1992
Widow's payment (lump sum)	1,000·00	1,000·00
Widowed mother's allowance	52·00	54·15
Widow's pension		
standard rate	52·00	54·15
age-related		
age 54 (49)	48·36	50·36
age 53 (48)	44·72	46·57
age 52 (47)	41·08	42·78
age 51 (46)	37·44	38·99
age 50 (45)	33·80	35·20
age 49 (44)	30·16	31·41
age 48 (43)	26·52	27·62
age 47 (42)	22·88	23·83
age 46 (41)	19·24	20·04
age 45 (40)	15·60	16·25

Note: For deaths occurring before 11 April 1988 refer to age-points shown in brackets.

Rossi Index

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he will publish a table showing the annual increases in prices measured by the Rossi index in each year since September 1987 *(a)* on the basis of calculation used hitherto and *(b)* on the new basis announced in his uprating statement on 21 October.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is in the table.

	"Rossi" calculation	
September	*Former*	*New*
1987	3·2	3·2
1988	4·7	5·0
1989	5·2	5·6
1990	8·1	8·4
1991	7·2	7·0

Source: Central Statistical Office.

Child Benefit

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what additional increases in child benefit would be required to restore it to the level it would have reached if it had been uprated in line with prices and average earnings, respectively, in each year from 1985 on, including the uprating announced on 21 October 1991.

Mr. Jack: The additional increases would be £0·75 for the eldest eligible child and £2·60 for other children on the basis of movements in the index of retail prices applicable to the general uprating of benefits from November 1985 to April 1992. Information which would enable a similar calculation to be made on the basis of movements in average earnings over the same period will not be available until 21 November, and I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security by how much the real value of benefit for each child of a widow, invalidity pensioner or retirement pensioner—child benefit and dependency addition combined—will be increased or reduced by the uprating announced on 21 October 1991.

Mr. Jack: It is proposed that the combined rates of child benefit and child dependency increase payable for each child of a widow, invalidity pensioner or retirement pensioner be increased in cash terms by £0·45 with effect from week commencing 6 April 1992. It is not possible to

calculate what such a cash increase would represent in terms of the real value of either the existing or previous rates of the benefits concerned until the retail prices index figures for April 1992 are available.

St. Francis Hospital, Haywards Heath

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the consequences of the benefit decision regarding St. Francis hospital, Haywards Heath.

Miss Widdecombe: The income support eligibility of people discharged from hospital is considered on an individual basis by independent adjudication officers in the local social security office and Ministers cannot intervene. The cases of former long-term patients of St. Francis hospital, Haywards Heath are currently the subject of an appeal and it would not be appropriate for me to comment.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of earnings was replaced by statutory sick pay for employees on 100 per cent., 75 per cent. and 50 per cent. of average earnings in each year since statutory sick pay commenced.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is in the table.

Date	*Average earnings*[1]	*Statutory sick pay*[2] *as a percentage of earnings at*		
	£	*(a) 100 per cent.*	*(b) 75 per cent.*	*(c) 50 per cent.*
April 1983	147·40	27·3	36·4	54·6
April 1984	159·30	26·5	35·4	53·0
April 1985	171·00	25·9	34·6	51·9
April 1986	184·70	25·3	33·7	50·6
April 1987	198·90	23·7	31·6	47·5
April 1988	218·40	22·5	30·0	45·1
April 1989	239·70	21·7	29·0	43·5
April 1990	263·10	20·0	26·6	39·9
April 1991	284·70	18·4	24·6	30·6

Notes:

[1] Earnings shown are the average for all full-time adult employees.

[2] The majority of SSP recipients get occupational sick pay on top of SSP when they are sick. In many cases this brings the total payment received up to full pay.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 11 November 1991

TRANSPORT

Goods Vehicle Drivers

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what statistical evidence is collected about accident rates for large goods vehicle drivers.

Mr. Chope: The statistics available cover road accidents involving personal injury and reported to the police. The standard report prepared by the police and submitted to the Department of Transport includes information on each vehicle involved and identifies the vehicle type. The report also includes the vehicle registration mark of any vehicles involved, and, by linking with data held at the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency at Swansea, a more precise definition of vehicle type can be obtained.

Information about the driver includes age, sex and results of any roadside screening breath test, but no other personal details. Information on heavy goods vehicle traffic and movements are produced by the national traffic census and the continuing survey of roads and goods transportation. Information on heavy goods vehicle accident involvement rates is published in "Road Accidents Great Britain 1990: The Casualty Report". The involvement rate of HGVs in injury accidents has fallen from 70 per 100 million vehicle kilometres in 1980 to 56 per 100 million vehicle kilometres in 1990. The casualty rate for HGV drivers was 11 per 100 million vehicle kilometres in 1990.

High-speed Rail Link

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what comparisons he has undertaken between the amount of revenue income attributable to the proposed King's Cross low-level international station from high-speed rail link services approaching via Stratford East, and those approaching from the previously proposed link from the south.

Mr. Freeman: The low-level station at King's Cross was treated by British Rail in its comparative study of routes for a high-speed rail link as an integral part of those routes in which it featured. British Rail's comparative estimates of the revenues obtainable from the traffic forecast for each of the routes is shown in its route comparison report, a copy of which is in the Library. In deciding their preferred route the Government took account of all the relevant considerations, including regional planning, the environmental impact, and the effect on property, as well as transport objectives.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport within what time range he expects the high-speed rail link from the channel tunnel to be *(a)* completed and *(b)* connected to the proposed low-level station at King's Cross.

Mr. Freeman: It is too soon to say. No decision has yet been made on when construction may start.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) whether the proposed rail link from Stratford to King's Cross will be designed to be able to take freight services;

(2) whether he has yet received any proposals from British Rail for the use of the proposed rail link from Stratford to King's Cross for freight services.

Mr. Freeman: Further consideration has to be given to the implications of the proposed new line for freight. But if it were to be designed to be able to be used for freight, it seems unlikely that freight trains would run on the section between Stratford and King's Cross.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) within what range of real rates of return British Rail's revenue projections for the proposed international low-level station at King's Cross lie;

(2) whether British Rail's proposals for the European passenger services component of the financing of the proposed international station at King's Cross envisage the involvement of any Government financial support; and whether British Rail is seeking any capital grant for the new Kent express or Thameslink components of the financing of the station;

(3) what updated appraisal he has received from British Rail of its proposals for financing the works covered by the King's Cross Railways Bill following his decision that the high-speed rail link should come to King's Cross via Stratford.

Mr. Freeman: The Department has not yet received British Rail's detailed financial appraisal for the proposed King's Cross terminal.

International passenger services using the station will be subject to the terms of section 42 of the Channel Tunnel Act 1987, so they will have to cover the part of the station costs properly attributable to them out of commercial revenue.

Network SouthEast is in principle eligible to receive capital grant in recognition of benefits of projects to non-users. British Rail has not sought such a grant so far in respect of the element of the cost of the proposed works at King's Cross relating to commuter services.

Dame Peggy Fenner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) when the Ove Arup original consultation team will be able to visit the Medway constituency to continue discussions on the precise location of the route;

(2) if he will meet constituents of the hon. Member for Medway to discuss their requirement that the channel tunnel rail link Medway crossing should be positioned as closely as possible to the present crossing;

(3) if the Government will publish the precise details of the channel tunnel rail link route through the Medway constituency.

Mr. Freeman: The route originally proposed by Ove Arup, and developed further in conjuction with British Rail, will now be refined over the next few months. It will be published once sufficient details are available to form the basis of the public consultation process that BR will lead. There will then be ample opportunity for any concerns to be aired about the alignment of the route and how best to limit its environmental impact. Only after this will the plans be finalised.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what proposals he has received from British Rail in furtherance of the implementation of its proposals in "International Rail Services for the United Kingdom" of 1989 to run 11 services per day from different places beyond London;

(2) what proposals he has received from British Rail for the provision of the rolling stock it aims to obtain for the channel tunnel rail link services to run through-trains beyond London.

Mr. Freeman: Since 1989 investment proposals have been approved by the Government for various infrastructure works which are under way. We are considering proposals for the day trains. Orders for the night rolling stock depend on the outcome of British Rail's negotiations with their continental railway partners. British Rail's initial plans and requirements for rolling stock are not affected by the Government's recent decision on the rail link.

Dame Peggy Fenner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the Ove Arup route now adopted for the channel link deviates in any way from that discussed with Ove Arup and the local communities.

Mr. Freeman: The supplementary note to British Rail's document "Rail Link Project: Comparison of routes: Report to British Railways Board, May 1991", a copy of which is in the Library, explains two late changes which Ove Arup introduced to its proposed route. These were summarised in letters which my right hon. and learned Friend's office sent to my hon. Friends the Members for Medway (Dame P. Fenner) and for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) on 14 October, and were reflected in the outline route map published by the Department.

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will be lifting his safeguarding directions covering the section of the previous British Rail preferred route for the channel tunnel rail link between Detling and Malling.

Mr. Freeman: My right hon. and leaned Friend made a direction on 5 November 1991 to the local authorities concerned. This varies the present safeguarding directions for the channel tunnel rail link in Kent so that these no longer apply to the west of the A249 at Detling.

Browniesside

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will now publish the report of the inspector who conducted the public inquiry into objections to the A1 Browniesside improvement scheme.

Mr. Chope: The decision letter and inspector's report on the statutory orders for the A1 Browniesside improvement scheme will be issued in a matter of weeks.

Blighted Homes

Sir. John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will be using his new powers under the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 to make voluntary acquisitions of blighted homes regardless of their distance from the proposed new highway scheme in question.

Mr. Chope: Section 62 of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 gives my right hon. Friend the power to acquire property which in his opinion will be seriously affected by the Department's road schemes. The criteria by which he will exercise his discretion are under consideration.

Driving Licence Fees

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the income from driving licence fees during 1990-91.

Mr. Chope: The income from driving licence fees for the year 1990-91 was £22,305,780.

High-speed Rail Link

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will publish the precise details of the channel tunnel rail link route as it passes through the Dartford constituency; and if he will make a statement;

(2) when he expects the original Ove Arup consultation scheme to visit the Dartford constituency to discuss the implications of the chosen channel tunnel rail link route upon local householders and communities;

(3) if the route he has approved for the channel link in concept deviates significantly from that running at March 1990.

Mr. Freeman: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer which I gave today to my hon. Friend the Member for Medway (Dame P. Fenner).

Road Accidents

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action his Department has taken over the past year to reduce the number of people who are killed or injured on the roads.

Mr. Chope: I have today published the "Road Safety Report 1990-91" which describes the measures to reduce casualties that the Department, together with the Scottish and Welsh Offices, have promoted over the past year. Copies have been placed in the House Library.

Central European Time

Sir Gerrard Neale: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the effect of a move by the United Kingdom to central European time on the number of fatal and serious road accidents; and whether the Government support such a move.

Mrs. Rumbold: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to estimates by the Transport and Road Research Laboratory set out in the Green Paper "Summer time: A Consultation Document", CM722. The responses to the Green Paper revealed considerable difference of opinion within the United Kingdom about options for future summer time arrangements. Policy on those arrangements therefore remains under consideration.

Smoke Emissions

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will specify what type of smoke measuring equipment will be required for use in heavy goods vehicle testing stations.

Mr. Chope: The vehicle inspectorate is currently studying which smoke opacity measuring equipment should be installed in heavy goods vehicle testing stations.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will bring forward proposals to amend the Motor Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations to require the identification of manufacturers' emission standards as recorded at COP testing on under-bonnet plates.

Mr. Chope: There is no need to do this. Information on vehicle manufacturers' recommended emission levels is readily available from the manufacturers and their agents and from certain specialist publications.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what standards will be used to assess emissions of smoke from heavy goods vehicles.

Mr. Chope: The current test relies on a visual check of smoke density by vehicle examiners to standards which are published in the heavy goods vehicle inspection manual. The same standards will be applied when smoke meters are introduced into the testing scheme.

Cycles

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps are taken by his Department to ensure that cycles using the public highway are equipped with an audible means of warning.

Mr. Chope: In 1984, there was consultation upon a proposal to require pedal cycles to be fitted with bells. The proposal was not implemented because it was subject to many objections from cycling organisations and also the Pedestrians Association. The issue will be considered further when the Pedal Cycles (Safety) Regulations are updated next year.

Remote Sensing Equipment

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for the use of remote sensing equipment to detect in-use vehicles which exceed the new MOT standards for carbon monoxide; and what action will be taken.

Mr. Chope: None.

DEFENCE

Operation Buffalo Nuclear Tests

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to remove nuclear debris from the site of the Operation Buffalo nuclear tests and to store such debris in a nuclear waste depository.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: This is a matter fror the Government of Australia.

Maralinga Nuclear Test Site

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his current estimate of the extent of plutonium contamination of the Maralinga site, resulting from the minor trials of British nuclear weapons.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The latest assessment of the extent of contamination of the Maralinga site is contained in the report by the technical assessment group entitled "Rehabilitation of Former Nuclear Test Sites in Australia" published by the Australian Department of Primary Industries and Energy in November 1990. I will arrange for a copy of this report to be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his latest assessment of the extent of radioactive contamination of the Maralinga site of the British nuclear bomb test; and what is his latest estimate of the cost of a clean up.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The latest assessment of the extent of contamination and cost of clean-up of the Maralinga site is contained in the report by the technical assessment group entitled "Rehabilitation of Former Nuclear Test Sites in Australia" published by the Australian Department of Primary Industries and Energy in November 1990. I will arrange for a copy of this report to be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimates his Department has made of the cost of decontamination of the Maralinga range, South Australia; what representations he has received on this matter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Newport, (Mr. Flynn), on 5 November, *Official Report*, column *43*. Estimates of the cost of options for rehabilitation of the former nuclear weapon test sites at Maralinga and Emu Field are set out in the report of the technical assessment group entitled "Rehabilitation of Former Nuclear Test Sites in Australia" published by the Australian Department of Primary Industries and Energy in November 1990. I will arrange for a copy of this report to be placed in the Library of the House.

Regiments

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out the dates for restructuring the regiments of the combat arms.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is intended to implement the majority of the regimental mergers and other restructuring progressively over the next four years. Plans have been made for the following major changes to take place by early 1993:

Early 1992

40 Army Engineer Support Group and RHQ 28 Engineer Regiment amalgamate.

30 Field Squadron Royal Engineers disbands.

Mid 1992

2nd and 3rd Royal Tank Regiments amalgamate

4th/7th Dragoon Guards and 5th Royal Inniskilling Dragoon Guards amalgamate.

The 1st, 2nd and 3rd Battalions of The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers merge to form two battalions.

The 1st, 2nd and 3rd Battalions of The Royal Anglian Regiment merge to form two battalions.

The 1st, 2nd and 3rd Battalions of The Royal Green Jackets merge to form two battalions

52 Field Squadron (Construction) Royal Engineers disbands.

244 Signal Squadron (Air Support) disbands.

Late 1992

The 1st and 2nd Battalions of 2nd King Edwards VII's Own Gurkha Rifles merge to form one battalion.

13th/18th Royal Hussars and 15th/19th The King's Royal Hussars amalgamate.
The Life Guards and The Blues and Royals combine.
The Royal Hussars and 14th/20th King's Hussars amalgamate.
49 Field Regiment Royal Artillery disbands.
22 Signal Regiment disbands.

Early 1993
The 1st, 2nd and 3rd Battalions of The Queen's Regiment together with The Royal Hampshire Regiment amalgamate to form a regiment of two battalions.
The 1st, 2nd and 3rd Battalions of The Light Infantry merge to form two battalions.
27 Field Regiment Royal Artillery disbands.
50 Missile Regiment Royal Artillery disbands.

Detailed planning for later years has not been finalised but it is expected that the following timetable will apply:

1993
The 1st and 2nd Battalions of The Royal Irish Rangers merge to form a single general service battalion.
The Second Battalions of the Coldstream Guards and the Scots Guards are placed in suspended animation.
The Cheshire Regiment and The Staffordshire Regiment amalgamate.
The Queen's Own Hussars and The Queen's Royal Irish Hussars amalgamate.
1st and 4th Royal Tank Regiments amalgamate.
16th/5th The Queen's Royal Lancers and 17th/21st Lancers amalgamate.
45 Field Regiment Royal Artillery disbands.
94 Locating Regiment Royal Artillery disbands.
23 Engineer Regiment disbands.
10 Field Squadron Royal Engineers disbands.
16 Field Squadron Royal Engineers disbands.
229 Signal Squadron disbands.

1994
The Queen's Own Highlanders and The Gordon Highlanders amalgamate.
The Gloucestershire Regiment and The Duke of Edinburgh's Royal Regiment amalgamate.
The Royal Scots and The King's Own Scottish Borderers amalgamate.
The Second Battalion of the Grenadier Guards is placed in suspended animation.
2 Field Regiment Royal Artillery disbands.
46 Air Defence Battery Royal Artillery disbands.
26 Engineer Regiment disbands.
38 Field Squadron Royal Engineers disbands.
1st Armoured Division Headquarters and Signal Regiment disbands.

1995
2nd King Edward VII's Own Gurkha Rifles, 6th Queen Elizabeth's Own Gurkha Rifles, 7th Duke of Edinburgh's Own Gurkha Rifles and 10th Princess Mary's Own Gurkha Rifles merge to form a single large regiment of three battalions.
71 Amphibious Support Squadron Royal Engineers disbands.
28 Signal Regiment disbands.
NORTHAG Air Support Radio Squadron disbands.

By 1997
As part of the drawdown in Hong Kong: there will be a reduction of one further Gurkha battalion; The Queen's Gurkha Engineers, The Queen's Gurkha Signals and the Gurkha Transport Regiment will each reduce to one squadron; and 660 Squadron Army Air Corps will disband.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prison Population (Ethnic Groups)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average sentence length of the prison population for each major ethnic group.

Mrs. Rumbold: The readily available information for 1990 is given in the table. The differences between the average sentence lengths received by males in the major ethnic groups in 1984-85 were discussed in Home Office Statistical Bulletin Issue No. 17/86 "The Ethnic Origin of Prisoners: The Prison Population on 30 June 1985 and Persons Received July 1984—March 1985, paragraphs 24-27" a copy of which is in the Library. The differences were found to be associated with a range of factors including the type of offence, the type of court which had passed sentence, and the number of previous convictions.

The average sentence lengths recorded for some of the female groups may be unrepresentative in that they are based on small numbers of persons.

Average sentence length[1] of persons received into Prison Service establishments in England and Wales under an immediate custodial sentence[2]: by sex, type of prisoner and ethnic origin, 1990

Months

Sex and Type of prisoner	*White*	*West Indian Guyanese African*	*Indian Pakistani Bangladeshi*	*Chinese Arab Mixed*	*Other, not recorded (including refusals)*	*All persons*
Males						
Young Offenders	12·2	16·7	16·1	14·4	11·6	12·6
Adults	17·7	25·5	21·1	23·2	23·4	18·6
Females						
Young Offenders	10·8	19·3	3·2	13·2	7·2	11·7
Adults	12·4	25·6	37·6	18·4	16·2	14·9

[1] Provisional Figures.
[2] Excluding those sentenced to life.

Torture

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has received the report on the visit to the United Kingdom by the European committee for the prevention of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: We have received the committee's report and have recently responded to it. Subject to the committee's agreement, we plan to make its report and the Government's response publicly available as soon as the necessary arrangements can be made.

City Status

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications he has received for city status; and if he will list those towns seeking city status.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: It is likely that the Queen will wish to grant city status to one town to mark the 40th anniversary of her accession. I have received representations that their town might be chosen for this from and on behalf of the authorities of the following 20 towns in England: Blackburn; Bolton; Brighton; Chelmsford; Colchester; Croydon; Dudley; Guildford; Ipswich; Middlesbrough; Milton Keynes; Northampton; Preston; Sandwell; Shrewsbury; Southend-on-Sea; Stockport; Sunderland; Telford; and Wolverhampton.

Dogs

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to publish the first set of centrally collected statistics related to the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991.

Mrs. Rumbold: Information relating to 1991 prosecutions is expected to be available towards the end of 1992.

Prison Officers

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the general secretary of the Prison Officers Association; and what subjects were discussed.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend last met the chairman and general secretary of the Prison Officers Association on 25 July 1991. I met them on 7 November. Subjects discussed at these meetings included the reorganisation of London prisons, the use of police cells, the corporate objectives process, the current review of the prison estate, contracting out and the Prison Service Union's application for recognition.

Prison Escapes

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners have escaped from prisons in the United Kingdom in each of the last three years up to 1 November.

Mrs. Rumbold: The figures are as follows:

	Number
Year ended 1 November 1989	169
Year ended 1 November 1990	185
Year ended 1 November 1991	316

Reports of all escapes are analysed to identify methods and possible preventive measures. The numbers of escapes nevertheless remain a cause for concern.

Joseph Arthur Lewis Baker

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he is yet in a position to write to the hon. Member for Stockton, South about the matters relating to Joseph Arthur Lewis Baker raised on 22 October 1991, *Official Report*, column *539*.

Mrs. Rumbold: I have written to my hon. Friend.

Prison Cells, London

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison cells were out of use on 1 November at London prisons due to the work taking place on the installation of an internal sanitation system.

Mrs. Rumbold: Three hundred and four cells.

Relate

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria are being used to decide the forthcoming level of grant allocation to Relate.

Mr. John Patten: Subject to parliamentary approval of supply estimates the level of grant to Relate's central administrative costs in 1992-93 will maintain cores funding in real terms. Additional funding will be made available in 1992-93 for other activities designed to improve the organisation's management structures at national and local level.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will show the level of grant expenditure allocated to Relate each year since 1979, both at current prices and showing the percentage change in the level of funding.

Mr. John Patten: The information is as follows:

	Grant (£ cash terms)	*Percentage increase on previous years*
1979-80	418,000	-
1980-81	555,000	32·8
1981-82	704,000	26·8
1982-83	750,000	6·5
1983-84	788,000	5·0
1984-85	827,460	5·0
1985-86	864,570	4·5
1986-87	890,500	3·0
1987-88	912,870	2·5
1988-89	935,910	2·5
1989-90	958,890	2·5
1990-91	1,006,840	5·0
1991-92	1,107,500	10·0
1992-93	[1]1,511,400	36·5

[1]Subject to Parliamentary approval of Supply Estimates.

In addition Relate received a special grant of £600,000 over the three years 1988-89 to 1990-91.

Sunday Trading

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration his Department is giving to the use of section 43 of the Shops Act 1950 to enable shops to trade legally on Sundays during the Christmas period.

Mrs. Rumbold: Section 43 of the Shops Act 1950 contains no power to vary the provisions of the Act which are concerned specifically with Sunday trading.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will issue guidance on which shops and markets may open and which goods may be legally offered for sale in England on Sundays between 17 November and Christmas.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply to a question from him given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 5 November 1991 at column *46*.

PC Tony Salt

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the West Midlands as to why PC Mark Bury

was permitted to retire on medical grounds before disciplinary action was taken against him, following the various false statements he made about the circumstances surrounding the death of his colleague, PC Tony Salt;

(2) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the West Midlands as to the date on which Assistant Chief Constable Meften became aware of the statement by the widow of PC Salt regarding the discovery of her husband's kubaton; and what action he took;

(3) if he will call for a report from the West Midlands police regarding the disciplinary action taken against the officers responsible for obtaining confessions from Messrs. Peter Gibbs, Mark Samuels and Tony Frances on charges of murdering PC Tony Salt;

(4) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the West Midlands as to *(a)* the date when the widow of the late PC Tony Salt made a statement regarding the discovery at home of her husband's kubaton, *(b)* the date the statement was passed to the Crown prosecution service and *(c)* the date charges were dropped against the three men accused of Mr. Salt's murder.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. These are matters for the chief constable of the West Midlands.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will order a public inquiry into the death of PC Tony Salt; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No.

Young Offenders

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has to encourage the establishment of projects similar to the Ilderton motor project in Deptford;

(2) if he will list the community-based projects in the United Kingdom which attempt to rehabilitate young people convicted of the offence of taking away a vehicle without the owner's consent; and how much Home Office funding has been allocated to such projects in recent years.

Mr. John Patten: The Home Office is providing £157,000 to seven motor projects this financial year under the young adult offenders grant scheme which exists to support voluntary organisations offering supervision to a wide range of offenders, in partnership with probation services. These projects are:

	£
Guiding Hands Assocation, West Glamorgan	20,787
Croft Motor Trust, North Yorkshire	4,100
Car Offender Project, West Sussex	27,774
Dragon Wheels, South Glamorgan	2,194
NACRO New Careers Training, West Yorkshire	69,653
Telford Drive, Shropshire	21,679
Mendip Motor Project, Somerset	11,300
Total	157,487

Similarly the Home Office makes grants available through the safer cities programme to motor projects with the aims of crime prevention. Grants in this financial year are:

	£
Salford Swinton Karting	2,005
Salford General Education in Automobile Responsibility	12,000
Nottingham Wheelbase	13,500
Hull Orchard Park Wheels	750
Coventry Henley Green Motorcycle	16,000
Bradford Motor Education	16,500
	60,755

No comprehensive record is held centrally of similar projects in England and Wales not funded by the Home Office.

Overall provision for the young adult offender grant scheme is being increased from £2·8 million this financial year to £3·8 million next; further applications will be invited shortly and motor projects as well as others will be welcome to apply.

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young offenders have been transferred from Hewell Grange to other institutions since 1 September 1991.

Mrs. Rumbold: The following numbers of young offenders have been transferred from Hewell Grange since 1 September:

	Number
Week commencing 1 September	Nil
Week commencing 8 September	5
Week commencing 15 September	Nil
Week commencing 22 September	95
Week commencing 29 September	2

On 30 September the role of Hewell Grange was changed from that of a young offender institution to a category D open prison for adult males.

Football (Policing)

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a table showing, for each year since 1986, *(a)* the total number of police officers on duty at Football League matches in England and Wales, *(b)* the total attendance at Football League matches in England and Wales, *(c)* the total number of police officers as a percentage of the total attendance at Football League matches in England and Wales and *(d)* the total number of police officers in England and Wales.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Information on the number of police officers on duty at Football League matches is not held centrally. On 31 July 1991 I wrote to the hon. Member with details of the attendance at Football League matches in England and Wales; those details were placed in the Library. The number of police officers in England and Wales is contained in the following table:

	Police strength at 31 December
1990	127,090
1989	126,110
1988	124,759
1987	124,102
1986	121,550

NATIONAL FINANCE

British Telecom

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the costs to the Government of *(a)* advertising, *(b)* marketing, *(c)* fees to advisers and *(d)* receiving bank and registration costs in connection with the sale of further shares in BT from (i) March 1990 to date and (ii) projected costs from March 1990 to March 1992.

Mr. Maude: Costs for the BT sale will be reported to Parliament after the sale has been completed. Sales proceeds will be appropriated in aid of the expenses of the sale.

Civil Service Recruitment

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has any plans to improve recruitment and retention levels in the civil service in the London area.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Recruitment and retention in the civil service is monitored carefully. There have been very significant improvements in the recruitment and retention position of the civil service in the London area, due in part to the changes in pay which the Government have introduced over the past three years.

Monetary Union

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact on the United Kingdom net contribution to the community budget of the proposals on cohesion in the draft treaty on monetary union.

Mr. Maude: Cohesion is best achieved by sound macro-economic policies, supported by the existing structural funds, within which there is provision for commitments to be doubled in real terms by 1993 in comparison with 1987. Future levels of the funds will be considered as part of the review of Community finances, not within the intergovernmental conferences. There is no reason why economic and monetary union should justify increases in the funds; sound open-market policies should bring about the convergence of economic performance necessary before any decision could be taken to move to a single currency.

Savings (Taxation)

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give figures for the taxation on savings in each OECD country for savings of *(a)* £10,000 and *(b)* £20,000.

Mr. Maude: The tax charge would depend on the type of investments held and the degree to which they produced income or capital gains subject to tax, as well as the amount of income and gains from other sources received by the saver and the availability of tax allowances and reliefs.

Guest Houses

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what amount of revenue has been lost from uncollected uniform business rates from guest houses accommodating more than six paying guests.

Mr. Key: I have been asked to reply.
This information is not available.

THE ARTS

Regional Arts Boards

31. **Mr. Soames:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what progress has been made on the setting up of the new regional arts boards.

Mr. Renton: I am delighted to tell my hon. Friend that excellent progress has been made. The 10 new regional arts boards formally came into being as planned on 1 October this year. The chairman and vast majority of board members have been appointed, and there remains only a small number of staff appointments to be made.

Arts, London

33. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what financial assistance is currently given to the arts in London out of public funds; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: The Arts Council spent £19·3 million in London in 1990-91 on its own clients and through Greater London Arts. In addition, the Arts Council made grants totalling just under £51·5 million to the major national companies, which are mainly based in London.

Local authorities in London also provide support for the arts from public funds.

Victoria and Albert Museum

34. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Minister for the Arts when he next plans to visit the Victoria and Albert museum to discuss the increase in its collection of fine arts.

Mr. Renton: I have made several visits to the Victoria and Albert museum and am familiar with the extent of its magnificent collections of fine arts. Last week I was pleased to announce additional funding of £5 million over four years to the museum to enable it to concentrate conservation of these collections in a single building at South Kensington.

Arts Sponsorship

35. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Minister for the Arts by how much the demand for business sponsorship incentive scheme awards exceeds the funding available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: The business sponsorship incentive scheme has been very successful in attracting sponsorship, with 2,075 sponsors and £45 million new money for the arts since 1984. The scheme is currently confined to new sponsors and demand for matching awards is close to the current ceiling of £3·5 million. From 1992-93 the annual budget will be increased to £4·5 million to help sustain the continuing growth in business sponsorship of the arts.

Museums (North-West)

37. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what industrial museums he has visited in the last 12 months in the north-west.

Mr. Renton: Since my appointment as Minister for the Arts in November 1990 I have visited the Quarry Bank mill at Styall in Cheshire, and the museum of science and industry in Manchester in June. Last week on a return visit to Manchester, I was pleased to announce a special grant of £200,000 in 1992-93 towards that museum's 1830s warehouse project.

Birmingham (City of Music)

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will visit Birmingham during its year as Arts Council city of music in 1992.

Mr. Renton: I was delighted to be present at the launch on 7 October of "Sounds like Birmingham", which sets out a full and exciting range of events to celebrate Birmingham's year as City of Music. It will also play a prominent part in National Music Day. I am inviting the EC Ministers of Culture to join me in Birmingham on 7 September 1992 to mark our presidency of the European Communities.

CIVIL SERVICE

Executive Agencies

41. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he will make a statement on the achievements of the next steps agencies.

Mr. Renton: Next steps is progressing well. We are today publishing the 1991 annual review on next steps agencies together with the Government reply to the seventh report of the Treasury and Civil Service Committee. The annual review shows agencies meeting and beating targets for quality of service, financial performance and efficiency and gives many instances of improved service to customers.

Mr. Cash: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service when the Government intend to reply to the Treasury and Civil Service Committee's seventh report of Session 1990-91, on the next steps initiative; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: The Government are today publishing, as Cm 1761, the reply to the Treasury and Civil Service Committee's latest report on next steps.

The Government are able to report further good progress in implementing next steps, with 56 agencies now established and 32 more announced candidates. Customs and Excise and the Inland Revenue are moving towards full operation on next steps lines. In all, by next April over half the civil service should be covered, and some 70 agencies due to be established by next July. The Government are committed to completing the coverage as far as practicable by the end of 1993. Details of all existing agencies are set out in the second annual review of next steps, published today as Cm 1760, which also sets out their targets and the results they are achieving.

The Government welcome the Committee's continuing endorsement of next steps, its recognition of the substantial progress that has been made, and its constructive recommendations. The Government remain firmly committed to taking forward this major programme of change, to making the reforms durable, and to ensuring that they deliver all the benefits of which they are capable. Next steps is leading to a more effective and adaptable civil service, with all its traditional values of propriety and impartiality intact, but better attuned to deliver the high-quality public services for which the citizen increasingly looks.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Divorce

Mr. Battle: To ask the Attorney-General what information he has concerning the total cost of processing divorce applications in England and Wales in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available.

The Attorney-General: The information sought is not readily available. It is estimated that the administrative cost of processing divorce proceedings in the High Court and in the county courts in each of the last four years was:

	£ million
1987-88	16·5
1988-89	17·0
1989-90	18·3
1990-91	20·5

A substantial proportion of these costs is recovered by way of court fees, as follows;

	£ million
1987-88	13·8
1988-89	14·8
1989-90	15·9
1990-91	16·9

The net cost of legal aid and advice in divorce and related matters during the same period was:

	£ million
1987-88	95·6
1988-89	109·6
1989-90	117·4
1990-91	137·0

Court Hearings

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Attorney-General if he will ensure that during court hearings of serious crimes, witnesses for the prosecution are securely separated from defendants' associates and defendants' witnesses while on court premises.

The Attorney-General: Segregated witness waiting rooms are provided in existing court buildings wherever possible. For new Crown court buildings, the design standards provide for a sufficient number of witness waiting rooms per courtroom and a separate witness suite which incorporates toilet facilities. Listing officers will, whenever possible, list cases so that witnesses and others involved are not kept waiting unnecessarily on court premises.

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Attorney-General if he will ensure that witnesses attending hearings of serious crimes are invited to attend the court on a phased basis rather than having to be present at all times during a particular day.

The Attorney-General: So far as possible, the Crown prosecution service tries to minimise delay for witnesses waiting to give evidence, and it is current practice to phase the attendance of witnesses in lengthy trials.

County Court Rules

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Attorney-General what is the average time taken to hear a disposal action at Lambeth county court under order 9, rule 3(3) of the county court rules; and what is the reason for this length of time.

The Attorney-General: There is no longer a hearing for a disposal action under order 9, rule 3(3). In line with the Lord Chancellor's objective of ensuring that business in the civil courts is dealt with at the most appropriate level this function is now undertaken by court staff.

Extradition (Ireland)

Mr. Stanbrook: To ask the Attorney-General what arrangements have been made *(a)* to comply with the terms imposed by the Irish Republic on the endorsement of British warrants under the Irish Extradition (Amendment) Act 1989 and *(b)* to comply with the Irish demand for formal adoption of the speciality rule in extradition arrangements between the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic.

The Attorney-General: The effect of the Extradition (Amendment) Act 1987 in the Republic of Ireland is that a warrant issued in the United Kingdom can be backed for execution in the republic only if the Attorney-General in the republic is satisfied that there is a clear intention to prosecute the person, and that this intention is based on sufficient evidence. To enable the Attorney-General in the republic to discharge this duty, I have agreed that, in cases arising in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, I shall supply him with a certificate confirming the prosecuting authority's intention to prosecute, a statement detailing the facts of the case, and a statement of the relevant law. These documents are not required, however, if the person concerned has been ordered to stand trial following a consideration of the evidence by a judicial authority, since the relevant provisions of the 1987 Act do not apply to such a case.

There is no statutory speciality rule that applies to extradition arrangements between the United Kingdom and the republic. There is an agreement between the United Kingdom and the republic, however, which the Government have no plans to change and under which the consent of the requested state is required before charges, other than those for which the offender's return was ordered, may be substituted or added, save in the limited circumstances where the substituted offence is one for which the jury could enter an alternative verdict notwithstanding that the indictment contained only the charge for which his return was ordered.

PC Tony Salt

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Attorney-General if he will order an inquiry into the failure of the Crown prosecution service to disclose to solicitors for the persons charged with murdering PC Tony Salt the statement by his widow regarding the discovery of her husband's kubaton; on what date it was disclosed; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The Crown prosecution service is committed to full discharge of its obligation to disclose to persons charged with criminal offences or to their lawyers all material not included in the prosecution case which has some bearing on the offences charged and the surrounding circumstances of the case. The acting Director of Public Prosecutions has not yet been able to ascertain whether there was a failure in this particular case but has asked for a report upon the circumstances. I will write to the hon. Member in the light of that report.

Trade and Industry Select Committee

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Attorney-General what progress has been made in his consideration of the papers sent to him by members of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry relating to the alleged harassment of members of that Committee; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney General: I refer my hon. Friend to the answers which I gave to the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery on 6 November 1991, at column *113*.

Inter-agency Steering Group

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement concerning the inter-agency steering group appointed to prepare plans for the implementation of the report of the working group on pre-trial issues.

The Attorney General: The Lord Chancellor, the Home Secretary and I have approved the implementation plan submitted recently by the steering group. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

In the preparation of the plan, the steering group consulted organisations and professional bodies with a direct interest in the working group's report. The steering group concluded that the interdependent nature of the recommendations means that it is necessary to implement the report as a package to achieve worthwhile improvements in the effectiveness and efficiency of pre-trial and court procedures, for example the proposed national time guidelines for the progress of cases will only be realised if the police produce the standard of prosecution files required, the Crown prosecution service —CPS—serves advance information on the defence by the first hearing date, and the courts revise listing practices.

The police, the CPS and the courts are required to adopt new approaches to their work which will substantially improve the quality of services provided to victims, witnesses, defendants and others involved in criminal proceedings. The agencies concerned have demonstrated their determination to act by the steps already taken to implement some of the recommendations. The majority of the recommendations will be implemented over the next two years, and those with significant resource implications will come into effect as the funds become available. The implementation dates allow for the introduction of certain recommendations, for example typed dual police files, in stages which reflect the degree of change required in different police forces, CPS areas and court centres.

Because of the inter-related nature of recommendations it may be some time before the full benefits are seen to have been achieved across the system as a whole. My ministerial

colleagues and I are nevertheless satisfied that there is a very positive joint commitment to ensure progress in the shortest possible time scale.

Social Security Tribunals

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Attorney-General if he will introduce provisions to ensure that the Office of the Social Security Commissioner supplies claimants with details as to the reasons why they have been refused leave to appeal against a decision of a social security tribunal.

The Attorney-General: It is not proposed to alter the provisions of the Tribunals and Inquiries (Social Security Commissioners) Order 1980 which exempts commissioners from the obligation to give reasons for decisions on applications for leave to appeal.

Shops Act 1950

Mr. Randall: To ask the Attorney-General what new initiatives he will be taking to ensure that the Shops Act 1950 is enforced over the Christmas period.

The Attorney-General: It remains the responsibility of local authorities to consider with their legal advisers what means are at their disposal.

Mr. Randall: To ask the Attorney-General what practical means local authorities now have at their disposal to carry out their responsibilities for enforcing the Shops Act 1950.

The Attorney-General: Parliament has given local authorities the primary responsibility for enforcing the provisions about Sunday trading in the Shops Act 1950. I shall take account of all relevant circumstances known to me, including developments in the courts, in deciding whether any new initiative by me is appropriate.

Attachment of Earnings Orders

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Attorney-General what assessment he has made of the implications of attachment of earnings orders for the security of an individual's employment.

The Attorney-General: No such assessment has been made. Employers have had a statutory obligation to comply with attachment of earnings orders since the commencement of the Attachment of Earnings Act 1971. If an individual is concerned about the effect of an attachment of earnings order on his relations with his employer, he may ask the court for a suspended order under which he makes payments directly to the creditor. Under this arrangement, a copy of the order is not sent to the employer.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Aid

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what a 3 per cent. increase in real terms in aid for developing countries, over the survey period referred to in the ODA press release of 6 November, would be in cash terms for the same period.

Mrs. Chalker: The overseas aid budget for developing countries is planned to increase to £1,980 million in 1994-95 compared with the original planning figure for 1991-92 of £1,721 million; this is an increase in cash terms of 15 per cent.

Simple Truth Appeal

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on the allocation of funds raised for Kurdish refugees by the Simple Truth appeal.

Mrs. Chalker: The British Red Cross, which helped to distribute the funds, confirms that all of the £57,042,000, including the £13,832,000 raised in the United Kingdom, has been accounted for. The Government were pleased to contribute £10 million. We are satisfied that these funds have been properly used. Of the £10 million, we contributed US$10 million to United Nation agencies and £5 million to the British Red Cross.

The British Red Cross figures show that of the £57,042,000, £56,098,000 has been distributed, leaving £396,000 in reserve earmarked for programmes in Iraq this winter; £250,000 of that sum was dispatched early last week to supplement winterisation programmes already in being. The difference of £548,000 represents British Red Cross's commendably low expenses.

PRIME MINISTER

Irish Republic (Legislation)

Mr. Stanbrook: To ask the Prime Minister in how many cases proceedings in the Irish Republic under their Criminal Law (Jurisdiction) Act 1976 have been requested by United Kingdom prosecuting authorities since 1976; in how many cases proceedings in the United Kingdom under the Criminal Jurisdiction Act 1975 have been requested by prosecuting authorities in the Irish Republic since 1975; and if he will make a statement on this reciprocal legislation.

The Prime Minister: Since 1976 there have been 32 applications by the United Kingdom prosecuting authorities for proceedings in the republic under the 1976 Act. There have been no applications from the prosecuting authorities in the republic under the 1975 Act, but 18 persons have been prosecuted in the United Kingdom under that Act for offences allegedly committed in the republic.

"Voice"

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Prime Minister if he will place in the Library a copy of his reply to a letter to him from "Voice" dated 11 October.

The Prime Minister: No. It is not my normal practice to do so.

Political Advisers

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister, further to his reply of 5 November columns *42-43* about political advisers to Ministers, whether any of the individuals work for Ministers of lower rank than Secretary of State or equivalent.

The Prime Minister: Yes. Six do so.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister, further to his reply of 5 November columns *42-43* about political advisers, whether there is any limit on the number of political advisers who can be appointed by individual Ministers.

The Prime Minister: My approval is required for the appointment of all special advisers.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister, further to his reply of 5 November, columns *42-3*, about political advisers to Ministers, if he will list the names of the individuals concerned.

The Prime Minister: The names of the special advisers (political) currently serving are as follows:

Mr. K. Adams	Mrs. E. Laing
Mr. L. Anisfield	Mr. W. Lightfoot
Mr. E. Bickham	Mr. R. Marsh
Mr. G. Black	Mr. J. Mayhew
Ms. A. Broom	Ms. S. McEwen
Ms. L. Campey	Mr. P. Miller
Mr. T. Collins	Mr. P. Moman
Mr. M. Fraser	Mrs. K. Ramsay *(part-time)*
Mr. J. R. M. Gardner	Dr. W. Robinson
Mr. C. M. Grantham	Mr. A. Rosling
Mr. H. Harris-Hughes	Mr. A. Ross-Goobey
Mr. J. Hill	Mr. D. Ruffley
Mrs. S. Hogg	Mr. I. Stewart
Ms. S. Hole	Lady Strathnaver
Mr. A. Kemp *(part-time)*	Mr. N. True
Mr. T. Kerpel	Miss B. Wallis *(part-time)*
Mrs. T. Keswick	Mr. A. Young

Civil Service (Sexual Harassment)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Prime Minister if he will develop a female contact point in the civil service management structure where women can seek guidance when suffering from sexual harassment.

The Prime Minister: The civil service is committed to providing a working environment which is free of harassment for all staff. Departments and agencies are advised to ensure that women who feel that they have been subjected to sexual harassment are able to go to a woman officer for advice and support in dealing with the problem. In many departments and agencies there are specially designated women officers to contact in case of sexual harassment. Specific training is available for those dealing with complaints of sexual harassment.

Single Parents

Mr. Battle: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list all Government policy initiatives taken since 1987 which aim to assist single parents.

The Prime Minister: The information is set out in the table.

Policy initiatives taken since 1987 to assist lone parents

Department/ Date	*Policy initiative*
EMPLOYMENT September 1988	Lone parents who have been in receipt of Income Support for at least 26 weeks may enter Employment Training even if they do not meet the usual eligibility criteria.
HEALTH Since 1987	The National Council for One Parent Families and Gingerbread have received over £1 million in core grants.
Since 1987-88	Gingerbread has received a total of £90,000 for its local groups from the Department's under fives small grants scheme.
Early 1988	Over £1 million of the RPI error monies was spent by 10 voluntary organisations on many different projects for lone parents.
Since 1989-90	The second Under Fives Initiative includes 4 local projects, costing in all over £300,000, to help understand better the effect of childcare services on the economic circumstances of lone parents.
HOME OFFICE 1991	In the Maintenance Enforcement Act 1991 the Government has given courts additional powers to enforce the payment of maintenance, which will help to ensure that single parents receive the monies to which they are entitled. The Act will be implemented in spring 1992.
LORD CHANCELLOR'S 1989	Single Parents can benefit from the new orders provided under the Children Act 1989. One of the Act's main principles is that parents should, wherever possible, come to an agreement about the future of their children without the intervention of the court. The Act also gives unmarried fathers the chance to apply for formal parental responsibility for their children.
SOCIAL SECURITY April 1988	The structure of personal allowances in Income Support provide that all lone parents aged 18 or over receive the full adult rate of benefit, normally only available from age 25. The Income Support lone parent premium is paid on top of the family premium to those lone parents who do not qualify for another type of premium. Income Support earnings disregard is £15 a week for lone parents, compared with a £5 disregard for most single people. Family Credit introduced: a much more generous scheme for all low income families than the Family Income Supplement scheme. In Family Credit lone parents get the same adult credit as two parent families. One Parent Benefit is ignored when calculating entitlement to Family Credit. Higher levels of lone parent premium in Housing Benefit and Community Charge Benefit. Housing Benefit and Community Charge Benefit rules for lone parents generally aligned with those in Income Support.
October 1989	Lone parents under 18 who have to live away from home entitled to the over 18 rate of Income Support personal allowance.
April 1990	Lone parent premium in Housing Benefit and Community Charge Benefit increased.
October 1990	Earnings disregard for those lone parents not on Income Support but receiving Housing Benefit or Community Charge Benefit increased from £15 to £25 a week.
Planned for April 1992	Reduction in qualifying hours rule in Family Credit from 24 to 16 hours a week. Corresponding change in Income Support. Introduction of £15 maintenance disregard in Family Credit, Disability Working Allowance, Housing Benefit and Community Charge Benefit. Child Support Unit Becomes operational and takes on existing liable relative work in preparation for the establishment of the Child Support Agency.

Department/ Date	Policy initiative
Planned for Spring 1993	Child Support Agency becomes operational. The Agency will trace absent parents, assess, collect and review child maintenance, and ensure that payments are made regularly.
WELSH OFFICE	Gingerbread is helped through the Support for Child and Family Services' grant scheme.
1991-92	A total of £24,440 has been awarded to Gingerbread to meet part of the costs of their Swansea office and of a development officer in North Wales.

Disabled People

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make the European Community's policy for disabled people one of his priorities at the Maastricht summit.

The Prime Minister: We believe that existing provisions for disabled people at the European level are satisfactory. In addition, a number of new proposals relating to disabled people are under consideration.

London Government

Mr. Tracey: To ask the Prime Minister how many representations he has received calling for a directly elected council for the London conurbation; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: As far as I am aware none, although my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has received a dozen or so, mostly in response to consultation on the review of local government outside London and the metropolitan counties. I am aware that the main opposition parties and the Association of London Authorities want to recreate a Greater London council in all but name. I have no plans for changing the basic structure of local government in London.

Child Benefit

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy not to allow names and addresses of child benefit claimants to be sold or passed on outside the Department of Social Security.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 8 November 1991]:* It is Government policy that all personal information, including names and addresses, held in social security records should be regarded as confidential and should not normally be disclosed to a third party without the consent of the person concerned. Information may normally be disclosed without consent to assist the police in the investigation of a serious crime; to meet the welfare needs of the individual concerned; to meet statutory requirements, for example, to other Government Departments or organisations which act as agents of the DSS in paying benefit; and to prevent the duplication of payments from public funds. We have no plans to change this policy.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister what changes have been made in the arrangements regarding the sending of letters from chief executives of executive agencies to hon. Members in response to parliamentary questions when the House is not sitting.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 8 November 1991]:* The aim of the arrangements for chief executives to write direct to hon. Members is to ensure that the replies are full, prompt and as helpful as possible. It is for individual Ministers to determine how they will achieve this, including when the House is not sitting.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list each Department and each executive agency which employs its target quota of people with disabilities.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 8 November 1991]:* All departments and agencies work to increase opportunities for people with disabilities, whether registered or unregistered, under a civil service code of practice on the employment of people with disabilities. The civil service compares favourably with the private sector and in 1990 six departments and agencies exceeded a 3 per cent. level of staff registered as disabled. The Government will continue to seek to ensure that disabled people have opportunities for employment in departments and agencies which are at least as good as those of able bodied people.

Offensive Odours (Cardiff)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Prime Minister what consultations he has had concerning the Butetown main foul sewer and offensive odours in the area of the Cardiff bay pierhead broadwalk.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 8 November 1991]:* During my visit to Cardiff bay on 20 September the problem was raised by local residents.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Adult Education

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he is taking to develop the provision of non-vocational adult education classes and increase the access to vocational classes for mature students.

Mr. Eggar: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the Further and Higher Education Bill, which was introduced in another place on November 4. Our proposals are designed to increase participation and improve opportunities in further education, including for adults.

English Teaching

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has to legislate for the regulation of schools teaching English as a foreign language.

Mr. Eggar: There are no plans for the regulation of private sector schools teaching English as a foreign language. Consumer choice, backed by the independent voluntary accreditation schemes, appropriately safeguards proper standards in the non-maintained further and higher education institutions.

Howbury Grange School

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received on the future of Howbury Grange school, Slade Green, Erith.

Mr. Fallon: My right hon. and learned Friend has received five letters about the Howbury Grange school. Four expressed opposition to its proposed closure and one sought technical information about the statutory procedures relating to school closures.

IQ Tests

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information is provided in the syllabus to students at teacher training colleges on IQ or mental tests for children.

Mr. Fallon: The Secretary of State's criteria for the approval of courses of initial teacher training state:

"on completion of their course students should have developed skills in the evaluation and recording of pupil performance, including in particular the testing and assessment requirements related to the National Curriculum and, where relevant, the preparation of pupils for public examinations."

ENERGY

Energy and the Environment

12. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what response he has made to the House of Lords European Affairs Select Committee report on energy and the environment.

Mr. Moynihan: The Government provided the Committee with a response to each of the report's conclusions and recommendations on 16 October; with the agreement of the Committee, we placed a copy of the response in the Library on 7 November. A debate on the report is taking place this afternoon in another place.

Coal Mining (Employment)

14. **Mr. O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he intends to meet the chairman of British Coal to discuss the levels of employment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wakeham: I meet the chairman of British Coal regularly to discuss all aspects of the coal industry.

Oil and Gas Revenues

15. **Mrs. Margaret Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his estimate of the value of production in the United Kingdom continental shelf of the oil and gas revenues to the United Kingdom Exchequer.

26. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his estimate of the value of production in the United Kingdom continental shelf of oil and gas revenues to the United Kingdom Exchequer.

Mr. Moynihan: In his autumn statement, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer gave his estimate of the value to the United Kingdom exchequer of UKCS oil and gas production as being £2·5 billion for the financial year 1990-91.

Nuclear Waste Disposal

16. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what discussions he has had with his counterparts in other European Community countries on the disposal of nuclear waste from electricity production on the sites of nuclear power stations and other nuclear installations.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Neither the Secretary of State for the Environment, who has policy responsibility for nuclear waste management, nor myself, with responsibility for nuclear energy policy more widely, has recently had discussions with European Community counterparts on the disposal of nuclear waste from power stations and other nuclear installations.

Electricity Generation

17. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on progress towards the establishment of independent electricity generation projects.

Mr. Wakeham: The Government's policy is to encourage the development of competition in generation. The first new independent power station since privatisation, at Roosecote, has already started supplying electricity to the grid; construction work has now started at three other sites; and the Government are aware of around 20 other projects at various stages of consideration.

27. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his estimate of the percentage of energy generation from *(a)* nuclear and *(b)* renewable sources in 1995 and 2000.

Mr. Wakeham: I anticipate that the contribution made to electricity generation by renewables will grow strongly in the future. Nuclear generation will also continue to make a substantial contribution.

Solar Energy

18. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what research is being undertaken into the potential for active solar technology in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Moynihan: I announced on 19 August a review which is presently under way to investigate developments in active solar heating during the last 10 years. As part of that review we are undertaking a comprehensive survey of the United Kingdom active solar heating industry.

Non-fossil Fuel Obligation

19. **Mr. Speller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the future of the non-fossil fuel obligation.

Mr. Wakeham: The non-fossil fuel obligation continues to ensure the availability in the national interest of nuclear generating capacity and, as my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy informed the House last week, is providing for the construction of greatly increased amounts of renewables-sourced generating capacity.

Refuse Incineration

20. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what assessment he has made of the contribution to energy needs that could be provided by *(a)* refuse incineration and *(b)* sewage sludge incineration and the technical possibilities of achieving acceptable standards for either or both.

Mr. Moynihan: Energy recovery from refuse and sewage sludge incineration can be an economically attractive and environmentally acceptable disposal route. Our review of renewable energy will consider the potential contribution from such sources of energy.

Combined Heat and Power

21. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a further statement about combined heat and power schemes.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Government fully recognise the environmental and energy efficiency benefits of combined heat and power and the Energy Efficiency Office continues to promote the wider use of the technology under its best practice programme. Interest in CHP is at a high level and the prospects for CHP in the 1990s are most encouraging.

Coal Industry

22. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he next intends to meet the chairman of British Coal to discuss the future of the coal industry.

Mr. Wakeham: I meet the chairman of British Coal regularly to discuss all aspects of the industry.

Insulation

23. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his most recent estimate of the annual amount spent on insulation measures in the private and public sectors.

25. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his most recent estimate of the annual amount spent on insulation measures in the private and public sectors.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: This information is not available. However, public sector expenditure to promote energy efficiency amounts to in excess of £1 billion.

Renewable Energy

24. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what new initiatives he plans to increase the volume of energy generated by renewables.

Mr. Moynihan: The second Renewables Order laid before the House on 5 November has resulted in a very substantial increase of 472 MW of capacity being contracted with the regional electricity companies. I am currently reviewing our renewable energy strategy and a revised forward plan is expected in spring 1992.

Energy Efficiency Office

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the total budget granted to the Energy Efficiency Office in each year from 1986-87 to 1991-92.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The following figures give the budget provision for the Energy Efficiency Office in each year from 1986-87 to 1991-92:

	£ million
1986-87	21·3
1987-88	18·9
1988-89	20·3
1989-90	15·0
1990-91	23·3
1991-92	41·9

Clean Coal Technology

Mr. Sumberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what recent initiatives he has taken to promote research and development into clean coal technology.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: In partnership with United Kingdom industry, British Coal and overseas agencies we have recently launched five new clean coal projects with a contract value of £20 million.

Wind Technology

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the obligation for wind technology under the 1991 Non-Fossil Fuel Obligation Renewables Order, calculated on the same basis as that used for the other technology bands in the statement of 5 November by the hon. Member for Lewisham, East (Mr. Moynihan), *Official Report*, columns 329-41.

Mr. Wakeham: The wind tranche of the 1991 renewables non-fossil fuel obligation has been set at a level that will build up to 82·43 MW declared net capacity. I understand that the regional electricity companies have entered into contracts for some 49 wind projects at a price of 11p/kWh.

Electricity Shareholders

Mr. Day: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his estimate of the number of electricity vouchers sent to customer shareholders in the 12 regional electricity companies.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Nearly 1 million people who bought shares in their regional electricity companies last December were sent vouchers in August. The breakdown in respect of each company is as follows:

Electricity vouchers issued by 1 October 1991:

Company	*Number of vouchers*
Eastern Electricity	62,099
East Midlands Electricity	62,300
London Electricity	27,344
Manweb	98,284
Midlands Electricity	137,083
Northern Electric	72,456
NORWEB	43,267
SEEBOARD	83,667
Southern Electricity	46,091
South Wales Electricity	79,924
South Western Electricity	72,038
Yorkshire Electricity	159,845
Total	944,378

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Debt Counselling

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list debt counselling services which are currently funded wholly or in part from his Department's budget; and what plans he has to expand funding of debt counselling services.

Mr. Leigh: My Department does not provide funds specifically for debt counselling services and has no plans to do so. The main provider of debt counselling services nationally is the Citizens Advice Service which, through the network of citizens advice bureaux, advises on debt problems as part of its general advisory work. Individual bureaux are funded mainly by local authorities. My Department funds the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux and Citizens Advice Scotland which provide the support services to the local bureaux. Total DTI grant-in-aid in 1991-92 to NACAB and CAS will be about £12 million.

Many lending institutions have already provided funds to support debt counselling services; the Government would like to see more following that lead.

Insurance Services Group

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he has taken within the specific powers and responsibilities of his office to assist civil service employees that have been or will be affected by the sale of the Insurance Services Group of the Export Credits Guarantee Department.

Mr. Sainsbury: Over 500 of ECGD employees have volunteered to transfer to the privatised new company which will take over the business of the Insurance Services Group. The decisions on who will be offered jobs in the new company and who will remain in ECGD will take account as far as possible of the preferences expressed by the employees. If there should be a surplus of people remaining in ECGD after all the transfers have taken place, every effort will be made to find them other jobs in the civil service. The appropriate unit of Her Majesty's Treasury has been alerted accordingly.

Engineering Steel Industry

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate he has of the effect exercised upon the engineering steel industry by the increases in electricity prices in recent months; and if he proposes to offer advice or take any action in regard to this matter.

Mr. Leigh: I am aware of the concern expressed by companies in the engineering steel industry about electricity price increases. Monitoring the operation of the electricity market is a matter for the Director General of Electricity Supply, who is also aware of this concern.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Baltic States

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he proposes for the return to the three Baltic sovereign states of their gold deposit made at the Bank of England in 1940.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have invited each Baltic Government to send a representative to London for a first round of discussions on the gold and other financial issues. Talks were held with the Estonian delegation on 7 November and the Latvian delegation on 8 November. In both cases it was agreed that a further round of discussions should be held. The discussions were friendly and useful progress was made. Talks with the Lithuanian delegation have been arranged for 13 November.

Western Sahara

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support is being given by Her Majesty's Government to the Sahrawi refugees in the western Sahara.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have not provided any bilateral financial assistance to western Saharan refugees. However, we have given our full support to the United Nations Secretary-General's settlement plan, which envisages the holding of a referendum early next year. This will enable the Saharawi to determine their own future. We have contributed, both in terms of finance and personnel, to the United Nations mission (MINURSO) responsible for the organisation and conduct of the referendum.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in the western Sahara in respect of the progress on the United Nations peace plan; and what action is being taken by the United Kingdom Government to support the peace plan.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Sir P. Blaker) on 5 November, column *27*.

Disabled People

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the European Council of Ministers last discussed the problems of disabled people; and when he next expects the Council of Ministers to discuss these problems.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The Council of Ministers agreed a Council resolution on 31 May 1990 on the integration of disabled young people into ordinary systems of education.

The Commission has published this year proposals concerning disabled people under its social action programme, but they have not yet been scheduled for Council discussion.

Croatia

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he is taking to bring the fighting in Croatia to an end.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: On 8 November we and our EC partners agreed a number of economic measures against Yugoslavia. We shall now be working towards a United Nations Security Council resolution imposing restrictions on the sale of oil to Yugoslavia.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements he is making to provide a package of aid to assist the people of Croatia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are contributing £250,000 to the International Red Cross Committee's effort in Yugoslavia. Together with our share of the 1 million ecu already committed by the European Community this brings our total contribution to over £1·3 million.

European Union

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress in the current negotiations on European political, economic and monetary union leading up to the ministerial European Council on 8 December.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Following the European Council in Luxembourg on 28-29 June, the Netherlands presidency has made good progress in leading negotiations on both political and economic and monetary union towards settlement at the European Council in Maastricht on 9 to 10 December.

On political union, the presidency has held a number of ministerial sessions of the intergovernmental conference since July and has made good progress on the basis of the Luxembourg presidency's text produced in June. A revised presidency text was produced on 9 November. It will be for the presidency to reconcile the differing views of member states in order to achieve an agreement acceptable to all at Maastricht.

On economic and monetary union discussions are now focussed on a composite text of draft treaty amendments circulated by the Netherlands presidency on 28 October. The text is a useful basis for further negotiations, but neither the United Kingdom nor other member states are committed to any particular part of its contents.

EC Draft Treaties

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what circulation has been given by the current Presidency of the European Council to the texts of their proposal for draft treaties on economic and monetary union and on political union; and what restrictions have been placed on their availability.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The Luxembourg presidency circulated a draft treaty text on economic and monetary and political union on 18 June in advance of the Luxembourg European Council. The Netherlands presidency produced composite draft treaty texts on political union on 24 September and on economic and monetary union on 28 October. They also produced, on 9 November, a revised treaty text on political union in advance of the Conclave of Foreign Ministers, 12 to 14 November. These texts are circulated by the presidency to those participating in the intergovernmental conferences—that is, the member states and the Commission. These are working documents in a confidential negotiation, but they have in practice rapidly become public and are or will all be available in the Library of the House.

Vietnamese Migrants

Mr. David Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Vietnamese migrants in Hong Kong.

Mr. Hurd: On 9 November, 59 Vietnamese illegal immigrants were repatriated from Hong Kong to Vietnam. This group was made up of so-called double-backers—those who did not qualify as refugees, who volunteered to return to Vietnam from Hong Kong once, thereby benefiting from repatriation payment by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, but who re-entered Hong Kong illegally for a second time, together with members of their family. All were screened again after arrival in Hong Kong and, after appeal, were again determined not to qualify for refugee status under the terms of the 1951 United Nations convention and its 1967 protocol.

The repatriation was carried out in full accordance with standard international practices, over a two-day period, and in line with the internationally agreed comprehensive plan of action, in particular the provision that all those who are not refugees should return home. On 8 November the illegal immigrants were moved from the Nei Kwu detention centre to a transit centre at Kai Tak airport. On 9 November, they were transported by air to Vietnam. Those returned will spend up to three days in the British-financed Co Nhue transit centre near Hanoi to obtain identity documents before travelling by bus to their home villages.

The Vietnamese Government have guaranteed that no illegal immigrant who returns to Vietnam will face persecution. They will facilitate the monitoring of all those who return by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and others to ensure that these guarantees are fully respected. In the last two and a half years, more than 11,500 Vietnamese migrants have returned voluntarily to Vietnam from Hong Kong without a single substantiated case of persecution.

Further repatriation will be arranged in the coming weeks. We welcome the fact that of the 160 double-backers whom we had originally intended to return to Vietnam on 9 November, more than half chose to opt for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' voluntary repatriation scheme. There remain almost 63,000 Vietnamese migrants in Hong Kong. We hope that all those determined to be illegal immigrants in Hong Kong will similarly opt to volunteer to return to Vietnam.

Hong Kong

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what changes he envisages in his relationship with the Hong Kong Legislative Council following the recent elections.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We share the wish expressed by the Governor of Hong Kong to build up a co-operative partnership with the new Council. This is essential for the continued success of Hong Kong. We look forward to keeping in close touch with members of the Council.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Sittings of the House

Mr. Allen: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick upon Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, what is the cost in constant prices, in overtime, other payments and overheads, of sittings of the House beyond 10 pm for each year since 1961 for which records exist.

Mr. Beith: It is not possible to provide the information requested without disproportionate cost. It is expected,

however, that the systems necessary to identify many of the elements of such expenditure in future will be established as a result of the implementation of proposals agreed by the House in respect of the report made by Sir Robin Ibbs to the House of Commons Commission.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Members' Pay and Allowances

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make it his policy to publish the reports of *(a)* the Hay Management Consultants into the office costs allowance, *(b)* the Office of Manpower economic report and *(c)* the Top Salaries Review Body report on Members' pay and allowances.

Mr. MacGregor: As part of the Top Salaries Review Body's review of the office costs allowance, the Office of Manpower Economics commissioned a report from Hay Management Consultants and ran a questionnaire survey of Members of Parliament. It is a matter for the review body to decide whether either or both of these are published. However, I am happy to draw the hon. Gentleman's question to the review body's attention.

Select Committees

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many departmental Select Committee reports there have been since the inception of the system; and how many have been debated on the Floor on a substantive motion.

Mr. MacGregor: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 13 June 1989, col. *357*, which gave information for the period from 1979 until then. Since that time 196 reports and 90 special reports have been published by the departmentally related Select Committees. None has been debated on substantive motions; but several have been debated in other ways, including debates on estimate days and other occasions when reports were cited on the Order Paper as relevant to proceedings in the House.

Suspended Sittings

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many times a Minister of the Crown has used the power to suspend the sitting under Standing Order No. 10 since 14 July 1969.

Mr. MacGregor: The last occasion was 14 July 1969.

Thefts

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many thefts have been reported in the Palace of Westminster for the latest year.

Mr. MacGregor: The police in the Palace of Westminster have recorded 92 incidents of theft in the parliamentary precincts since 1 January 1991. Five arrests have been made in the same period.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will initiate measures to provide all Members who wish it, with keys to their offices so they can secure their property against theft; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: Members occupying the new accommodation in 1 Parliament street are already being issued with keys to their rooms. In other parliamentary outbuildings and the Palace of Westminster itself, keys can be made available to Members on request to the Serjeant at Arms. Keys are also provided for all desks and filing cabinets and it is a great help to the security staff if Members can ensure that desks and filing cabinets both in their own rooms and in their secretaries' rooms are locked when not in use, that the keys are not left in easily accessible places and that articles of value, such as portable television sets, telephones and cash boxes, as well as confidential papers are locked away when offices are left unattended.

Special Standing Committees

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will list the occasions when Special Standing Committees have been established; and what proposals he has to use these procedures in the current Session.

Mr. MacGregor: The following Bills have been referred to Special Standing Committees: in Session 1980-81, the Criminal Attempts Bill, the Deep Sea Mining (Temporary Provisions) Bill *[Lords]*, and the Education Bill; in Session 1981-82, the Mental Health (Amendment) Bill *[Lords]*; and in Session 1983-84, the Matrimonial and Family Proceedings Bill *[Lords]*.

As I indicated to the House on 7 November, col. *581*, this procedure is really best suited to specialist, highly technical measures which are not really of party-political controversy: I doubt if any of the Bills in the current Session fall into this category.

Private Members' Bills

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Lord President of the Council what was the cost to public funds, in each of the last four Sessions of Parliament, of printing Private Members' Bills introduced under the ten-minute rule which never reached the Second Reading stage.

Mr. MacGregor: The costs of printing all the Bills of the House are borne by HMSO, which aims to recover its costs from sales revenue.

The estimated cost, including materials, of printing Private Members' Bills introduced under the 10-minute rule which did not reach the Second Reading stage in each of the last four Sessions is as follows:

	£
1987-88	7,500
1988-89	11,900
1989-90	11,500
1990-91	7,100

Guillotine Motions

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will list the occasions on which the Government have introduced the guillotine allocation of time order since the 1979-80 Session, indicating after how many hours in Committee on each Bill it was introduced and the total number of hours in Committee.

Mr. MacGregor *[holding answer 8 November 1991]*: The information is supplied in the table.

Session/Bill	Bills guillotined in Standing Committee: Hours in Committee before guillotine	Bills guillotined in Standing Committee: Total hours in Committee	Bills guillotined in Committee of whole House: Hours in Committee before guillotine	Bills guillotined in Committee of whole House: Total hours in Committee
1979-80				
Education (No. 2)	82	103	—	—
Social Security	60	92	—	—
Housing	110	144	—	—
Social Security (No. 2)	44	64	—	—
1980-81				
Transport	55	96	—	—
British Nationality	90	136	—	—
1981-82				
Oil and Gas (Enterprise)	70	99	—	—
Employment	91	110	—	—
Northern Ireland	—	—	54	64
1982-83				
Transport	80	96	—	—
Telecommunications	110	149	—	—
Housing and Building Control	90	108	—	—
1983-84				
Telecommunications	80	106	—	—
Rates	80	109	—	—
Rating and Valuation (Amendment) (Scotland)	82	100	—	—
1984-85				
Local Government	86	145	—	—
Transport	76	129	—	—
1985-86				
Gas	75	114	—	—
Social Security	100	141	—	—
European Communities (Amendment)	—	—	18	22
1986-87				
Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland)	101	119	—	—
Local Government Finance	—	—	15	21
1987-88				
Education Reform	88	163	—	—
Local Government Finance	72	136	—	—
Social Security[1]	—	—	—	—
Firearms[1] (Amendment)	—	—	—	—
Housing[1]	—	—	—	—
1988-89				
Children *(Lords)*[1]	—	—	—	—
Companies *(Lords)*[1]	—	—	—	—
Dock Work	29	46	—	—
Employment[1]	—	—	—	—
Football Spectators *(Lords)*	37	54	—	—
Local Government and Housing[1]	—	—	—	—
Official Secrets	—	—	14	30
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions)	52	54	—	—
Self-Governing Schools &c. (Scotland)	120	188	—	—
Water	75	148	—	—

Session/Bill	Bills guillotined in Standing Committee: Hours in Committee before guillotine	Bills guillotined in Standing Committee: Total hours in Committee	Bills guillotined in Committee of whole House: Hours in Committee before guillotine	Bills guillotined in Committee of whole House: Total hours in Committee
1989-90				
Education (Student Loans)[1]	—	—	—	—
Human Fertilization and Embryology *(Lords)*[2]	—	10	—	17
National Health Service and Community Care[1]	—	—	—	—
Social Security[1]	—	—	—	—
1990-91				
Community Charges (General Reduction)[2]	—	—	4	—
Dangerous Dogs[2]	—	—	5	—

[1] Allocation of time motion moved after Committee stage.
[2] Allocation of time motion moved before Committee stage.

SCOTLAND

Salmon Fisheries

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will list all the bodies and individuals from whom he received formal or informal representations about the east coast salmon fisheries between the date when the report on the fisheries was first delivered to his Department and the date of its publication; and whether he will list any further bodies or individuals whom he consulted on the matter.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: No. Views about east coast salmon net fisheries were stated or sent in by very many bodies and individuals while the report was in preparation. There were, however, no consultations about the report or its contents which, as section 39 of the Act makes clear, were matters for my right hon. Friends the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Secretary of State for Scotland to consider and present to Parliament.

Examinations Statistics

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the number of pupils in Scotland who were presented for exams in those standard grade subjects offering credit, general and foundation level in 1991; what are the corresponding figures for the number of pupils who actually sat each of those exams; and if he will publish a breakdown of these figures for each local education authority.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is set out in the tables. It includes data for those examinations offered at credit and general levels only: that is, biology, chemistry, physics and the optional writing examinations in French, Gaelic (Learners), German, Italian, Russian and Spanish.

Borders Region

Subject	Number of pupils presented for standard grade at February 1991	Number of pupils assessed
Art and Design	460	442
Biology	508	504
Chemistry	417	416
Classical Studies	—	—
Computing Studies	391	387
Contemporary Social Studies	23	23
Craft and Design	317	309
Drama	—	—
Economics	—	—
English	1,302	1,278
French	532	524
French-Writing	510	441
Gaidhlig (Revised)	—	—
Gaelic (Learners) (Revised)	—	—
Gaelic (Learners)-Writing	—	—
Geography (Revised)	477	451
German (Revised)	224	220
German-Writing	212	178
Graphic Communication	—	—
Greek	7	7
History (Revised)	263	249
Home Economics	260	250
Italian (Revised)	—	—
Italian-Writing	—	—
Latin	28	27
Mathematics	1,460	1,437
Modern Studies (Revised)	258	239
Music	220	203
Office and Information Studies	319	313
Physical Education	309	302
Physics	397	392
Religious Studies	46	44
Russian (Revised)	—	—
Russian-Writing	—	—
Science	272	264
Social and Vocational Skills	117	115
Spanish (Revised)	—	—
Spanish-Writing	—	—
Technological Studies	186	174

Central Region

Subject	Number of pupils presented for standard grade at February 1991	Number of pupils assessed
Art and Design	988	785
Biology	933	930
Chemistry	1,180	1,164
Classical Studies	12	10
Computing Studies	919	901
Contemporary Social Studies	280	274
Craft and Design	720	671
Drama	15	14
Economics	—	—
English	3,237	3,206
French	1,453	1,414
French-Writing	1,251	1,004
Gaidhlig (Revised)	—	—
Gaelic (Learners) (Revised)	2	2
Gaelic (Learners)-Writing	2	2
Geography (Revised)	558	538
German (Revised)	252	246
German-Writing	241	216
Graphic Communication	46	45
Greek	—	—
History (Revised)	542	497
Home Economics	672	605
Italian (Revised)	8	8
Italian-Writing	8	8
Latin	102	99
Mathematics	3,266	3,228
Modern Studies (Revised)	210	182
Music	403	383
Office and Information Studies	702	677
Physical Education	636	609
Physics	1,032	1,025
Religious Studies	47	44
Russian (Revised)	5	5
Russian-Writing	5	4
Science	881	870
Social and Vocational Skills	175	164
Spanish (Revised)	—	—
Spanish-Writing	—	—
Technological Studies	234	216

Dumfries and Galloway Region

Subject	Number of pupils presented for standard grade at February 1991	Number of pupils assessed
Art and Design	664	626
Biology	674	654
Chemistry	756	738
Classical Studies	—	—
Computing Studies	530	516
Contemporary Social Studies	97	92
Craft and Design	462	440
Drama	47	45
Economics	—	—
English	1,827	1,770
French	651	642
French-Writing	637	555
Gaidhlig (Revised)	—	—
Gaelic (Learners) (Revised)	—	—
Gaelic (Learners)-Writing	—	—
Geography (Revised)	606	559
German (Revised)	246	229
German-Writing	225	198
Graphic Communication	—	—
Greek	—	—
History (Revised)	539	510
Home Economics	356	326
Italian (Revised)	15	15
Italian-Writing	15	14
Latin	7	6
Mathematics	1,857	1,810
Modern Studies (Revised)	261	243
Music	278	268
Office and Information Studies	602	583
Physical Education	484	456
Physics	620	608
Religious Studies	44	38
Russian (Revised)	—	—
Russian-Writing	—	—
Science	437	408
Social and Vocational Skills	177	173
Spanish (Revised)	36	36
Spanish-Writing	34	24
Technological Studies	119	98

Fife Region

Subject	Number of pupils presented for standard grade at February 1991	Number of pupils assessed
Art and Design	1,341	1,288
Biology	1,162	1,148
Chemistry	1,262	1,247
Classical Studies	30	25
Computing Studies	1,072	1,046
Contemporary Social Studies	510	495
Craft and Design	879	837
Drama	—	—
Economics	13	12
English	4,178	4,110
French	1,567	1,538
French-Writing	1,526	1,257
Gaidhlig (Revised)	—	—
Gaelic (Learners) (Revised)	—	—
Gaelic (Learners)-Writing	—	—
Geography (Revised)	771	676
German (Revised)	777	772
German-Writing	777	631
Graphic Communication	26	24
Greek	6	6
History (Revised)	704	661
Home Economics	975	945
Italian (Revised)	—	—
Italian-Writing	—	—
Latin	97	93
Mathematics	4,181	4,127
Modern Studies (Revised)	946	894
Music	379	356
Office and Information Studies	71	71
Physical Education	388	377
Physics	1,348	1,336
Religious Studies	—	—
Russian (Revised)	1	1
Russian-Writing	1	1
Science	1,318	1,277
Social and Vocational Skills	94	91
Spanish (Revised)	8	8
Spanish-Writing	8	7
Technological Studies	681	652

Grampian Region

Subject	Number of pupils presented for standard grade at February 1991	Number of pupils assessed
Art and Design	2,047	1,963
Biology	1,374	1,352
Chemistry	1,507	1,482
Classical Studies	2	2
Computing Studies	1,575	1,543
Contemporary Social Studies	180	176
Craft and Design	1,300	1,249
Drama	119	118
Economics	13	12
English	5,772	5,718
French	2,471	2,455
French-Writing	2,072	1,668
Gaidhlig (Revised)	—	—
Gaelic (Learners) (Revised)	—	—
Gaelic (Learners)-Writing	—	—
Geography (Revised)	1,641	1,593
German (Revised)	663	658
German-Writing	588	492
Graphic Communication	59	59
Greek	—	—
History (Revised)	1,063	1,020
Home Economics	899	882
Italian (Revised)	—	—
Italian-Writing	—	—
Latin	35	35
Mathematics	5,707	5,670
Modern Studies (Revised)	1,192	1,114
Music	402	395
Office and Information Studies	1,037	1,030
Physical Education	845	823
Physics	1,235	1,226
Religious Studies	88	84
Russian (Revised)	—	—
Russian-Writing	—	—
Science	1,457	1,439
Social and Vocational Skills	1,109	1,098
Spanish (Revised)	56	55
Spanish-Writing	49	47
Technological Studies	590	566

Highland Region

Subject	Number of pupils presented for standard grade at February 1991	Number of pupils assessed
Art and Design	1,054	1,030
Biology	723	714
Chemistry	784	769
Classical Studies	15	15
Computing Studies	764	742
Contemporary Social Studies	66	64
Craft and Design	768	738
Drama	37	36
Economics	31	28
English	2,665	2,639
French	1,123	1,093
French-Writing	1,053	861
Gaidhlig (Revised)	2	2
Gaelic (Learners) (Revised)	113	111
Gaelic (Learners)-Writing	84	63
Geography (Revised)	1,176	1,136
German (Revised)	282	271
German-Writing	266	214
Graphic Communication	28	26
Greek	2	2
History (Revised)	713	683
Home Economics	686	678
Italian (Revised)	16	16
Italian-Writing	9	9
Latin	35	35
Mathematics	2,685	2,665
Modern Studies (Revised)	303	290
Music	415	401
Office and Information Studies	409	402
Physical Education	606	597
Physics	935	924
Religious Studies	56	54
Russian (Revised)	9	9
Russian-Writing	9	9
Science	670	664
Social and Vocational Skills	29	29
Spanish (Revised)	—	—
Spanish-Writing	—	—
Technological Studies	183	175

Lothian Region

Subject	Number of pupils presented for standard grade at February 1991	Number of pupils assessed
Art and Design	2,225	2,127
Biology	1,922	1,897
Chemistry	2,248	2,224
Classical Studies	—	—
Computing Studies	2,179	2,125
Contemporary Social Studies	216	210
Craft and Design	1,540	1,437
Drama	66	63
Economics	154	152
English	7,230	7,090
French	2,086	2,053
French-Writing	1,856	1,546
Gaidhlig (Revised)	—	—
Gaelic (learners)-Writing	—	—
Gaelic (Learners)-Writing	—	—
Geography (Revised)	2,336	2,242
German (Revised)	1,084	1,062
German-Writing	1,011	851
Graphic Communication	58	56
Greek	4	4
History (Revised)	1,533	1,429
Home Economics	1,544	1,484
Italian (Revised)	—	—
Italian-Writing	—	—
Latin	76	76
Mathematics	7,135	6,709
Modern Studies (Revised)	1,077	1,008
Music	870	810
Office and Information Studies	1,935	1,890
Physical Education	1,405	1,358
Physics	2,338	2,303
Religious Studies	97	89
Russian (Revised)	22	22
Russian-Writing	22	20
Science	2,316	2,267
Social and Vocational Skills	238	229
Spanish (Revised)	76	72
Spanish-Writing	68	55
Technological Studies	686	650

Orkney Islands

Subject	*Number of pupils presented for standard grade at February 1991*	*Number of pupils assessed*
Art and Design	65	63
Biology	94	94
Chemistry	125	124
Classical Studies	—	—
Computing Studies	73	73
Contemporary Social Studies	1	1
Craft and Design	62	61
Drama	—	—
Economics	—	—
English	256	254
French	112	110
French-Writing	112	107
Gaidhlig (Revised)	—	—
Gaelic (Learners) (Revised)	—	—
Gaelic (Learners)-Writing	—	—
Geography (Revised)	117	116
German (Revised)	43	43
German-Writing	43	41
Graphic Communication	—	—
Greek	—	—
History (Revised)	74	72
Home Economics	39	39
Italian (Revised)	—	—
Italian-Writing	—	—
Latin	16	16
Mathematics	262	260
Modern Studies (Revised)	33	30
Music	37	37
Office and Information Studies	61	60
Physical Education	23	23
Physics	97	97
Religious Studies	—	—
Russian (Revised)	—	—
Russian-Writing	—	—
Science	32	30
Social and Vocational Skills	29	28
Spanish (Revised)	—	—
Spanish-Writing	—	—
Technological Studies	40	37

Shetland Islands

Subject	*Number of Pupils Presented for Standard Grade at February 1991*	*Number of Pupils Assessed*
Art and Design	83	81
Biology	57	57
Chemistry	100	98
Classical Studies	—	—
Computing Studies	49	48
Contemporary Social Studies	32	32
Craft and Design	89	89
Drama	—	—
Economics	—	—
English	317	316
French	102	101
French-Writing	100	84
Gaidhlig (Revised)	—	—
Gaelic (Learners) (Revised)	—	—
Gaelic (Learners)-Writing	—	—
Geography (Revised)	174	172
German (Revised)	—	—
German-Writing	—	—
Graphic Communication	—	—
Greek	—	—
History (Revised)	100	97
Home Economics	71	70
Italian (Revised)	—	—
Italian-Writing	—	—
Latin	2	2
Mathematics	317	317
Modern Studies (Revised)	26	26
Music	32	31
Office and Information Studies	83	82
Physical Education	9	8
Physics	114	114
Religious Studies	—	—
Russian (Revised)	—	—
Russian-Writing	—	—
Science	113	113
Social and Vocational Skills	4	4
Spanish (Revised)	—	—
Spanish-Writing	—	—
Technological Studies	—	—

Strathclyde Region

Subject	*Number of pupils presented for standard grade at February 1991*	*Number of pupils assessed*
Art and Design	7,587	7,130
Biology	7,223	7,123
Chemistry	8,563	8,466
Classical Studies	122	114
Computing Studies	5,907	5,649
Contemporary Social Studies	1,700	1,592
Craft and Design	6,631	5,893
Drama	286	262
Economics	208	193
English	26,985	26,250
French	10,882	10,615
French-Writing	9,535	7,195
Gaidhlig (Revised)	3	2
Gaelic (Learners) (Revised)	27	12
Gaelic (Learners) Writing	17	12
Geography (Revised)	5,507	5,021
German (Revised)	1,699	1,663
German-Writing	1,579	1,231
Graphic Communication	113	107
Greek	9	7
History (Revised)	3,380	3,047
Home Economics	5,343	4,926
Italian (Revised)	90	89
Italian-Writing	79	65
Latin	599	566
Mathematics	27,268	26,695
Modern Studies (Revised)	3,618	3,223
Music	2,432	2,283
Office and Information Studies	5,503	5,320
Physical Education	4,301	4,096
Physics	7,527	7,447
Religious Studies	185	166
Russian (Revised)	31	30
Russian-Writing	29	23
Science	8,065	7,727
Social and Vocational Skills	2,411	2,230
Spanish (Revised)	398	377
Spanish-Writing	379	278
Technological Studies	1,923	1,771

Tayside Region

Subject	Number of pupils presented for standard grade at February 1991	Number of pupils assessed
Art and Design	1,108	1,051
Biology	1,059	1,042
Chemistry	1,180	1,163
Classical Studies	—	—
Computing Studies	1,333	1,304
Contemporary Social Studies	510	478
Craft and Design	933	859
Drama	19	19
Economics	30	25
English	4,492	4,388
French	1,787	1,740
French-Writing	1,627	1,314
Gaidhlig (Revised)	—	—
Gaelic (Learners) (Revised)	5	5
Gaelic (Learners)-Writing	2	2
Geography (Revised)	1,044	994
German (Revised)	493	476
German-Writing	483	402
Graphic Communication	35	34
Greek	4	4
History (Revised)	238	207
Home Economics	833	746
Italian (Revised)	3	2
Italian-Writing	1	1
Latin	102	100
Mathematics	4,458	4,349
Modern Studies (Revised)	401	361
Music	480	454
Office and Information Studies	603	579
Physical Education	811	751
Physics	1,161	1,147
Religious Studies	42	36
Russian (Revised)	—	—
Russian-Writing	—	—
Science	1,189	1,154
Social and Vocational Skills	417	396
Spanish (Revised)	68	67
Spanish-Writing	65	50
Technological Studies	514	483

Western Isles

Subject	Number of pupils presented for standard grade at February 1991	Number of pupils assessed
Art and Design	128	128
Biology	130	128
Chemistry	173	173
Classical Studies	—	—
Computing Studies	161	156
Contemporary Social Studies	10	10
Craft and Design	58	57
Drama	—	—
Economics	—	—
English	469	463
French	129	127
French-Writing	123	72
Gaidhlig (Revised)	102	101
Gaelic (Learners) (Revised)	131	129
Gaelic (Learners)-Writing	91	68
Geography (Revised)	—	—
German (Revised)	6	6
German-Writing	5	5
Graphic Communication	—	—
Greek	—	—
History (Revised)	—	—
Home Economics	80	79
Italian (Revised)	—	—
Italian-Writing	—	7
Latin	—	—
Mathematics	469	465
Modern Studies (Revised)	—	—
Music	40	38
Office and Information Studies	120	119
Physical Education	67	65
Physics	155	152
Religious Studies	—	—
Russian (Revised)	—	—
Russian-Writing	—	—
Science	151	148
Social and Vocational Skills	—	—
Spanish (Revised)	—	—
Spanish-Writing	—	—
Technological Studies	50	50

Total for all Regions

Subject	Number of pupils presented for standard grade at February 1991	Number of pupils assessed
Art and Design	17,750	16,714
Biology	15,859	15,643
Chemistry	18,295	18,064
Classical Studies	181	166
Computing Studies	14,953	14,490
Contemporary Social Studies	3,625	3,447
Craft and Design	13,759	12,640
Drama	589	557
Economics	449	422
English	58,750	57,482
French	22,895	22,412
French-Writing	20,402	16,104
Gaidhlig (Revised)	107	105
Gaelic (Learners) (Revised)	278	264
Gaelic (Learners)-Writing	196	147
Geography (Revised)	14,407	13,498
German (Revised)	5,769	5,646
German-Writing	196	147
Graphic Communication	365	351
Greek	32	30
History (Revised)	9,149	8,472
Home Economics	11,758	11,030
Italian (Revised)	132	130
Italian-Writing	112	97
Latin	1,099	1,055
Mathematics	59,065	57,732
Modern Studies (Revised)	8,325	7,610
Music	5,988	5,659
Office and Information Studies	11,445	11,126
Physical Education	9,884	9,465
Physics	16,959	16,771
Religious Studies	605	555
Russian (Revised)	68	67
Russian-Writing	66	57
Science	16,901	16,361
Social and Vocational Skills	4,800	4,557
Spanish (Revised)	642	615
Spanish-Writing	603	465
Technological Studies	5,206	4,872

Crofters

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the total amounts of money awarded under the crofter building grants and loans scheme in each of the past five financial years; what is the amount

awarded so far in the current financial year; and what were the amounts awarded specifically to fishermen who are not crofters for each of the same years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The approved expenditure under the crofters building grants and loans scheme in each of the past five financial years and the first six months of the current financial year is set out in the table.

	Total Approved Expenditure £	*Approved Expenditure —fishermen feuars* £
1986-87	3,402,000	64,000
1987-88	3,885,500	121,500
1988-89	2,977,500	121,500
1989-90	3,586,500	94,500
1990-91	4,027,500	31,000
April 1991 to 30 September 1991	2,175,000	31,000

Red Deer

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent studies he has received and considered relating to the red deer population; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The most recent study of this nature is the report on "The Management of Wild Red Deer in Scotland", commissioned by Rural Forum. My right hon. Friend considers that this report is a helpful contribution to public debate and is timely in view of the current review of deer legislation. It will be studied in detail in the context of the review.

Scottish Food

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action his Department is taking to promote Scottish food and drink, both in the United Kingdom and abroad; and whether he has any plans to help fund a body similar to Scottish Food Promotions Ltd.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Government support for the industry's marketing of food and drink is provided through Food From Britain, which is accountable to all four Agriculture Ministers. In Scotland, additional public support is provided by Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. The Scottish Office provides specific forms of assistance for exporters and is supporting the National Farmers Union of Scotland's plans for comprehensive quality assurance systems on farms. Since the closure of Scottish Food Promotion, SE and HIE have commissioned Trade Promotions (Scotland) Ltd. to arrange a Scottish presence at major trade fairs. There are no plans to set up another company to perform other functions of SFP.

School Reports

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action is being taken by his Department to monitor the implementation of recommendations made in HM inspectorate of schools' reports on individual schools.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: After a sufficient interval to give an opportunity to act on a report—usually a period of several months after publication—the inspectorate mounts a follow-up inspection to discuss the report and any action which has been taken on it with the director of education and the head teacher.

School Meals

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many children are receiving free school meals in each of the education authorities in Scotland expressed as a percentage of the total number of children taking school meals.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested, taken from the 1991 annual school meals census return, is as follows:

Percentage of children taking school meals who receive free meals

	Number receiving free meals	*Percentage of total receiving meals within each Region*
Borders	650	12·2
Central	5,170	29·7
Dumfries and Galloway	1,769	14·1
Fife	6,432	24·9
Grampian	4,375	14·0
Highland	2,881	22·1
Lothian	12,330	28·2
Strathclyde	61,169	39·7
Tayside	6,199	28·2
Orkney	179	9·2
Shetland	160	5·9
Western Isles	601	23·6
All Scotland	101,915	30·7

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by educational authority the number and percentage of secondary schools which now operate a cash cafeteria system for their pupils for the midday meal.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested, taken from the 1991 annual school meals census returns, is as follows:

Number of secondary schools operating a cash cafeteria system

Region	*Number of secondary schools*	*Number offering cash cafeteria system*	*Percentage*
Borders	9	9	100
Central	19	19	100
Dumfries and Galloway	16	16	100
Fife	19	19	100
Grampian	38	38	100
Highland	27	23	85
Lothian	51	51	100
Strathclyde	182	177	97
Tayside	32	32	100
Orkney	6	2	33
Shetland	9	1	11
Western Isles	16	6	38
All Scotland	424	393	93

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans his Department has to improve the diet of Scottish schoolchildren.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: An objective of health education in schools is to encourage pupils to adopt a well-balanced

and healthy diet. The place of health education in the curriculum is being reviewed as part of the 5-14 development programme.

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has any plans to reintroduce the nutritional requirement for school meals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Nutritional standards for school meals have never been prescribed in Scotland.

Cumbernauld High School

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action has been taken by his Department to monitor the implementation of the recommendations made by HM inspectorate of schools' report on Cumbernauld high school in 1990.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Cumbernauld high school was inspected in January and February 1990, the inspectorate report was published in June 1990 and a follow-up inspection was made by the inspectorate in January 1991.

Corporal Punishment

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has had from Kilsyth primary school board concerning corporal punishment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The school board wrote to me on 29 October advocating the reintroduction of corporal punishment in schools as a deterrent of last resort. Following a judgment in the European Court of Human Rights in 1982, the legal safeguards covering the administration of corporal punishment by staff in Scottish schools were withdrawn and this form of sanction was abolished.

Fish Farming

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what support his Department has given to the fish farming industry in Scotland since 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Department has given support to the fish farming industry in various ways.

The Scottish Office provides scientific advice and research through the marine laboratory in Aberdeen. Spending on relevant research has amounted to some £4 million in the last five years.

The Department also provides supplementary funding to fish farmers seeking grants from the European Community (EC Regulation 4028/86). Such assistance has amounted to £1·321 million to date. In addition, financial assistance has been provided through Highlands and Islands Enterprise and its predecessor for fish farms, fish processing investment, and for other forms of assistance, estimated at some £34 million since 1979.

The Department has also committed funding under the integrated development programme and the agricultural development programme for the Scottish islands for fish farming amounting to £4 million in total since 1982.

Royal Observer Corps

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what training facilities will be available to local authorities taking on the responsibilities of the Royal Observer Corps; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what arrangements have been made to ensure the maximum use of existing expertise and equipment during the transfer of Royal Observer Corps duties to local authorities; how many volunteers will be sought; which authorities have already developed parallel arrangements and what those arrangements are; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what plans have been made for the transfer of Royal Observer Corps duties to local authorities; by what date the transfer is expected to be complete; who will undertake these duties in the interim period; and if he will make a statement;

(4) if additional finances will be made available to local authorities in order to carry out the role of the Royal Observer Corps; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Following the statement on the Government's emergency planning review made on 10 July 1991 by the Secretary of State for the Home Department, columns 393-96, preliminary discussions have been held with local authorities in Scotland on what new monitoring arrangements may be appropriate following the standing down of the Royal Observer Corps and what role the former ROC volunteers might have in these new arrangements. While no conclusions have yet been reached on these matters, the aim will be to make as much use of ROC resources as possible.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement concerning the future plans for Royal Observer Corps centres at Raigmore, Inverness, and the RIMNET system on Tiree.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Home Office has responsibility for the Royal Observer Corps facility at Raigmore. Officials of my Department are considering with their opposite numbers in the Home Office whether an alternative civil defence use for the centre might be found.

The radioactive incident monitoring network system on Tiree is one of 16 sites throughout Scotland established under the national response plan to cater for the response to nuclear incidents occurring overseas. There are no plans to discontinue the use of the site on Tiree and it will continue to be part of the network.

College Management

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what added costs will arise from the change in management of colleges in the Further and High Education (Scotland) Bill because of the requirements under section 20 of the Value Added Tax Act 1983.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: An accurate assessment of the colleges' liability for value added tax after 1 April 1993 will be made when a precise breakdown is available of the sum to be transferred to the Secretary of State's budget for the funding of further education colleges.

Football (Policing)

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing, for each year since 1986,. *(a)* the total number of police officers on duty at Scottish Football League and Premier Division matches in Scotland, *(b)* the total attendance at Scottish Football League and Premier Division matches in Scotland and *(c)* the total number of police officers as a percentage of the total attendance at Scottish Football League and Premier Division matches in Scotland and *(d)* the total number of police officers in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not held centrally, but I will write to the hon. Member.

Civil Defence Budget

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total annual budget for civil defence provisions for 1991-92 and for each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office Home and Health Department's annual budget for civil defence provision over the period in question has been as follows:

	£ million
1978-79	0·8
1979-80	1·1
1980-81	1·4
1981-82	2·4
1982-83	3·7
1983-84	6·5
1984-85	7·5
1985-86	5·4
1986-87	5·3
1987-88	5·8
1988-89	6·1
1989-90	7·0
1990-91	7·9
1991-92	7·6

Rural Enterprise Programme

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he is now able to announce the outcome of the review of the operational areas for the business development scheme of the rural enterprise programme.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I am pleased to announce today that the rural enterprise programme's business development scheme, which aims to help farmers and crofters develop new businesses, will now be extended into two additional areas of the Highlands and Islands. The new areas are Dunoon/Cowal, Oban/Lorn and Mid-Argyll/Kintyre, and Badenoch/Strathspey and Upper Moray. Locally based project officers will be appointed as quickly as possible and I hope the first awards for approved projects in the new areas will be made by spring 1992.

The response to the BDS from the four existing operational areas of south-east Sutherland, West Ross, Lochalsh and Lochaber has been most encouraging, with some 30 projects already approved and many more under consideration. The REP offers generous levels of support and I am very pleased at the response so far. I hope that farmers and crofters in the two new operational areas will also respond positively to this opportunity which aims to make agricultural producers in the highlands and islands more secure in the face of growing pressures to reduce agricultural support.

Sheltered Housing

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will increase resources for Scottish local authorities to be able to increase their sheltered housing provision; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 7 November 1991]:* Resources totalling £454·5 million were announced in March for housing capital investment in authorities' own stock in 1991-92. It is for local authorities to decide how best to deploy the resources available to them to meet local housing needs, including the need for sheltered housing provision if this is seen as a priority in their areas.

Wild Birds

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will state which sites he intends next to designate as special protection areas under EC directive 79/409 on the conservation of wild birds, and which sites he intends to so designate before 1 December.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 8 November 1991]:* Consultations are taking place about the designation of eight special protection areas at present. It is not possible to say which site will be designated first or to give dates for possible designation.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Hospital Laundry Services

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland why the Eastern health and social services board rejected the tender for laundry services in the Royal group of hospitals.

Mr. Hanley: The only tender received for the laundry services contract in the Royal group of hospitals unit of management was from the in-house contractor. Since that tender price substantially exceeded the present cost of the service, the Eastern health and social services board quite correctly decided in this particular case not to award the contract but to re-tender the work within 18 months.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment has been made of the reasons for there having been only cross board and in-house tenders for laundry services in the Eastern health and social services board.

Mr. Hanley: All reasonable steps are taken to generate private sector interest in laundry services contracts. The small number of commercial firms with the capability of and interest in undertaking laundry contracts in Northern Ireland have decided not to submit tenders for contracts in EHSSB. Such decisions are a matter for them and I do not intend to speculate as to their reasons. However, the absence of private sector competition in this particular case does not prevent the board from achieving the objective of competitive tendering which is to test the cost-effectiveness of the service.

Civil Defence

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement regarding civil defence measures in the event of a nuclear explosion either in peace or war.

Dr. Mawhinney: I am currently reviewing civil defence arrangements in Northern Ireland in the light of the answer which my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary gave to a question from the hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) on 10 July, *Official Report*, columns *393-96*. While the new arrangements will be similar to those being developed for the remainder of the United Kingdom, some variations will be necessary to take account of different organisational and administrative structures within the Province.

CRISP Programme

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give the criteria for benefiting under CRISP—the community regeneration initiative special project—programme and urban development grant, indicating any change in those criteria in the last year, and list the persons and bodies which administer the same.

Mr. Hanley: The CRISP initiative is targeted on towns and villages with populations below approximately 10,000 in areas of particular disadvantage and is available to community groups and district councils.

Urban development grants are available for developments in specified areas of Belfast and Londonderry where the intention is to let or sell the completed projects and for refurbishments or new buildings within these areas aimed at achieving physical and economic regeneration.

There has been no change to the criteria for the UDG scheme or CRISP in the last year.

These programmes are administered by the Department of the Environment.

Grant outside Belfast and Londonderry is provided under the urban development programme which is funded by the International Fund for Ireland and I have asked the chairman of the fund to write to the hon. Gentleman. I will place a copy of his letter in the Library.

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the towns and villages that have benefited and will benefit from the CRISP—community regeneration initiative special project—programme and urban development grant, giving the total amount and population in each case.

Mr. Hanley: The moneys committed under the CRISP programme which is funded by the International Fund for Ireland and the Department of Environment, are shown in the table:

Town	*Amount Approved* £ million	*Population (Approximately)*
1. Coalisland	2·700	3,800
2. Castlederg	1·570	2,900
3. Carrickmore	1·880	1,000
4. Keady	1·500	3,200
5. Belleek	1·890	1,000
6. Dromore (Co. Tyrone)	0·670	1,000
7. Belcoo	0·314	1,100
8. Newtownhamilton	0·600	1,200

It is not possible to say which applications will receive approval in the future.

The urban development grant scheme applies only to Belfast—population 280,972—and Londonderry—population 94,721. At 31 October 1991, £68 million had been committed or expended on approved projects in the two cities.

Grants outside Belfast and Londonderry are provided under the urban development programme which is funded by the International Fund for Ireland. I have asked the chairman of the fund to write to the hon. Gentleman and I will place a copy of his letter in the Library.

Care Standards

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will place in the Library copies of specifications for care standards required by the four units of management in the Eastern health and social services board.

Mr. Hanley: Service specifications for three services—catering, domestic and laundry—have been individually prepared for all nine units of management in the Eastern health and social services board. A sample copy of each of the three services has been placed in the Library.

School Nurses

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many school nurses were employed in Northern Ireland in *(a)* 1975, *(b)* 1980, *(c)* 1985 and *(d)* 1990.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is given in the table.

	Number of Staff[1]	*Whole time equivalent*
1975	68	Not available
1980	92	82·2
1985	94	79·0
1990	101	81·3

[1] The figures show the number of staff in post at 31 December of each year.

Chronic Pain

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland at which clinics sufferers of chronic pain can be treated within the national health service; what is the extent of funding for treatment of chronic pain; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: Treatment for sufferers of chronic pain is provided at out-patient clinics in the following hospitals in Northern Ireland:

Eastern Board: Belfast City, Royal Victoria, Musgrave, Ulster, Mater, Bangor.
Northern Board: Waveney, Coleraine, Whiteabbey.
Western Board: Altnagelvin.
Southern Board: Craigavon, South Tyrone.

A clinic is also provided for outpatients on a weekly basis at the Queens university department of anaesthesia and there is a clinic for in-patients at the Belfast city hospital. Information about the extent of funding for the pain relief service is not held centrally.

Cardiac Operations

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people are currently waiting for cardiac operations at the Royal Victoria hospital, Belfast; what is the average waiting time; and what proposals there are to reduce the waiting time for such operations.

Mr. Hanley: There were 991 people waiting for cardiac operations at the Royal Victoria hospital, Belfast at the end of September 1991 and I have set out below the details of how long they have been doing so. The recent completion of the £1·5 million extension to the cardiac recovery area at the RVH will permit an increase in the number of operations and an additional cardiac surgeon and supporting staff will be appointed soon to support this increased workload. Boards are also actively considering the possibilities of purchasing further operations from outside Northern Ireland. The Western board has already taken an initiative this year in buying additional cardiac operations for its resident population from hospitals in London.

Patients waiting for admission by months waiting

Months	*Patients*
0-2	125
3-5	81
6-8	78
9-11	68
11-23	168
24+	471
Total	991

North and West Belfast Unit of Management

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list in tabular form for the years 1986 to 1991 the numbers in post in the North and West Belfast unit of management in the grades *(a)* senior management, *(b)* middle management, *(c)* medical, *(d)* nursing, *(e)* social workers, *(f)* social work assistants and *(g)* support staff.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested in respect of the North and West Belfast community unit is set out in the table:

	1986	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
Senior Management	12	12	16	16	31	31
	(12)	(12)	(16)	(16)	(31)	(31)
Middle Management	190	191	196	185	255	244
	(182·5)	(184·58)	(180·57)	(177·03)	(246·81)	(234·09)
Medical	10	13	14	11	13	13
	(5)	(6·7)	(7·7)	(4·7)	(6·7)	(6·7)
Nursing	182	174	193	206	689	679
	(152·53)	(166·12)	(177·15)	(177·19)	(614·45)	(605·36)
Social Workers	94	94	113	105	106	106
	(85·96)	(86·52)	(104·12)	(96·12)	(97·12)	(97·12)
Social Work Assistants	58	52	54	50	50	50
	(55·81)	(51·33)	(51·95)	(47·95)	(47·95)	(47·95)
Support Staff	457	422	470	397	649	645
	(335·89)	(324·9)	(358)	(304·85)	(506·79)	(505·08)

Notes:
1. Whole time equivalent figures are shown in brackets.
2. The figures show the number of staff in post at 30 September of each year.
3. Figures for 1990 and 1991 include staff in Muckamore Abbey hospital which prior to 1 April 1990 was a separate unit of management.
4. Medical figures do not include registrars, senior registrars and consultants who are not on the unit payroll.

Residential Homes

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the number of *(a)* residential care homes and *(b)* nursing homes in operation for each year since 1979.

Mr. Hanley: The information is as follows:

Year	*Residential care homes*[1]
1979	Not available
1980	234
1981	241
1982	246
1983	257
1984	253
1985	255
1986	266
1987	289
1988-89	[2]302
1989-90	[2]337

Year	*Nursing homes*[3]
1979	13
1980	11
1981	12
1982	12
1983	15
1984	18
1985	32
1986	46
1987	64
1988	90
1989	129
1990	164

[1] Includes both homes operated by health and social services boards and homes in the voluntary and private sectors.
[2] From 1988 information on residential care homes has been collected on a financial year basis. All other data on such homes are in relation to end of year.
[3] Figures at 31 December each year.

DSS Benefit Advisers

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list by local office the number of DSS benefit advisers appointed since the new DSS Benefits Agency was set up.

Mr. Hanley: Social security operational matters are the responsibility of Mr. Alec Wylie, chief executive of the Social Security Agency. He has written to the honourable Gentleman and copies of his reply will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the number of people receiving supplementary benefit or income support who were *(a)* residents in residential care homes, *(b)* residents in nursing homes, *(c)* residents over pension age, *(d)* residents under pension age, *(e)* elderly residents, and *(f)* mentally ill residents for each year since 1979.

Mr. Hanley: Full information is not available in the form requested. The available information for the years 1987 to 1990 is as follows:

Number of people receiving supplementary benefit/income support

Type of Home[3]	*May 1987*[1]			*May 1988*[1]			*May 1989*[1]			*October 1990*[2]		
	HSSB	*RCH*	*NH*	*HSSB*	*RCH*	*NH*	*HSSB*	*RCH*	*NH*	*HSSB*	*RCH*	*NH*
Status of resident 60 years or over:												
mentally ill[4]	630	713	317	720	1,120	1,060	700	1,420	1,500	N/A	85	80
others										N/A	1,321	2,533
Under 60 years:												
mentally ill[4]	469	151	102	260	140	100	240	120	120	N/A	41	7
others										N/A	203	219
Totals	1,099	864	419	980	1,260	1,160	940	1,540	1,620	N/A	1,650	2,839

[1] Annual statistical enquiry (5 per cent. sample).
[2] Special survey.
[3] Health and social services boards (HSSB) residential homes, indpendent residential care (RCH) and nursing homes (NH).
[4] Numbers qualifying for supplementary benefit/income support limits appropriate to mental disorder.

ENVIRONMENT

Regalian Building, Vauxhall Cross

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what Government work will be undertaken at the nine-storey building currently under construction by Regalian at Vauxhall Cross on the Thames Embankment.

Mr. Yeo: The building is for occupation by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Royal Parks (Staff)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many staff of the royal parks are being made redundant; and what is the total redundancy payment.

Mr. Yeo: A total of 342 industrial staff have received redundancy notices. It is estimated that redundancy and early retirement payments will total £3·05 million.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many current staff of the royal parks live in tied accommodation; how many will be allowed to remain when contractors take over; and what will happen to the rents of those who remain.

Mr. Yeo: A total of 35 current staff live in royal parks lodges. The 22 industrial staff who have received redundancy notices will be allowed to continue living in their lodges whether they are employed by contractors or not. Those who are not already paying fair rents will be required to do so with the increase being phased-in over a period depending on the size of the change.

Methane

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimates he has available for the quantity of methane loss into the atmosphere from the British gas industry.

Mr. Baldry: Data on United Kingdom methane emissions are published annually in the "Digest of Environmental Protection and Water Statistics," copies of which are placed in the Library of the House. The latest estimates, for 1989 in Digest no. 13, show that gas leakage from the distribution system accounted for 340,000 tonnes of methane, and venting from oil and gas platforms together accounted for a further 175,000 tonnes of methane.

Sports Facilities (Tendering)

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on how local authorities must draw up contracts for competitive tendering of the running of sports facilities so that the private sector has a fair chance to compete; and what powers he has to ensure that fair competition is encouraged with regard to the kinds of tasks set out in the tender documents.

Mr. Key: Under the Local Government Act 1988 local authorities are required to avoid anti-competitive behaviour in carrying out tendering for work subject to the Act. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has sanction powers which he may use if he considers that an authority has failed to comply with the statutory requirements, including the requirement to avoid anti-competitive behaviour. In March 1991, we issued a circular (1/91) giving guidance on factors that the Secretary of State would consider in reaching a view on whether local authorities had acted anti-competitively. We

are seeking powers in the Local Government Bill to strengthen our ability to prescribe what is, or is not, to be regarded as anti-competitive behaviour. We have just issued a consultation document "Competing for Quality —Competition in the Provision of Local Services" setting out our proposals for the use of those proposed powers.

Thames House, Millbank

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he consulted the Royal Fine Arts Commission before commencing work on the listed building Thames house, Millbank.

Mr. Yeo: The Royal Fine Arts Commission was consulted after minor works to remove redundant services had started but before the start of the main works.

Wild Birds

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation banning the importation of all wild birds; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The Government share the concern that has been expressed about the possible effects of trade on the wild populations of many species and about the conditions in which animals—especially birds—are transported. These are international problems which require international solutions and we are therefore pressing for stricter controls throughout the European Community and beyond.

Conservation action must be based on sound science. Earlier this year I therefore commissioned the Government's scientific advisers, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, to review the evidence as to whether the trade in wild-taken animals and plants was compatible with maintaining species at satisfactory levels. The JNCC's report was submitted on 31 July and copies are available in the Library of the House. The report gives unequivocal support for the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), which is the foundation for conservation controls on trade in the European Community and most of the rest of the world. The Committee does not advocate extensive bans but has made some wide-ranging recommendations for tightening the present controls. The report of the Royal Botanic Gardens submitted recently reaches similar conclusions and makes detailed recommendations on plants. We will make this available as soon as possible.

I therefore wrote to the European Commission on 14 October, urging it to propose that the Community takes steps to:

- strengthen measures to prevent illegal trade in endangered species and to ensure that specimens of these species are used to bring conservation benefits;
- make more systematic checks on the effect of trade on species whose survival might become threatened, to ensure that it continues only at sustainable levels;
- monitor trade in more species:
- make sure that appropriate care is taken of all species listed in CITES.

We intend to make clear the importance we attach to early progress at the Environment Council next month.

Because of his responsibilities for the welfare of animals during transport, my hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, joined me in this approach to the Commission, to press for strict controls on trade in any species which are particularly vulnerable to stress and mortality as a result of transport or captivity.

Listed Buildings (Alterations)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what bodies he consults before commencing major alterations to listed buildings.

Mr. Yeo: Clearance is sought from the local planning authority in line with DOE circulars 18/84 and 8/87. The local planning authority will in turn consult with various heritage bodies, though where significant proposals are concerned my Department will normally have had prior discussions with these bodies.

Planning Permissions

Mr. Colin Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on how many occasions in each of the last 10 years has *(a)* the South Herefordshire district council granted a planning permission as a departure from the structure plan, *(b)* such a planning consent been granted as a result of an appeal and *(c)* if he will give the same information for other non-metropolitan district councils in England.

Mr. Yeo: This information is not held centrally.

Local Government Finance

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment to what extent there is non-payment of the community charge in the current year; and what support he is giving to recover the unpaid community charge.

Mr. Key: At the end of June community charge receipts in England averaged 12 per cent. of local authorities' budgeted charge income. This figure was however affected by delays in issuing community charge bills due to the general reduction of £140 in headline charges announced in the Budget and it is not possible to draw conclusions about overall collection for the year. We will be publishing information on the second quarter of the year shortly.

The Government strongly support local authorities' efforts to collect the community charge. We have given them wide ranging collection powers and if these are used to the full authorities should be able to collect the charge from those people who have not paid.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will immediately review community charge benefit regulation No. 89 in order that full time married students can receive poll tax relief without affecting the spouse's claim.

Miss Widdecombe: I have been asked to reply.

Regulation 89 of the Social Security Community Charge Benefits (General) Regulations 1989 (SI 1989/1321) provides for excess benefits that have arisen where claimants have not declared all of their capital assets. We are not aware that this regulation has caused any difficulties in particular in relation to full-time married students.

Non-student partners of registered students can claim community charge benefit, while the student is entitled to

relief and only pays 20 per cent. of the charge. The benefit awarded to the non-student partner takes account of the couple's joint circumstances.

Local Authorities

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will publish a list of each local authority in England, its political control and the amount paid in attendance allowance and expenses to the highest paid councillor in each authority in respect of the most recent two years for which the information is available;

(2) what information he has in respect of councillors' attendance allowances and expenses for each local authority in England.

Mr. Key: This information is not collected by my Department. Each local authority must, on request, make available for inspection a record of allowances paid and the names of the recipients.

Mortgages

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he intends to meet the Council of Mortgage Lenders to discuss the establishment of a code of practice for mortgage lenders.

Mr. Yeo: At the suggestion of this Department, the Council of Mortgage Lenders issued statements of practice on the handling of mortgage arrears and of possession procedure in February this year.

Air Pollution

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the number of occasions on which the one-hour and the eight-hour World Health Organisation guideline values for ozone were exceeded at each Warren Spring Laboratory monitoring site in the last year for which data are available.

Mr. Baldry: The number of days during which the one hour (76ppb) and the eight hour (50ppb) World Health Organisation guideline values for ozone were exceeded at the Department of the Environment's monitoring sites in 1991 are as follows:

	WHO guideline exceedences, days	
	1-hour	*8-hour*
Stevenage, Herts	5	7
Sibton, Suffolk	3	19
Bridge place, London	0	0
Aston hill, Wales	1	15
Lullington heath, Sussex	7	24
Strath Vaich, Highlands	0	20
High Muffles, Yorkshire	4	23
Lough Navar, NI	4	8
Yarner Wood, Devon	14	33
Ladybower, Derbyshire	6	14
Harwell, Oxfordshire	13	20
Bottesford, Notts	2	11
Eskdalemuir, Dumfries	1	12
Great Dun Fell, Cumbria	6	19
Wharleycroft, Cumbria	4	26
Glazebury, Lancs	2	5
Bush, Midlothian	1	1

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will review the air quality bulletin system to ensure that appropriate information and advice is provided to the public during eight-hour sustained pollution episodes.

Mr. Baldry: The advice currently issued during ozone episodes follows recommendations in a report by the Chief Medical Officer's advisory group on the medical aspects of air pollution episodes, published in May this year. In accordance with the group's recommendations, it is issued when hourly mean ozone concentrations exceed, or are expected to exceed 100 parts per billion. We see no reason at present to alter this practice, but the arrangements will be kept under review.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the United Kingdom-wide newspapers, radio and television stations which have agreed to print or broadcast his Department's advice on what to do if air quality becomes poor.

Mr. Baldry: Advice on what to if air quality becomes poor is obtained from the telephone information system and from general practitioners.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all the United Kingdom-wide newspapers, radio stations and television stations which agreed to print or broadcast air quality bulletins on a regular basis.

Mr. Baldry: Air quality bulletin information is currently available on a daily basis on page 583 of Ceefax and in the *Guardian* and the (London) *Evening Standard*. Weather forecasts on BBC and ITV report episodes and forecasts of poor air quality. The air quality bulletins are provided free of charge to all radio and television stations and newspapers that take the weather information provided by the Meteorological Office.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to assess the effectiveness of the air quality bulletin system in its first year of operation.

Mr. Baldry: My Department assesses continuously the effectiveness of the bulletin system. It has been extended, improved and made more accessible in a number of ways since its introduction in October 1990. The media are making increasing use of it.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the weekly average number of calls received by his Department's air quality call line *(a)* in total and *(b)* seeking advice on what action to take if air quality becomes poor.

Mr. Baldry: The weekly average number of calls received on the Department's air quality call line during October 1991 was about three and on the air quality advice line, 32 over the same four week period.

Noise

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out the progress so far made in implementing the recommendations of his Department's noise review working party published in October 1990.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Memberf for Burnley (Mr. Pike) on Friday 8 November 1991, at c. *310-03*.

Send-a-penny Campaign

Mr. Grist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many pennies and representations he has received in connection with the send-a-penny campaign designed to improve the provision, cleanliness and accessibility of public conveniences; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The Department has received 235 pennies and 88 representations. For over 100 years authorities have had an absolute discretion as to whether, and how, they provide public conveniences. We have no plans to change this.

Hedgerows

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures the Government are planning to introduce to protect hedgerows; and when these will be presented.

Mr. Yeo: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave today to the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley).

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to bring forward detailed legislation to protect hedgerows.

Mr. Baldry: In July I announced the Government's revised proposals to protect hedgerows. These include two main elements: a proposed scheme to require owners and occupiers to notify intended removal of hedgerows—linked with new powers for local authorities to register key hedgerows; and proposed new incentives to promote environmentally beneficial management.

The former requires legislation, which we shall seek to introduce when parliamentary time permits. However, the proposed incentives scheme does not depend on new legislation and we are discussing with the Countryside Commission and others the best means of taking early steps to implement this.

Housing Investment Programme

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultations he has had with the Institute of Housing with regard to the allocation of the housing investment programme.

Mr. Yeo: The institute commented on the Secretary of State's recent proposals that more account should be taken of local authorities' performance and plans in the allocation of housing capital resources. Their views were taken into account. The Secretary of State announced on 30 October his decision to proceed to implement these proposals.

Building Industry

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent consultations he has had with the Federation of Master Builders about the state of the building industry.

Mr. Yeo: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had no such consultations.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has had from building firms about the effects of the recession on the building industry.

Mr. Yeo: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning on 6 November 1991 at column *154*.

Housing Expenditure

Mr. Aspinwall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give details of how he plans to use the increases in public expenditure on housing announced in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's autumn statement, and his proposals for local authority housing subsidy.

Sir George Young: Public expenditure on housing will be nearly £7·8 billion next year, an increase of 4·9 per cent. on previous plans, and will rise further to £8·2 billion by 1994-95. This rising programme will increasingly focus on tackling run-down council estates and providing for families in housing need. Our plans include:

—£350 million extra over three years to provide nearly £1,200 million in total for the enhanced estate action initiative which I announced in July, and more for housing action trusts in the two later years, to continue our policy of focusing resources on the most run-down council estates;

—the Housing Corporation's capital programme of new social housing to go on rising as planned to £1·7 billion next year and over £2 billion thereafter, to provide 120,000 homes over three years mainly for the benefit of homeless families and others in housing need;

—£30 million next year for a continuation of the successful programme of new rural housing financed through local authorities;

—£25 million over three years for bringing flats over shops back into use;

—£70 million over three years for a new grant to help authorities meet the costs of replacing privately leased accommodation for homeless families;

—over £1·5 billion each year in grants and borrowing approvals for local authorities' mainstream housing capital programmes of renovating their own estates, supporting housing associations, and helping low-income private owners to renovate their houses;

—£3·75 billion in 1992-93 for subsidies to council housing, including rent rebates for low-income tenants.

Lower construction costs—down nearly 10 per cent. since this time last year—and lower land prices are helping us to get more output from current levels of public expenditure. The table gives further details of the breakdown between main spending areas. I shall announce further details of specific programmes, and of capital allocations to individual authorities and of the Housing Corporation's development programme, over the coming weeks.

	1991-92	*1992-93*		*1993-94*		*1994-95*
	Forecast outturn	*Previous plan*	*Revised plan*	*Previous plan*	*Revised plan*	*plan*
Housing Corporation (net capital)[1]	1,636·7	1,706·5	1,706·5	1,918·8	1,918·8	1,966·7
Local authority capital[2]	1,961·1	1,845·9	1,962·7	1,813·5	1,952·5	2,002·4
Housing Action Trusts	10·3	67·3	40·1	69·0	86·8	88·2
Housing Revenue Account Subsidy	3,751·1	3,531·8	3,755·7	3,537·8	3,695·3	3,861·7
Other Expenditure	266·6	263·3	310·2	255·8	305·4	292·0
Total housing	7,625·8	7,414·9	7,775·2	7,594·9	7,958·8	8,211·0

[1]Housing Corporation forecast gross capital expenditure: 1991-92 £1,731 million; 1992-93 £1,770 million; 1993-94 £2,004 million; 1994-95 £2,052 million.

[2]Includes Estate Action: 1991-92 £266 million; 1992-93 £365 million; 1993-94 £407 million; 1994-95 £423 million.

My Department is also today consulting local authorities about my proposals for the management and maintenance allowances and rent guidelines to be used in calculating authorities' entitlements to housing revenue account subsidy next year, and I have placed the consultation papers in the Library with a list of proposed allowances and guidelines for each authority. I plan to introduce important new measures to help raise standards of management and maintenance in council housing. First, I propose an average increase of 6½ per cent. in management and maintenance allowances, allowing a real improvement in service to tenants. Second, I propose further moves towards targeting allowances according to the type of housing that each authority owns and the differing management problems they face, thereby directing £93 million more to the authorities with the greatest needs. On rents, I propose increases in guidelines averaging £2·44 a week—to give a new average guideline of £27·33—and ranging from £1·20 to £4·50 a week, thus continuing our policy of encouraging authorities to charge rents that better reflect the relative value of housing provided while remaining on average well below market levels. Responsibility for setting actual rents remains with individual local authorities. Housing benefit will normally meet the whole of any rent increase for the two thirds of tenants receiving it.

Backed by this substantial public expenditure provision, and by recent initiatives to drive up standards and secure better value for money, our housing policies will continue to focus—though constructive partnerships between all the agencies involved in providing housing—on encouraging owner-occupation for those who can afford it, on helping homeless families, and on widening choice and improving service for tenants especially on the most run-down council estates.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensioners

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many individuals his Department were unable to trace to tell them they could make up their contributions to claim a full pension.

Mr. Jack: The responsibility for tracing individuals for contributions purposes is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive of the Contributions Agency. She will write to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the cost to the Treasury of the additional claims for mortgage interest payments from those pensioners who will be entitled to claim income support as a result of the uprating statement; and how many individuals will be able to claim such payments.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* We estimate that fewer than 5,000 pensioners with a mortgage could become entitled to claim income support as a result of the uprating statement. The extra cost to the Treasury is negligible.

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much money the Government received from pensioners through deductions from their pensions occasioned by stays in hospital longer than six weeks in each year since 1988-89.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many low income pensioners are expected to gain from the measures in the uprating statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The proposed uprating income support by a full 7 per cent. from next April will give increases substantially above the current level of inflation to around 3·5 million low-income pensioners where the claimant or partner is aged 60 or over.

Furthermore, there will be rises in addition to the uprating increase for older and disabled pensioners who receive the higher pensioner premium. Couples will get £1·50 per week extra and single claimants £1·00. This measure alone will add £60 million in a full year to the help available to low-income pensioners.

The income support limits for residential care and nursing homes are also to be increased by £15 in nearly all cases. This rise is significantly greater than inflation and represents additional funding of £200 million per year.

As a result of the proposed uprating it is expected that up to 400,000 people will become newly eligible to claim income support and the majority of these are likely to be pensioners.

Pensions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what approximate amount per week will be payable as a SERPS addition to their pension to those who have been on average earnings throughout their working life if they retire in 1991, 1992 and for each subsequent year for which forecasts exist.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is given in the table.

The amount of additional pension payable for a man experiencing age specific male average earnings throughout his working life and a woman experiencing age specific female average earnings during her working life retiring in each year from 1991 to 2061.

Year reaching pension age	*Men*	*Women*
1991	40·90	25·45
1992	48·80	30·15
1993	54·50	33·70
1994	59·85	37·00
1995	65·25	40·25
1996	70·90	43·65
1997	76·85	47·20
1998	82·80	50·75
1999	84·95	52·15
2000	86·00	52·85
2001	86·95	53·55
2002	87·80	54·20
2003	88·55	54·85
2004	89·15	55·50
2005	89·55	55·90
2006	89·85	56·30
2007	90·00	56·60
2008	89·85	56·90
2009	89·35	57·00
2010	90·00	57·95
2011	90·55	58·95
2012	91·05	59·85
2013	91·50	60·65
2014	91·85	61·30
2015	92·05	61·90
2016	92·25	62·40
2017	92·35	62·85
2018	92·30	63·20
2019	92·20	63·45
2020	91·95	63·60
2021	91·65	63·70
2022	91·30	63·80
2023	90·65	64·55
2024	90·00	65·45
2025	89·10	66·20
2026	88·15	67·20
2027	86·95	68·10
2028	86·95	69·10
2029	86·90	70·10
2030	86·90	71·15
2031	86·95	72·15
2032	87·05	73·10
2033	87·15	74·15
2034	87·30	75·20
2035	87·50	76·15
2036	87·65	77·10
2037	87·90	78·05
2038	88·25	78·95
2039	88·60	79·75
2040	88·95	80·40
2041	89·30	81·00
2042	89·65	81·55
2043	90·00	82·10
2044	90·30	82·60
2045	90·65	83·10
2046	90·95	83·60
2047	91·30	84·05
2048	91·55	84·50
2049	91·85	84·95
2050	92·15	85·35
2051	92·45	85·70
2052	92·75	86·10
2053	93·00	86·40
2054	93·25	86·75
2055	93·55	87·10
2056	93·80	87·45
2057	94·05	87·75
2058	94·30	88·10
2059	94·55	88·40
2060	94·80	88·70
2061	95·00	89·00

Benefits

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the circumstances in which the social fund or any other benefits can be used to purchase services from the national health service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: Social fund payments for medical items are specifically excluded from the scope of the fund. People in receipt of other social security benefits are free to choose how they wish to spend their money. Income support or family credit recipients are entitled to free prescriptions, optical tests and dental treatment.

The provision of NHS services is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what policy he follows in exercising his discretion

to round benefit rates up or down under section 63(5) of the Social Security Act 1986; and what exceptions have occurred to that policy since 1986.

Miss Widdecombe: The rounding rules of all benefits are reviewed annually as part of the uprating exercise. No established practice exists which would pre-empt our discretion in this matter.

SERPS

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many individuals are in receipt of a state earnings-related pensions scheme pension higher than £60 a week.

Miss Widdecombe: The most recently available statistics, based on a 10 per cent. sample of those in receipt of retirement pensions in March 1991, indicate that no one in that sample was in receipt of an additional pension (SERPS) higher than £60 per week.

Residential and Nursing Homes

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what provision his Department is making to provide for the shortfall between the fees charged by residential homes and nursing homes and the level of income support under community care; and what assistance his Department can give to those who meet the normal qualifying conditions but whose fees are above the benefit limit and who are unable to meet their charges in full.

Miss Widdecombe: The present system of income support limits will be preserved for existing recipients who are resident in homes when the new community care arrangements are introduced in April 1993. As now, under those arrangements there will be limits to the level of benefit available for different types of care and these will be reviewed regularly. Subject to the normal qualifying conditions, people whose fees are at or below the limit will have their charges met in full.

The current income support limits for the various categories of residential and nursing home care represent the maximum amounts available. Any additional assistance—for example, that provided by relatives or charitable organisations—is, however, disregarded in the calculation of income support entitlement. This provision will continue under the new arrangements from April 1993.

Under the present arrangements, as an alternative to placing people in their own residential accommodation, local authorities have powers to place people in private residential care homes and meet their fees in full, recouping from the resident an assessed amount towards the charge where appropriate. LAs can also make weekly cash payments in certain circumstances to people in independent homes where the fees are more than the appropriate income support limit. This provision will continue under the new community care arrangements after April 1993 for those residents with preserved income support rights.

Funeral Expenses

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the current cost of providing funeral expenses to those pensioners on income support; and what is the number who have secured such help.

Mr. Scott: In the last full year for which records are available (1990-91) 12,702 awards of funeral payments were made totalling £7,631,107 to pensioners on income support; in the first six months of this year 6,015 awards have been made totalling £4,094,645. Funeral payments from the social fund are also paid to people who are receiving family credit, housing benefit and community charge benefit.

Mental Handicap

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on how income support for the mentally handicapped is calculated regarding training, education, employment and other day care elements now; and how it is planned to be changed after 1 April 1993.

Miss Widdecombe: Income support is calculated in accordance with the relevant regulations by reference to the individual's circumstances including any recognised extra expenses, and other income or capital. Mentally handicapped people undergoing training, education, employment or receiving day care are eligible for income support on the same terms as other disabled people. There are special rules to enable disabled people to retain the disability premium during training and to encourage them to take up employment or advanced education. Severely disabled young people may be entitled to income support while undertaking full-time non advanced education or if they are unable to participate in youth training. These special rules are likely to continue after April 1993. The provision of day care by local authority social services departments and community care arrangements from April 1993 are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

Residential Care Allowance

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will detail expenditure on income support residential care allowances for the years 1988-89 and 1990-91 by the different residential and nursing home categories for each benefit area.

Miss Widdecombe: Because of the sample size of the data collected on the number of residents and expenditure in residential care and nursing homes it is only statistically sound for the larger categories of care. Information is not available for expenditure split into areas. The available data are shown in the following table:

Estimated expenditure

£ million

	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
Residential care				
Elderly	269	301	312	346
Very dependent elderly	75	114	145	184
Mental handicap	116	126	139	187
Physically handicapped below pension age	33	56	68	82

	1988	1989	1990	1991
Total (including other categories)	556	658	740	888
Nursing homes				
Elderly and others	201	267	230	378
Terminal illness	17	74	168	369
Total (including other categories)	322	446	529	984

Lone Parents

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to increase the amount of earnings disregard before benefits for lone parents are affected.

Mr. Jack: The earnings disregard for lone parents of £15 was increased in housing benefit and community charge benefit in October 1990 to £25. We have no plans for further change at present.

Homeless Families

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what account was taken of the need of children of homeless families in bed-and-breakfast accommodation to have a balanced diet in the review of the arrangements for income support of homeless families.

Miss Widdecombe: Since April 1989 people in board and lodging accommodation have been treated in the same way as most other recipients of income support. They therefore now receive housing benefit to cover the cost of their accommodation and also standard income support personal allowances and premiums to meet their day-to-day living expenses.

The income support rates, including premiums, are regularly reviewed and from April 1992 the Government propose to increase these by a full 7 per cent.

Family Credit

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he is taking to improve the service given to self-employed people seeking help through family credit.

Mr. Jack: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Butler) earlier today.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures he has taken to improve the working of the cold weather payments scheme.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 7 November.

Mr. McKelvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much was paid out on cold weather payments over the last winter period; and what was the cost of administering these payments.

Mr. Scott: In 1990-91, 1,430,000 cold weather payments were made, at a cost of almost £8·6 million. Administration costs were approximately £3·6 million last year, but they will reduce considerably this coming winter because payments will be made automatically by national computer rather than clerically.

Child Support Act 1991

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what consideration has been given to the impact on black communities of the provisions in the Child Support Act 1991.

Mr. Jack: The provisions of the Child Support Act 1991 will apply equally and be administered equitably in respect of all persons who are habitually resident in the United Kingdom. The Government consulted widely on the proposals in the White Paper "Children Come First" including the Commission for Racial Equality. A consultation document containing details of the proposed contents of the regulations to be made under the Act, was published on 1 November. A copy has also been sent to the Commission for Racial Equality. A full list of all the organisations being consulted was given in my reply to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) on 7 November. The Government will consider carefully all comments on the consultation document before the regulations are finalised and laid before Parliament next year.

Family Credit

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he is taking to improve the service given to self-employed people seeking help through family credit.

Mr. Jack: There are already over 50,000 families on family credit, around 15 per cent. of the caseload, where the main earner is self-employed. The average payment of family credit in these cases is £44·10 a week, compared with £28 a week for families where the main earner is an employee.

We have commissioned a research study, which is being carried out by the social policy research unit at the university of York, into family credit for the self-employed. The study, which is well advanced, with information due to become available during next year, will enable us to determine what changes in assessment and procedures are called for in order to further improve the way we handle claims from the self-employed.

Severe Disability Premium

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimate for the number of people in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* Derbyshire who will no longer be eligible for severe disability premium after 11 November.

Miss Widdecombe: The arrangements in Great Britain, including Derbyshire, should ensure that no one who has secured the premium prior to 21 October will lose it after 11 November. The arrangements made in Northern Ireland are the responsibility for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claims for severe disability premium

were made in each of the years since its conception, and at what cost; how many reviews for non-award were requested; and how many were accepted.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* The severe disability premium is a component of income support, housing benefit and community charge benefit, and is not the subject of a separate claim. Information on the number of reviews for non-awards is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The number of people not receiving income support but receiving housing benefit and community charge benefit, which included the severe disability premium, is not available prior to May 1990. However, the figures for May 1990 are 9,000 people for housing benefit and 17,000 for community charge benefit. The number of people receiving income support which included the severe disability premium on a particular day is as follows:

May	*Number*
1988	35,000
1989	45,000
1990	62,000

Source: Annual Statistical Enquiry.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total full year cost of increases in income support limits for people in residential care and nursing homes announced in the last two years.

Miss Widdecombe: The estimated full-year cost of the April 1991 increase in residential care and nursing home limits is £225 million and for the April 1992 increase, £190 million.

HEALTH

Paediatric Pathologists

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many paediatric pathologists there are in the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not held centrally. All regions were required to have at least one paediatric pathologist in post by 31 March and to have conducted a review of the need for further posts by 1992. All regions have met these objectives except in one case where there has been difficulty in filling the post.

National Health Service Charges

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the current average levels of charges for *(a)* glasses, *(b)* dental treatment, *(c)* eye tests and *(d)* dental checks; how many of each took place in each of the last five years in Nottingham health authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Since July 1986 all spectacle dispensings, and since April 1989 a large proportion of sight tests, have been carried out privately. No information is collected on the levels of private charges. The maximum charge for lenses prescribed by the hospital eye service is £63·15.

The average patient charge for a course of dental treatment paid by patients paying the full charge in the financial year 1990-91 was approximately £26. There are three levels of dental examination for which the associated patient's charge is £3·75, £5·25 and £12.

It is not possible to provide figures on a comparable basis for the number of sight tests carried out over the period requested as figures are not collected on the number of sight tests carried out privately.

The numbers of dental examinations and dental treatments provided under the general dental services in Nottinghamshire family health services authority in the last five years is shown in the table.

	Dental examinations	*Dental treatments*
1985	635,560	692,120
1986-87	652,660	715,870
1987-88	651,480	724,580
1988-89	671,930	761,950
1989-90	623,049	722,966

The figures in 1988-89 were boosted by the announcement during the year of the proposed introduction of a charge for dental examinations from January 1989, and depressed in 1989-90 because people had brought forward their visits to the dentist. The evidence suggests that the number of dental examinations in England and Wales is now returning to the level it had reached before the announcement of the charge was made. The number of courses of dental treatment carried out in England has increased by 4·9 million, or 18 per cent., since 1979.

Residential and Nursing Homes

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to ring fence those resources his Department considers necessary for local authorities to meet the fees for those in residential and nursing homes either *(a)* to meet current demand or *(b)* the demand expected under community care.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No. It is for the local authorities to decide on the right balance between spending on residential, day and domiciliary services in the light of the needs of people in their area and, where they support people in homes in the independent sector, to negotiate fees with home owners.

Optical Charges Vouchers

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if will make it his policy to increase the value of vouchers for optical charges in line with charges made by manufacturers to opticians.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is already our policy to set voucher values with reference to nationwide average manufacturers' prices.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the cost of extending to disability working allowance claimants entitlement to the remission of prescription charges.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The estimated cost would be about £2 million.

Pharmaceutical Price Retail Scheme

The Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the £4 million pharmaceutical price retail scheme ceiling over which an annual financial return was required from the pharmaceutical industry was last approved; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Pharmaceutical suppliers with sales of £4 million or more to the national health service have been required to submit annual financial returns to the Department under the terms of the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme since 1984. The present scheme is due for renegotiation next year.

Divorces

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has concerning the total number of children whose parents have been divorced in England and Wales in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available.

Mr. Dorrell: The number of children of divorcing couples in England and Wales is shown in the table:

	Children aged under 16	*Children aged 16 or over*
1990	152,877	68,181
1989	148,162	68,405
1988	150,176	70,120
1987	148,911	68,394
1986	151,964	71,394
1985	155,740	71,152
1984	148,600	71,620
1983	155,562	70,987
1982	158,268	68,455
1981	159,403	66,572

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the total number of divorces in England and Wales in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available.

Mr. Dorrell: The information is shown in the table.

Divorces in England and Wales

	Number
1990	153,386
1989	150,872
1988	152,633
1987	151,007
1986	153,903
1985	160,300
1984	144,501
1983	147,479
1982	146,698
1981	145,713

Disabled People

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the implementation of sections 1, 2 and 3 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friends the Members for the Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) and for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth), on 22 March, at columns *254-55*. I made it clear that the community care reforms have largely overtaken the provisions of these sections. The Government intend to review the need to implement these sections after several years' experience of the community care arrangements.

Organ Transplants

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions have taken place between himself and representatives of the United Kingdom transplant authority about improving the system by which health regions exchange human organs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State discussed this matter during a visit to the United Kingdom transplant support service authority on 7 November. Human organs for transplantation are allocated by the authority in accordance with criteria agreed by the medical profession. The authority has arranged for meetings with the profession to consider ways of improving the system to ensure that organs available for transplantation are distributed as effectively and equitably as possible.

Patients Charter

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what new and additional resources he has committed to meeting the objectives of the patients charter, excluding from his reply the costs of the publication and its preparation and distribution.

Mr. Dorrell: Making services more responsive to patients, which is the key aim of the charter, means doing things differently and more effectively. All the charter standards are already being achieved somewhere in the NHS. We want to bring all parts of the service up to the standards of the best.

Residential and Nursing Care

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will outline the timetable from 1993 onwards for transferring to local authorities the moneys currently spent by the Benefits Agency on residential and nursing care.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There will be a single formal transfer of resources from the Department of Social Security to local authorities in the 1992 public expenditure survey, covering the years 1993-94, 1994-95, 1995-96. Provision for both social security and local authorities in subsequent surveys will be determined in the light of the declining number of cases with preserved entitlement under social security rules and the rising demand for local authority services, including demographic changes.

Nasogastric Feeding Tubes

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will arrange for nasogastric feeding tubes to be available on prescription from general practitioners.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The resource and other implications of making nasogastric feeding tubes available on GP prescription are under consideration.

General Practitioners

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what decisions he has taken about payments to general practitioners who achieved higher targets in health promotion clinics, minor surgery, immunisations and vaccinations and cervical cytology.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend gave my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Butler) on 7 November at columns *259-60*.

Bexley District Health Authority

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received on the funding of Bexley district health authority.

Mr. Dorrell: Since my previous reply to my hon. Friend on 14 May 1991 at column *134*, we have received no representations.

Abortion

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when an official from his Department visited the Merseyside nursing home abortion clinic in Parkfield road, Liverpool, to inspect and approve its new method of disposing of the bodies of aborted unborn babies, introduced on 1 November; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No visit has been made in connection with this particular aspect of the clinic's operation.

HIV

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many non-haemophiliacs in the United Kingdom have contracted HIV infection as a result of contaminated NHS blood/tissue transfers; and how many of those became infected before the introduction of the screening of donations in October 1985.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* There have been 50 reports in England, Wales and Northern Ireland of HIV infections in people who received blood or tissue in the United Kingdom before screening of donations was introduced in 1985. There have been no reports of infection occurring due to blood transfusion since then. One HIV infection occurred in 1986 due to tissue transfer.

EMPLOYMENT

Delta Programme

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give, in relation to the European Commission's DELTA 91 programme *(a)* the names, organisations and areas of expertise of the members of each of the DELTA programme's technical evaluation committees, *(b)* the titles of the proposals which have been accepted for funding by the Commission and *(c)* the names of each organisation participating in each proposal.

Mr. Forth: The European Commission is responsible for the administration of the Telematics programme, of which DELTA 91 is a part. Member states have agreed to maintain confidentiality until the Commission publishes the results of the selection process. This is likely to be in December.

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether the organisation appointed to act as DELTA 91 United Kingdom technical assistance unit made any bids for funds under the programme, either as a main contractor or as a partner; and how much the organisation which acted as DELTA 91 United Kingdom technical assistance unit was paid to provide that service.

Mr. Forth: Member states have agreed to maintain confidentiality about all applications to the Telematics programme, of which DELTA is a part. The DELTA 91 United Kingdom technical assistance unit was appointed after full competitive tendering, in line with public purchasing policy. The value of contracts are commercial in confidence and are not disclosed.

Special Needs Training

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will show both at 1991 prices and as a percentage of the total training budget, the amount allocated for training for people with special needs for each year since 1987.

Mr. Jackson: Information on expenditure on training for people with special training needs is not separately identified.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will show what proportion of the budget for the TECs is allocated to provide training for people with special needs.

Mr. Jackson: The proportion of training budgets allocated to provision for people with special training needs is the responsibility of individual training and enterprise councils and is determined by local needs and priorities.

Wages Underpayment

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many employers have been prosecuted for underpayment of employees in each year since 1980.

Mr. Forth: The number of employers prosecuted for paying their employees less than the statutory minimum remuneration required by the appropriate wages council orders is detailed in the table.

Year	*Number of employers prosecuted*
1980	8
1981	8
1982	4
1983	2
1984	2
1985	2
1986	2
1987	3
1988	9
1989	9
1990	7
1991	[1]12

[1] To date.

These figures include two prosecutions in Wales, one in 1987 and one in 1988.

Hoiger Subir Majhi

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will obtain information from the Health and Safety Executive about the activities of the executive in connection with the accident to Hoiger Subir Majhi at Ambrosia creamery, Lifton, Devon, on 28 November 1990, and if he will make a statement on the reasons why it was decided not to undertake legal proceedings.

Mr. Forth: The Health and Safety Executive were notified by telephone of the accident to Mr. Majhi at 3.35 pm on Thursday 29 November 1990. HSE determined the steps being taken by the company to carry out its own investigation into the accident and obtained an assurance that the machine would not be brought back into use until HSE were satisfied that it was safe to do so. The following day HSE obtained assurance that the necessary steps had been taken to safeguard the machine and that a thorough investigation was continuing. HSE therefore arranged to visit the factory on Tuesday 4 December to investigate the accident.

HSE's inspector was given notes of the investigation undertaken by the company and copies of statements taken. He interviewed a number of people at the factory and saw a video recording of the machine taken by the company after the accident, and discussed the accident with the senior union representative on site. Safety representatives had been involved in the company's investigation from the outset. The inspector was not able to interview Mr. Majhi at that stage because he was in hospital.

The company sent a memo on safety to all staff and introduced a new system of machine checks to prevent a recurrence of the accident.

Having considered all the evidence, a prosecution was not brought by HSE because:

(a) there was doubt whether danger which gave rise to the accident was reasonably foreseeable within the terms of the Factories Act.

(b) it was not possible to determine how and whom might have been responsible for the damaged guard mechanism; and

(c) the company has a generally good approach to health and safety and responded quickly and effectively to the accident.

Building Societies

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if the Health and Safety Executive is satisfied that pneumatically operated safety screens now being installed on customer service counters by building societies can be operated with proper regard to the safety of staff and public; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The Health and Safety Executive's experience of this type of screen to date is not sufficient to allow them to comment on it. It is for employers and others with duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 to ensure that equipment used in their undertakings does not put the health and safety of their staff or the public at risk.

Manual Handling

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he expects the Health and Safety Commission to publish the consultative document on manual handling; what period will be allowed for consultation; and when he envisages the regulations will be laid before Parliament.

Mr. Forth: The Health and Safety Commission's consultative document on the manual handling of loads was published on 7 November; a copy has been placed in the Library. The Commission has invited interested parties to comment on the proposals set out in that consultative document by 9 March next—that is, within four months. The European Community directive on manual handling requires member states to implement it by 31 December 1992; it is my intention that regulations will be made and brought into effect in time to meet that deadline.

Health and Safety Executive

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the current budget for overseas travel for the Health and Safety Executive; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: Health and Safety Executive's expenditure on overseas travel is not a separate item, but is provided from within a general HSE travel and subsistence budget which takes account of the need for, for example, work in connection with EC matters. Some of HSE's overseas travel is reimbursed by the European Commission; that carried out by the nuclear installations inspectorate is charged out to the nuclear industry.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will state the number of health and safety inspectors employed by the executive in each division; how many are full time and part-time; what vacancies exist in each category; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The information requested is as follows, at 1 November 1991:

HSE Division	*Number of Inspectors*
Field Operations Division	914·5
Nuclear Installations Inspectorate	164·0
Technology and Health Sciences Division	136·5
Inspectorate of Mines	38·5
Offshore Safety Division	57·0
Railway Inspectorate	28·0
Resources and Planning Division	8·0
Safety and General Policy Division	12·5
Special Hazards Division	16·0
Health Policy Division	9·0
Executive Support Branch	13·0
Hazardous Installations Policy Branch	6·0
Research and Laboratory Services Division	1·0

Of these, 1,387 worked full time and 34 part time, part-timers being counted as half units. Targets for each inspector category are set for the end of the planning year. The number of vacancies calculated against the 1 April 1992 targets are given in the table:

Inspector occupational grouping	Number of vacancies
Agricultural	0·0
Factory	17·0
Specialist	0·5
Mines	0·0
Quarries	4·0
Nuclear Installations	10·0
Railway	7·0
Offshore Safety	61·0

Considerable efforts are being made to fill inspector vacancies, particularly those for offshore safety inspectors. Thirty-four successful candidates have joined or are shortly expected to join HSE as offshore safety inspectors from a recruitment competition earlier this year. Two competitions are currently under way and 19 further successful candidates have already been selected from these. There are currently 12 successful candidates for factory inspector posts waiting to join the organisation and applicants for factory and nuclear installations inspector jobs will shortly be interviewed.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will obtain from the Health and Safety Executive information about the activities of the executive in connection with the crane failure at St. Mary's, Isles of Scilly, on 13 July 1991; and what steps have been taken to prosecute those persons responsible for overloading the crane and causing a crane to be operated without an effective safe load indicator.

Mr. Forth: The Health and Safety Executive was informed about the accident by police a few hours after it happened on Saturday 13 July.

The police told HSE's Plymouth office that the crane which had overturned while offloading a cargo container was in a dangerous condition with its rear wheels in the air and the jib resting on the jetty and the sea bed. HSE's inspector wished to visit the scene of the accident directly, but was prevented from doing so by heavy fog which had led to the suspension of commercial sailings and flights to the island. The inspector was not in the circumstances able to visit the scene until Monday 15 July.

Police advice was that it was imperative that the crane should be made safe as the area surrounding it could not be closed off. HSE's inspector therefore briefed the police by telephone on how to ensure the crane's safe retrieval and the recording of the information needed to establish the cause of the accident.

Making the crane safe involved some dismantling, and during this process part of the jib became detached and sank to the sea bed. This loss of part of the jib and damage to other parts of the crane sustained during the overturning meant that it was not possible for HSE to gather the evidence needed to establish if the crane was overloaded or not, and thus to mount any prosecution in this case. An automatic safeload indicator was, however, seen on the crane.

Textile and Footwear Industry

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give the numbers employed in the textile and footwear industries per month, by industry, using the latest figures, for each month of 1991.

Mr. Jackson: The number of employees in employment in the textile and footwear industries in Great Britain were as follows:

Thousands

	Unadjusted for seasonal variations	
	Footwear SIC Group 451	Textile SIC Class 43
1991		
January	44·2	185·4
February	44·0	186·4
March	43·4	182·6
April	42·6	183·2
May	42·1	182·2
June	41·7	181·1
July	41·4	183·7
August	40·6	183·2

EC Legislative Competence

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what legislative competence the EC has in respect of deciding, by majority voting, matters relating to *(a)* maternity leave and *(b)* the length of the working week, and under what legislative authority.

Mr. Forth: It is for the European Court of Justice in the final analysis to determine such matters.

Existing directives which are concerned with terms and conditions of employment have been based on article 100 of the treaty of Rome—establishment or functioning of the common market—or article 235—measures necessary to achieve the objectives of the Community but which are not provided for elsewhere in the treaty. These articles require unanimity in the Council.

The European Commission has cited article 118A—health and safety of workers—as the proposed legal base for its draft directives on pregnant workers and working time. Under article 118A, the Council may adopt directives through qualified majority voting.

Building Industry

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has had concerning redundancies in the building industry.

Mr. Forth: This Department has had a number of representations about employment in the building industry. A wide range of training, enterprise and employment measures are available to help unemployed people.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of redundancies in the building industry for the first three quarters of 1991.

Mr. Forth: It is estimated that there were 3,066 confirmed redundancies in the construction industry in Great Britain in the first quarter of 1991, 3,423 in the second quarter and a provisional total of 2,079 in the third quarter of 1991.

Working Time Directive

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the Council of Ministers meeting on the draft directive on working time.

Mr. Forth: The Labour and Social Affairs Council met on 6 November 1991. The draft directive on working time was not discussed.

WALES

Pembrokeshire Health Authority

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received concerning the application for national health service trust status from Pembrokeshire health authority; how many have been in support of the application; and how many against.

Mr. David Hunt: A total of 101 representations have been received during the consultation period of which 50 did not support the establishment of the trust. I intend shortly to announce my decision having taken into account the comments received, alongside the individual merits of the application.

Nebulisers

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the estimated cost of providing nebulisers free of charge to all NHS patients requiring them in the present financial year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information requested is not available centrally; this is a matter for individual health authorities. District general managers have been reminded of their duty under section 1 of the National Health Service Act 1977 to provide health service free at the point of delivery to NHS patients except where there is statutory provision for charging.

Long-term Unemployment

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many long-term unemployed people there are in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: On 11 July 1991 there were in Wales 27,784 claimants who had been unemployed for more than 12 months.

Uniform Business Rate

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the amount of unpaid uniform business rate in each of the counties of Wales since its inception.

Mr. David Hunt: National non-domestic rates came into force on 1 April 1990. The information available is given in the following table:

Arrears of non-domestic rates at 31 March 1991[1]

County Area[2]	*Arrears (£,000)*	*Amount due*[3] *(£,000)*
Clywd	4,597	51,292
Dyfed	2,202	36,564
Gwent	4,039	60,400
Gwynedd	1,378	23,610
Mid Glamorgan	4,885	55,589
Powys	393	9,473
South Glamorgan	1,916	59,217
West Glamorgan	2,111	55,307
Total Wales	21,521	351,452

[1] As reported by charging authorities.
[2] Charging authorities grouped in county areas.
[3] Gross amount due less discretionary reliefs. Figures shown are provisional.

Pembrokeshire Health Authority

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in relation to the Pembrokeshire health authority's application for trust status *(a)* the date on which he received the application, *(b)* the date on which he will announce his decision and *(c)* the criteria he will use to reach his decision.

Mr. David Hunt: The application was received on 16 July and the three months' public consultation commenced on 1 August. I expect shortly to announce my decision whether to establish the trust. This will take into account:

(a) the comments received as a result of public consultation; and
(b) the individual merits of the application in demonstrating the benefits and improved quality of services to patients; the involvement of professionals, especially consultants in senior management; management capability and capacity, and the financial soundness of the potential trust.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the hospitals in Wales that propose to opt out or establish a NHS trust or have expressed an interest in doing so; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To date only Pembrokeshire has submitted an application to become an NHS trust. An announcement listing those units or hospitals invited to prepare an application to seek trust status in April 1993 will be made in a few weeks.

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much of the financial contribution received by Pembrokeshire health authority, towards costs incurred through preparing an application for NHS trust status, has been used for public relations.

Mr. David Hunt: The contribution made available to Pembrokeshire health authority was to help towards costs incurred in preparing the application, associated printing and during the consultation period.

Adult Education

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he is taking to develop the provision of non-vocational adult education classes in Wales and increase the access to vocational classes for mature students in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: The development of and access to adult education is currently the responsibility of the local education authorities, the university of Wales and a number of voluntary organisations.

Patients Charter

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what new and additional resources he has committed to meeting the objectives of the patients charter in Wales, excluding from his reply the costs of the publication and its preparation and distribution.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The patients charter for Wales builds on existing good practice within the NHS. Some of

the guarantees and standards in the charter are already being achieved by health authorities in Wales. Where the objectives in the charter are not presently being achieved, health authorities will need to use the resources allocated to them.

GP Fundholders

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a list of those GP fund-holding practices in Wales which have set up private companies for aspects of their patients' care.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: There are none.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish for each family health service authority area in Wales *(a)* the total number of GP practices, *(b)* the number of fund-holding practices and *(c)* the percentage of Welsh patients registered with a GP who belong to a fund-holding practice.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information is as follows:

Family health service authority	*Number of GP practices*	*Number of GP fund-holders*
Clwyd	74	1
Mid Glamorgan	106	4
South Glamorgan	76	1
West Glamorgan	65	1
Gwent	95	—
Gwynedd	55	—
Powys	19	—
Dyfed	70	—

Some 3 per cent. of patients in Wales are covered by the seven fund-holding practices.

Parliamentary Questions

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his practice to answer hon. Members to whom he has replied to a parliamentary question with an undertaking to write, within one week of his reply.

Mr. David Hunt: My practice is to write to hon. Members as soon as possible.

Community Services Managers

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will give a list of community services managers, or their equivalents, within the health service in Wales, together with their grades and pay scales and any appropriate qualifications;

(2) if he will give a list of unit general managers within the health service in Wales together with their grades and pay scales and any appropriate qualifications.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my letter of 7 November, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Unit General Managers

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his practice to require health authorities to report to him the reasons for any dismissals from the post of unit general manager within hospitals in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: No. As I said in my reply on 17 October 1991 contractual matters pertaining to general managers fall entirely within the operational responsibilities of the employing authority.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Abattoirs

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number of small abattoirs currently not up to EC hygiene standards which will qualify for permanent derogation.

Mr. Maclean: All red meat abattoirs in Great Britain currently operate under licences granted by local authorities. With the exception of abattoirs approved for intra-Community trade, records are not routinely mentioned by the Department on the site of individual abattoirs. However, annual statistics derived from State Veterinary Service visits indicate that there are some 222 abattoirs in Great Britain which are eligible to qualify for a permanent structural derogation from the EC single market rules contained in Council directive 91/497/EEC. EC rules on hygiene and inspection apply to all abattoirs whether or not they qualify for a derogation.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number of small slaughterhouses and cutting plants currently not up to European Community hygiene standards which will qualify for temporary derogation until the beginning of 1996.

Mr. Maclean: Council directive 91/498/EEC enables member states, subject to approval by the EC standing veterinary committee, to grant temporary structural derogations to red meat slaughterhouses, cutting premises and cold stores of all sizes which are unable to comply with single market rules by 1 January 1993. All premises not currently EC approved may apply for a temporary derogation. However, this is a commercial decision for individual businesses and it is not possible accurately to estimate the likely numbers. The Department has recently made available to businesses a detailed free information pack on the new rules, including an application form for temporary derogations.

Wind Farms

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the level of grant aid which farmers can receive for the construction of wind farms from his Ministry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Grants are available only where the main purpose of the windmill is to serve the agricultural needs of the farm for electricity. The grant rate is 25 per cent. in the less-favoured areas and 15 per cent. elsewhere. Where the supply also serves a domestic dwelling or provides surplus power to another farm or an electricity company grant is paid on three quarters of the eligible costs.

Pesticides

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the present restrictions on the use of Atrazine and Simazine pesticides.

Mr. Maclean: United Kingdom use of Atrazine and Simazine are subject to statutory conditions of use such as maximum application rate, minimum harvest interval and operator protection requirements. Use of any pesticide in an unapproved manner is an offence under the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986.

Fishing Industry

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what funds he has set aside for 1991-92 to fund a decommissioning scheme for the fishing industry.

Mr. Curry: None, but as I indicated in reply to the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) on 5 November, at column 77 the Government are ready to consider industry proposals for decommissioning and the necessary funding provided these form part of a wider conservation package aimed at reducing fishing effort.

Food from Britain

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the level of funding given to Food from Britain in each year since 1985.

Mr. Curry: The information, which relates to the amount of Government grant for each financial year mentioned, is as follows:

	£ million
1985-86	6
1986-87	5
1987-88	4·1
1988-89	4·2
1989-90	4·5
1990-91	4·5

Sheep Dips

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will review his policy concerning the requirement of a single autumn dip for sheep; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Future arrangements will be considered when the results of this year's dip, which ended on 2 November, are available.

Non-fat Milk

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will place a copy of the European Commission reasoned opinion on regulation 164 relating to non-fat milk bulk distribution in the Library.

Mr. Curry: Reasoned opinions are confidential between the Commission and Government, being preparatory to possible court proceedings. It is established practice therefore not to publish their contents.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the new environmentally sensitive areas he intends to designate and how many existing environmentally sensitive areas he intends to expand; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: I plan to increase expenditure on environmentally sensitive areas in England by £75 million over the next three years. I will be making announcements concerning the designation of new areas and the improvements in the existing ESAs shortly.

Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number of recorded cases of spongiform encephalopathy in cats, with relevant dates.

Mr. Maclean: The number of recorded cases of spongiform encephalopathy in cats in Great Britain listed by date or clinical onset of the disease is as follows:

	Number
November 1989	1
January 1990	1
February 1990	1
March 1990	2
April 1990	1
May 1990	1
June 1990	2
July 1990	1
September 1990	2
October 1990	4
December 1990	1
March 1991	1
May 1991	1
June 1991	1
August 1991	1
Report not yet received	1
Total	22

Cymag and Spannit

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the agricultural uses of *(a)* sodium cyanide (Cymag) and *(b)* chlorpirifos (Spannit).

Mr. Maclean: Sodium cyanide (Cymag) is a vertebrate control agent. It is not approved for agricultural use in the United Kingdom.

Chlorpirifos (Spannit) is approved for agricultural use on the following crops:

Calabrese or
Calabrese at drilling or transplanting

Kale or
Kale at drilling or transplanting

Drilling Carrott Potato

Swede or
Swede at drilling or transplanting

Turnip or
Turnip at drilling or transplanting

Plum
Apple
Pear

Currants (black, white and red)

Currants (bushes)
after harvest
Gooseberry
Strawberry
Strawberry (plants)

after cropping
Raspberry
Narcissus bulbs
Forestry (cut logs)

Winter wheat
pre-emergence or
post-emergence

Barley
Oats
Spring wheat
Grass
Maize

Sweetcorn
Pea
Oilseed rape or
Oilseed rape at drilling

Broccoli or
Broccoli at drilling or transplanting

Cabbage or
Cabbage at drilling or transplanting

Cauliflower or
Cauliflower at drilling or transplanting

Brussels sprout or
Brussels sprout at drilling or transplanting

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number of cases of BSE in cows born after the ban on the inclusion of ruminant protein in cattle rations.

Mr. Maclean: Three.

Sheep (Import Bans)

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those countries presently operating an import ban on sheep from the United Kingdom.

Mr. Curry: The information requested is as follows:

Argentina
Australia
Austria
Brazil
Canada
Chile
Malaysia
New Zealand
Sweden
Tunisia
Turkey
United States of America
Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Farmed Salmon

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action the Government are taking to remedy the disturbance of the salmon market and to protect the farmed salmon industry from unfair competition.

Mr. Curry: The EC Commission adopted on Friday 8 November a regulation which introduces a scale of minimum import prices for imports into the European Community of fresh, chilled or frozen Atlantic salmon. The regulation came into force on 9 November, and will run until 29 February 1992.

I very much welcome this positive response by the Commission to the strenuous representations we have been making to secure a floor in the market, as protection against the threat of price collapse caused by unfair competition from Norwegian imports. Our producers have been left to struggle for too long, while huge stocks of frozen salmon have built up in Norway and consignments have been offered for sale at prices which have undermined the market. This has posed a severe threat to United Kingdom salmon farmers and to the economy of the rural areas where they operate.

I hope the measures that have now been introduced will restore stability to the market during the important pre-Christmas period.

Tecnazene

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will bring forward proposals to restrict the use of the fungicide Tecnazene.

Mr. Maclean: Tecnazene is under review by the independent Advisory Committee on Pesticides. Ministers in the six Departments responsible for pesticides will decide jointly on any appropriate regulatory action on the basis of expert advice from the ACP.

Milk Marketing Boards

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the monopoly powers of the milk marketing boards; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Under Community law the United Kingdom is authorised to grant the milk marketing boards the exclusive right to buy from producers in their area the milk which they produce and market without processing, provided it satisfies certain minimum requirements. This right is coupled with an obligation on the boards to purchase the milk in question.

Farm Assistance

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of the proportion of the support provided by consumers/taxpayers directly and indirectly to farmers and horticulturalists which goes to the 1,000 largest owners of agricultural land, excluding woodland and rough grazing.

Mr. Curry: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) on 6 November, (*Official Report*, columns *165-66*).

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give for England and Wales the amount of aid distributed to hill farmers under each category of assistance for each year from 1978-79.

Mr. Curry: This information can be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

Wyandotte Birds

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the destruction of rare Wyandotte birds following a court case brought against their owner, Mr. Clem Shaw, by Shropshire trading standards department.

Mr. Maclean: I am not aware of any destruction of Wyandotte birds owned by Mr. Shaw; nor has the Department issued any instructions for their slaughter.

Cattle

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will encourage a system of passports for finished cattle at auction;

(2) what information he has of the present usage of the system of passports for finished cattle at auction.

Mr. Curry: I understand that a "passport" system for cattle is operated in a number of member states of the European Community. Proposals for a common system of livestock identification are expected to be put forward by the European Commission to the Council of Agriculture Ministers. I have no plans to introduce changes to the system of cattle identification in the United Kingdom in advance of agreement on those proposals.

Rapeseed

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much rapeseed in the EC is used for animal feed; what is the cost to EC funds of using this feed; and if he will publish a table showing the total subsidies paid by the EC on ingredients to animal feed and the total value of feed produced.

Mr. Curry: In 1990-91, around 6 million tonnes of rapeseed were processed in the EC. The majority was crushed for oil and meal. Only the meal, which makes up around 60 per cent. of the seed by weight, is used in animal feeds. Some 290,000 tonnes of rapeseed were directly incorporated into animal feed. Expenditure on EC support subsidies for rapeseed in 1989, the latest year for which final figures are available, was 1,288 mecu—£843 million.

The other information requested is not available.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 12 November 1991

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Sir Allan Green

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Attorney-General what financial arrangements were made with the previous Director of Public Prosecutions as to compensation for his years of service.

The Attorney-General: The previous Director of Public Prosecutions has a pension entitlement, not payable until August 1997. He will receive now an ex-gratia payment of three months salary.

McKenzies Friend

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Attorney-General what was the cost to public funds of the Treasury Solicitor contesting the case in the Appeal Court in July on McKenzie's friend, what fees were paid to the barrister who acted as amicus curiae; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: Treasury counsel was instructed by the Treasury Solicitor to appear as an amicus curiae in the case of *R v. Leicester City Justices ex parte Barrow* at the request of the Court of Appeal. Counsel did not appear in order to "contest" the appeal, but in order to assist the court on matters of law. The cost to public funds of such assistance to the Court of Appeal was £2,412·45. The amount of the fee paid to counsel is a matter of professional confidence between solicitor and counsel.

TRANSPORT

Stoke-Derby Link Road

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he can report progress on the Stoke-Derby link road and the Derby southern spur.

Mr. Chope: Good progress is being made and the link road between Stoke and Derby is on target for completion in 1996.

I hope to be able to announce a decision on the route of the Derby southern bypass and spur by Christmas and to publish the remaining statutory orders for side road alterations and the compulsory purchase of the necessary land in the spring of 1992.

Tyre Tread Depths

155. **Mr. Mills:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will publish in full the new requirements on tyre tread depth regulations;

(2) if he will publish the date of making and the date of implementation of the new construction and use regulations concerning tyre tread depths; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: From 1 January 1992 the grooves of the tread pattern of every tyre fitted to the wheels of cars, light vans and their trailers must be of a depth of at least 1·6mm throughout a continuous band situated in the central three-quarters of the breadth of tread and round the entire circumference of the tyre. They will replace the current standard of 1mm of tread across three quarters of the tread pattern and visible tread in the remaining quarter. Vehicles first used before 3 January 1933 are exempt from these new requirements, because in many cases they have resilient, rather than pneumatic, tyres. The new standards on tyre tread depths of cars, light vans and their trailers are covered by the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) (Amendment No. 4) Regulations 1990 (SI 1990 No. 1981) which were made on 28 September 1990.

Ipswich—Cambridge Rail Service

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of the public service grants he has made to British Rail for the purpose of keeping open rail services between Ispwich and Cambridge over each of the past five years; whether those train services are meeting the performance targets and obligations laid down by his Department; if he will list those targets and obligations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Public service obligation (PSO) grant is a block grant paid towards the cost of maintaining all supported services. In 1990-91 British Rail received £699·9 million in PSO grant.

The quality of service standards applicable to services of this type are that 90 per cent. of trains should arrive within five minutes of the scheduled time and no more than 1 per cent. of trains should be cancelled. Performance against these standards is not monitored by the Department on a line by line basis. However, for the Anglia sub-sector, of which the Ipswich-Cambridge route is part, 86·9 per cent. of trains arrived within five minutes of their scheduled time and 2 per cent. of trains were cancelled in the year to September 1991.

A45, Bury St. Edmunds

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what portions of the A45 at Risby near Bury St. Edmunds are or have been closed over the past four weeks; and if he will publish a list of previous closures of this trunk road within five miles to the east and west of Bury St. Edmunds in each of the past five years, indicating in each case for how long portions of this highway were closed and how much public money was spent in each case, and in total for repairs or other purposes.

Mr. Chope: The westbound carriageway at Risby is currently being reconstructed and resurfaced.

Previous closures are attached. These do not include emergency works, routine maintenance or works for public utilities.

Year	Location	Scheme	Cost £000s	Duration	Traffic management
1985-86	Rougham-Moreton Hall	Carriageway maintenance and widening	1,200	12 weeks	Contraflow and lane closures
1987-88	Risby westbound on slip road	Repairs/resurfacing	40	2 weeks	Lane closures
1988-89	Beyton-Bury bypass	Carriageway maintenance and overlay	1,000	22 weeks	Contraflow and lane closures
1988-89	Risby-Westley	Safety fence works	100	19 weeks	Lane closures
1989-90	Risby westbound carriageway	Resurfacing	75	2 weeks	Lane closure
1989-90	Risby-Rougham	Surface dressing	50	2 days	Lane closure
1990-91	Bury St. Edmunds	Reconstruction-overlay	4,000	20 weeks	Contraflow
1990-91	Various sites	Surface dressing	50	2-3 days	Lane closures
1990-91	Risby-Kentford	Safety fencing	130	6 weeks	Lane closures
1990-91	Rougham	Closure of gap	50	3 weeks	Lane closures
1990-91	Various sites	French drain renewal	70	4 weeks	Lane closures

Car Pooling

159. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research his Department has carried out into congestion reduction from incentives for car pooling; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: An extensive programme of research was conducted following the Transport Act 1978 which liberalised the rules governing car sharing. It was apparent from this work and subsequent initiatives that it is particularly difficult to organise formal car pooling schemes and that when successful they can have the effect of reducing public transport patronage. We continue to keep the matter under review.

Shipping (Toxic Substances)

170. **Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps the Government are taking to secure changes to United Nations shipping regulations in respect of classification of the toxicity of transported substances according to the results of LD50 tests.

Mr. McLoughlin: The United Kingdom Government have been actively involved in discussion within OECD of an alternative to the LD50 methodology. If an alternative is agreed, the appropriate United Nations Committee on the Transport of Dangerous Goods will consider the effect on transport regulations generally.

Lighthouses

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what borrowing limits apply to each general lighthouse authority;

(2) for each of the last five years, what is the amount of money allocated from the reserves of the General Lighthouse Fund to supplement light due costs;

(3) if he will give the current level of liquid reserves available to the General Lighthouse Fund; and what is his current estimate of the level expected in March 1992.

Mr. McLoughlin: Under section 662A of the Merchant Shipping Act 1894 (as inserted by the Merchant Shipping Act 1988) the borrowing limit applying to the General Lighthouse Fund is £100 million. This is not disaggregated to each general lighthouse authority. In the last five years the GLF reserves have met the following shortfalls of the income required to meet total operating costs plus depreciation:

Year	£ million
1986-87	3·2
1987-88	1·9
1988-89	5·9
1989-90	8·9
1990-91	[1]11·8

[1] Provisional.

The liquid reserves stood at £22·1 million at the end of October and are expected to be around or below £20 million by March 1992.

A4

Sir Barney Hayhoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what studies or plans are in hand for alterations at the junctions on the A4 road between Brentford and Hammersmith.

Mr. Chope: The report of the M4-A4 corridor study by Howard Humphreys and Partners was published on 3 October. It recommends a new link between the M4 and the A4 to relieve congestion on the elevated dual two-lane section of the motorway between junctions 1 and 2 and also recommends various improvements to A4 junctions. The report is now the subject of consultation. The improvement of the A4 junction with the A316 at Hogarth roundabout has been investigated by Sir William Halcrow and Partners Limited, as has the A4 junction with the A406/A205 at Chiswick roundabout. These reports are being considered. Frank Graham Consulting Engineers Ltd, the Department's agent for this part of the A4, is investigating right-of-way priorities at Hogarth roundabout and the provision of signals at Chiswick roundabout to cater for traffic from the Chiswick Park development in Chiswick High road. Their work is still at an early stage.

Dock Workers

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many hours dock workers have worked per week on average in each of the last five years in each of the major ports.

Mr. McLoughlin: Weekly average hours worked within the dock labour scheme as a whole were published in the annual reports of the National Dock Labour Board and were as follows (including overtime but excluding "under-employed" hours):

1986	1987	1988
39·5	41·0	42·0

I have no information on ports outside the scheme, or for the period from 1989 when it was abolished.

Ports (Operational Leases)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to give effect to section 17 of the Ports Act; and what particular regard his plans have for operational leases.

Mr. McLoughlin: It is intended that the affirmative order provided for in section 17(8) of the Act shall be laid before Parliament shortly. At the present time, the draft proposals for the provisions of the order, including provisions for leases of operational land, are the subject of consultation with the trust ports. It is too early therefore to say what the precise nature of those provisions will be.

Rural Bus Routes

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the total number of rural bus service routes in 1980 and the total number in 1990 in the United Kingdom.

Mr. McLoughlin: Between 1982 (the earliest year for which statistics are available) and 1990-91, vehicle mileage in the English shire counties increased by 19 per cent. But no breakdown between rural and urban mileage is available within this total; nor is information available on numbers of routes.

Rail Electrification

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his estimate of the proportion of *(a)* Wales's and *(b)* Britain's railway network which is electrified; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: There are no electrified lines in Wales; as at 31 March 1991, 30 per cent. of British Rail's network was electrified or in the process of being electrified as a result of projects approved or under construction.

RNIB Needs Survey

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration he has given to the report "Blind and Partially Sighted Adults in Britain—The RNIB Needs Survey"; what action he will be taking in relation to its findings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Department of Transport has not yet received a copy of the report. We have asked the RNIB to send us one urgently so that we can consider it fully.

Nuclear Transport Routes

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he possesses in regard to the reasons for the diversion of the Pacific Teal away from its planned route from Japan to Barrow in Furness via the Panama canal during its voyage in December 1989 to February 1990; and what was the effect on the safe operation of the ship.

Mr. McLoughlin: The ships of Pacific Nuclear Transport Limited are capable of taking any of a number of different non-stop routes from Japan to Europe and have done so on a number of occasions. In this instance, because of uncertainties relating to transit of the Panama canal at that time, the decision was taken to use another route.

Departmental Restructuring

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give details of the recent restructuring of his Department and its implications for shipping and ports policy; if he will give details of the establishment in his Department as it relates to shipping and ports related posts; and if he will indicate which posts are currently unfilled or vacant.

Mr. McLoughlin: Some changes were made with effect from 2 September to the responsibilities of a number of directorates in the Department, but these had no implications for shipping and ports policy. There are some 1,020 shipping and ports related posts in the Department including 483 coastguard grades. As at 8 November there were five administrative vacancies, 13 specialist vacancies and 29 vacancies in coastguard grades.

Trust Ports

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give details of the liquid assets currently held by each trust port on 31 July 1991.

Mr. McLoughlin: Port authorities produce annual accounts, but I have no information on their mid-year financial positions.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how he plans to ensure that the objectives set out in the transfer schemes for trust ports are made binding on the successful bidder; and what safeguards exist to ensure that memoranda and articles agreed by him in respect of the new company will not be changed following the completion of the sale to the successful bidder.

Mr. McLoughlin: The purpose of a transfer scheme is to effect the transfer of a trust port's existing undertaking to a successor company with a view to the subsequent disposal of that company's securities: such schemes do not contain operational objectives for the successor company. However, in cases where a port is to be sold to a single buyer, objectives of sale are agreed between the authority concerned and the Government. Prospective purchasers will then be required to demonstrate to the authority in the bidding process how they intend to meet those objectives, and this information will be taken into account by an authority in their assessment of competing bids.

Such objectives cannot by their nature be legally binding. In determining the company's business objectives, and in deciding whether to make alterations to its memorandum and articles however, the new owner of the port will need to take account of the plans on which his bid has been based, and the statutory powers and duties of the company. The relevant provisions of the Companies Act 1985 relating to alterations to the memorandum and articles will of course apply in the same way as they do to any other company.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how amendments made by him to the proposed transfer schemes of trust ports are to be incorporated into competing bids.

Mr. McLoughlin: Before finalising their bids, prospective purchasers of a trust port will have the opportunity to acquaint themselves with the provisions of any order made

under section 9 of the Ports Act 1991, confirming that port's transfer scheme with or without modifications. They will therefore be able to determine their final bid in the light of any modification which may have been made.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give details of those trust ports which have to date submitted proposals to privatise under the provisions of the Ports Act 1991; and if he will give in respect of each the timetable for *(a)* the deadline by which representations have to be received, *(b)* the completion date of the transfer of the trust port to the newly established company, and for *(c)* the date when it is expected to name the successful bidder.

Mr. McLoughlin: To date, four ports have formally submitted schemes of transfer: Tees and Hartlepool port authority, Medway ports authority, the Port of London authority for the port of Tilbury, and Clyde ports authority. The deadline for the end of the representations period in each case is as follows: for Tees, 24 September; for Medway, 2 October; for Clyde, 13 December. There is under the Act no representations period for the Port of Tilbury. The dates for completion of the transfer schemes and the naming of the successful bidder in each case are not yet known. The former will depend on the extent and nature of the modifications to any particular scheme that appears necessary in the light of representations and other factors and after consulting the relevant authority. The latter will depend on the date on which each authority recommends a bidder and the timing of the decision on whether to accept that recommendation.

Driving Licences

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the name of the marketing company that advised DVLC (Swansea) on its use of the drivers' licence computer base for the purpose of test-marketing the potential for commercial firms to advertise their services to applicants for driving licences.

Mr. Chope: The company advising the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency on the market research necessary to establish the potential of its database and dispatch equipment is Marketing Triangle Ltd.

Promotional Leaflets

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the driver and vehicle licensing centre intends to continue to send out promotional leaflets for the British School of Motoring with provisional driving licences.

Mr. Chope: The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency concluded the test mailing on 4 October. No new mailing will take place until the results of the market research have been fully evaluated. In deciding future policy in this area, account will be taken of representations received.

Docklands Light Railway

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for the management of the Docklands light railway; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: We intend that there should be new management arrangements for the DLR. The railway has a vital role in the regeneration of Docklands, and there is a strong case for uniting it with the London Docklands development corporation, whose prime objective that regeneration is. Subject to the outcome of any necessary consultations, I therefore intend asking the chairman of London Regional Transport to transfer responsibility for the DLR to the LDDC. The effective date of the transfer will be announced when the necessary procedures and detailed arrangements are completed.

Civil Aviation Authority

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what objectives he has set for the new chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority.

Mr. Rifkind: I sent the following letter recently to Mr. Christopher Chataway:

This letter sets out the objectives which the Government wishes you to pursue as Chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority in fulfilment of the statutory functions of the Board. In the case of conflict between these objectives and the Authority's statutory duties, the statutory duties must prevail.

General Objectives

Safety. Your overriding objective must be to ensure that the CAA continues to promote, in an efficient and cost-effective way, high standards of safety in all aspects of civil aviation. I have made it clear that safety is the responsibility of the CAA and it is not my intention to interfere in the discharge of its duties.

Regulation. Subject to your responsibility for safety, and to other explicit statutory requirements, the Authority should impose as few burdens as possible on those whose activities it regulates. The United Kingdom civil aviation industry had to bear the full costs of regulation and the Authority must therefore continually strive to ensure that regulation is no greater than necessary.

I would expect your charges in relation to the services of the Economic Regulation and Safety Regulation Groups to cover their costs and to provide the required rate of return on investment without rising faster than the rate of inflation, taking one year with another, unless there were very good reasons for them to do so, and in all events to be as low as is compatible with the proper discharge of their responsibilities.

Costs and Quality of Service. The Authority should keep its costs under constant review and, where appropriate, should devise formal cost reduction programmes. Quality of service should also be carefully monitored. In the light of these considerations and or your overriding safety objective, in the course of your first year of appointment you should review all performance targets and indicators (including the development of appropriate unit cost indicators) for the Authority, and put to me proposals for the future, with a view to our agreeing them in time for inclusion of the targets in the 1992 Corporate Plan. You should continue to keep under review your arrangements for consulting users about the Authority's charges and I would be glad if you would cover this point in particular in your first annual report to me.

The Environment. While I have primary responsibility for regulating environmental disturbance attributable to civil aviation, in planning and providing its air traffic control services, the Authority should assess the possible effects of any changes on the environment, including the effects of noise. The Department should be notified in any cases where the Authority considers that adverse effects are likely to be significant. The Authority should also maintain its capacity to provide expert technical advice on environmental problems.

External Relations. The Authority must continue to seek to maintain good communications with Parliament, industry and the public so that each properly understands the CAA's various roles. It will be your continuing responsibility to deal, in correspondence and otherwise, with the concerns of Members of both Houses of Parliament as they affect the Authority's activities.

The Authority is both a regulator of the industry and a monopoly supplier of many air traffic control services, and you should ensure that the industry is kept in close touch with your plans, and has full opportunities to tell you of their

views. The Safety Regulation Group Finance Advisory Committee is an example of a valuable consultation mechanism, and you should ensure that it is continued effectively.

Public Sector Financial Disciplines. The Authority should continue to stay within its External Financing Limit each year and the associated investment approvals limits. It should also continue to provide the Government with regular, timely flows of information so that the Authority's performance can be monitored both generally and more specifically against agreed strategies and targets and the External Financing Limit.

Over the three year period ending in 1991-92, the Authority has been working to a target annual average rate of return on average capital employed of 8 per cent. on a current cost basis; this target has applied to all the Authority's activities, except UK airspace air traffic services and Highland and Islands Airports Ltd. You should plan on the basis that this target will be maintained for the next three-year period, beginning in 1992-93, but it will be subject to review in the autumn of this year.

Corporate Planning. The Authority should prepare Corporate Plans reflecting the objectives in this letter (and the outcome of the previous annual Investment and Financing Review), including the External Financing Limit. Each year's plan should be submitted to me no later than April each year.

Organisation. You should ensure that an appropriate structure and management systems are in place to provide a cost-effective and commercial approach within the Authority, with effective control of both capital and current expenditure, so that the Authority can take a corporate view of its priorities, set targets for parts of the business and ensure that they are achieved.

The recent Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on National Air Traffic Services (NATS) made a number of recommendations, almost all of which were accepted by the Authority. These recommendations should be implemented in a timely fashion. I attach particular importance to those recommendations concerning manpower planning, for which appropriate systems need to be developed without delay.

Objectives for Economic Regulation

Within the relevant statutory requirements, and working with the Department in the international arena, the Authority should act to ensure that as far as possible, the United Kingdom travelling public is served by a healthy competitive multi-airline industry. Further steps towards liberalisation and the creation of a single market within the European Community will bring important changes in the next few years (on matters such as route licensing, the approval of fares, and probably the allocation of airport slots). The Authority should continue to be ready to advise the Government on necessary changes to policy and to legislation, and to revise its Statement of Policies on air transport licensing appropriately in response to changes in both.

It is important that the Economic Regulation Group's costs remain under effective control, so that increases in charges are kept to a minimum.

Objectives for National Air Traffic Services

The National Air Traffic Services (NATS) is run jointly between the Authority and the Ministry of Defence with staff provided by each. You should be aware of the Ministerial Directions to NATS which I shall soon be revising with the Secretary of State for Defence. The Directions will continue to require NATS to provide airspace capacity, on a cost effective and timely basis, to meet the needs of airspace users both civil and military but, recognising the increasing demand from aircraft operations, they will invite you—in consultation as necessary with the Secretary of State for Defence—to advise me on appropriate action in the event of demand for airspace exceeding capacity.

To this end it is essential that NATS' capital programme is implemented in a thorough and effective way, with due attention paid to project appraisal and to the delivery of projects (notably the New En-Route Centre and the Central Control Function) punctually and to budget. This will be a key responsibility for the new Chief Executive of NATS. The Authority have already made significant changes in NATS' project management arrangements, but it is important that these are maintained and followed through, and that the possible need for further changes is kept always in mind.

I also attach great importance to effective international working on air traffic control (ATC) matters; I look to the Authority for full support in helping to implement the plan endorsed by the European Civil Aviation Conference Ministers for harmonising and progressively integrating their ATC systems. Together with the Chief Executive of NATS, I should like you in due course to consider with your Board whether the new NATS organisational structure is proving to be appropriate to the ever-increasing international dimension of ATC work.

There have been long-running negotiations with BAA on the provision of aerodrome navigation services. I hope it will be possible to bring these to a conclusion soon, to put this important relationship on a firm footing.

Objectives for Safety Regulation

The Authority has its own safety responsibilities, but it is important that recommendations by the Air Accident Investigation Branch (AAIB) which are accepted should be followed up with all due promptness. I should like you to continue to send me a report annually on the way in which this is being done.

My predecessor was concerned at last year's increases in the charges made by the Authority's Safety Regulation Group. Since then a review of the Group's operation has been conducted and recommendations have been made. I would be grateful for a report by the end of the financial year as to what has been done in the light of the consultants' report.

The Group's future staffing levels and the level of charges to industry should reflect improvements in efficiency and working practices without of course compromising the effectiveness of the Group's safety functions. Progress on achieving this should be included in your annual reports on the achievement of your objectives.

The Safety Regulation Group is already playing a prominent role in international organisations such as the European Joint Aviation Authorities and should continue to do so. However, I would ask you to ensure that, as the role of such bodies grows, there should be as little duplication as possible between their work and that of the Group.

Objectives for Scottish Aerodromes

The primary objective for the Authority's Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd. (HIAL) subsidiary should be to seek to break even on its non-oil related operations after grant, consistent with ensuring that the aerodromes continue to meet the social needs of the communities which they serve. I would also be glad if you would examine the scope for unit cost indicators for HIAL.

General

The CAA is established as a nationalised industry separate from Government, and as such it should be free to pursue objectives and responsibilities, within the Corporate Plan accepted by the Government and the Internal Financing Review provision agreed for the next three years. You and your Board are responsible for the day-to-day management of the Authority and can expect to carry this out without interference from Government. At the same time, I am accountable to Parliament for the overall performance of the Authority and I have specific functions in relation to a variety of matters affecting the Authority. It is therefore important that I and my officials have access to the information that bears on my responsibilities, and you should ensure that there continues to be close relationship between my Department and the Authority on all matters of mutual concern.

I expect from time to time to review these objectives with you. I attach importance to receiving regular reports at the end of each financial year on your progress in implementing these objectives.

Vehicle Registration Numbers

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will make a progress report on the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency's scheme to sell attractive registration numbers.

Mr. Chope: This highly successful and innovative scheme has proved to be very popular with the British motoring public. Since sales began in December 1989 over 100,000 numbers have been sold providing total receipts of over £55 million. Particular interest has been shown in the latest range of numbers to be made available taken from the 'A' prefix series which went on sale from 19 August this year. So far over 33,000 have been sold and they allow motorists who have vehicles registered on or after 1 August 1983 to obtain personalised numbers at a reasonable price. Numbers taken from the current issue 'J' prefix series are also available specifically for new car buyers. I have placed copies of the latest sales information leaflets in the Library.

Roadside Tests

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set an annual target for the number of roadside tests of emissions from heavy goods vehicles undertaken by his vehicles inspectorate.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 11 November 1991]:* A total of 113,000 HGV's were inspected at the roadside during 1990-91, and a similar number will be inspected this financial year. All these vehicles are checked for excessive smoke. Wherever possible vehicles are selected for roadside checking where they appear to be emitting a high level of smoke.

THE ARTS

British Library

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Minister for the Arts what discussions are taking place between himself, the PSA, the main contractor and the Dutch supplier of the equipment for the basement book store at the British Library to ensure that the equipment fully meets its specification and that, if any modifications cause its in-service date to be delayed, proper compensation will be paid.

Mr. Renton: Both PSA Services and the construction manager have been in detailed contractual discussions since July with the Dutch supplier to ensure that the product meets its specification and is fit for its purpose. A number of technical shortcomings have already been rectified. The payment of compensation for demonstrated damage is part of the discussions. I am being kept fully informed.

The British Library is shorty to recommence testing to determine the extent of movement, if any, of books on the shelves, during book retrieval operations.

HOME DEPARTMENT

BBC

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the members of the BBC governing body and their current salaries.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The membership of the BBC Board of Governors and their annual remuneration is as follows:

	Annual remuneration with effect from 1 April 1991	
Chairman		
Marmaduke Hussey, Esq.	£54,145	On the basis of four days per week.
Vice-Chairman		
The Rt. Hon. Lord Barnett, PC	£13,890	On the basis of one and half days per week.
National Governor for Northern Ireland		
Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, KCB	£13,890	
National Governor for Wales		
John Parry, Esq, CBE,	£13,890	
National Governor for Scotland		
Professor Sir Graham Hills	£13,890	
Governors:		
Dr. John Roberts	£6,945	On the basis of one day per week.
Baroness James of Holland Park, OBE	£6,945	
Bill Jordan, Esq.	£6,945	
Keith Oates, Esq.	£6,945	
Dr. Jane Glover	£6,945	
Mrs. Shahwar Sadeque	£6,945	
Lord Nicholas Gordon-Lennox, KCMG, KCVO	£6,945	

The annual remuneration was increased by 7·5 per cent. from 1 April 1991 and is due to be increased by a further 1·9 per cent. from 1 December 1991. The increases are in line with those approved for groups covered by the Top Salaries Review Body.'

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement as to the outcome of the meeting between the Parliamentary Under-Secretary and the Trade Association of Television Retailers, held on 29 October, concerning the BBC's commercial use of the licence database.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I informed the RETRA representatives that I understood that the Director General of Fair Trading considered the BBC's Telecover promotion likely to promote competition; and that the Data Protection

Registrar did not believe the BBC's use of licensing data for other purposes contravened the Data Protection Act 1984 provided the data protection principles were observed. I said also that the BBC had said that they would not promote Telecover in using future licensing data.

I invited the RETRA representatives to contribute to the forthcoming debate preceding the expiry of the BBC's charter in 1996, and to discussion of the draft EC directive on data protection.

Prisoners (Police Cells)

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average weekly cost of keeping a prisoner *(a)* in prison and *(b)* in a police cell.

Mrs. Rumbold: During the financial year 1990-91 the average weekly cost of keeping a prisoner in prison was £384 and in a police cell £1,400.

Animals (Scientific Procedures)

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost of the work of the Animal Procedures Committee in 1990.

Mrs. Rumbold: The cost of the work of the Animal Procedures Committee and its research sub-committee during 1990, which includes the fee paid to the chairman, the travelling and subsistence costs of its members and a notional amount to cover the servicing of the committee, was in the region of £29,000.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the amounts of revenue raised under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 in 1990 in fees for certificates of designation of scientific procedures establishments, in fees for personal licences and in fees for certificates of designation of breeding and supplying establishments.

Mrs. Rumbold: Some £1·7 million was collected in respect of certificates of designation and personal licences in force during 1990.

Nationality Applications

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of applications waiting for consideration for British nationality on 1 November.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: As at 31 October 1991, the number of applications for British citizenship awaiting determination was 54,897, of which more than 30,000 were at various stages of consideration.

Door Supervisors

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to control the activity of door supervisors on licensed premises.

Mr. John Patten: As a result of a meeting in September 1990 with representatives of organisations using and providing door supervisors, a survey of police forces was conducted earlier this year to provide information on the nature and extent of problems associated with door supervisors and on any schemes which had been set up to tackle these problems on licensed premises where identified.

The survey revealed that most parts of the country are experiencing some problems with door supervisors, including incidents of violent behaviour. Most of the local registration schemes in existence or planned focus on the need for identification, and to a lesser extent training, of door supervisors. In many cases, registration of door supervisors is a condition of the issue or renewal of a public entertainments licence. In some cases it is required that the employment of individual door supervisors be approved by a local committee, comprising representatives of the police and local authorities.

It is not possible at this stage to evaluate the effectiveness of these schemes since most of them are of relatively recent origin. The operation of a representative sample is, however, currently being monitored. We aim to have the interim results of this exercise next spring, to consult with interested parties and to publish a final report before the end of 1992. Our intention is then to issue guidelines to all police forces on the most effective means by which conduct of door supervisors may be controlled. In the meantime the Home Office will maintain close contact with interested parties.

National Crime Intelligence Service

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the date on which the new Welsh regional office of the national criminal intelligence service will be set up in Cardiff.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The location of branch offices of the national criminal intelligence service is being determined by a balance of operational and financial considerations. Current plans are that the branch office covering the police forces in south Wales and south-west England will be sited in Bristol.

Press Complaints Commission

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the chairman of the Press Complaints Commission; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. Friend and I met the chairman of the Press Complaints Commission on 14 March. The Home Office keeps in touch with the commission, and I met the chairman on 30 October.

Firearms

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all those hunts that hold *(a)* firearms licences and *(b)* shotgun licences and the people whose names appear on the licences.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for the grant of firearm and shot gun certificates lies with local chief officers of police. Details of certificates on issue are not held centrally.

Police Science and Technology Group

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what goods or services are to be supplied by the successful tenderer to the Home Office Police Department science and technology group tender 87/91; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The successful tenderer, British Telecom plc, will provide cardphone facilities at prison service establishments in England and Wales.

Chief Constables (Salaries)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the names and salaries of each of the chief constables in Britain.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Chief constables' current rates of pay are set out in Home Office Circular 70/1991. The names of all chief constables can be found in the Police and Constabulary Almanac. Copies of both documents are in the Library.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the total cost that was incurred in 1990-91 in pursuing poll tax enforcement procedures through the courts.

Mr. John Patten: About £3·4 million.

Niggers with Attitude Case

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether, in the light of the judgment in the NWA—Niggers with Attitude—case at Redbridge on 7 November, he will bring forward proposals to amend the Obscene Publications Act 1959.

Mr. John Patten: I cannot comment on the decision of a court in a particular case. The Government recognise that there is concern about the effectiveness of the Obscene Publications Act 1959. This is traditionally an area for Private Members and the Government are prepared to support any suitable proposals for amendments which would make the law more effective and which appear likely to command sufficient public and parliamentary support.

Magistrates Courts

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average cost per sitting hour of a magistrates court.

Mr. John Patten: The average hourly running cost of magistrates courts in 1990/91 was £216·85.

Drug Traffickers

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made towards further bilateral treaties to provide for the confiscation of the assets of drug traffickers.

Mr. John Patten: The United Kingdom has now concluded 23 such agreements or arrangements: 20 in respect of the proceeds of drug trafficking and three concerning the proceeds of all serious crimes. Ten of these agreements or arrangements are in force. In addition, the United Kingdom is able to assist 28 further countries in tracing, freezing and confiscating drug trafficking proceeds by virtue of our recent ratification of the 1988 United Nations convention against illicit traffic in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances (the Vienna convention). Details are as follows:

(i) *Bilateral agreements or arrangements to trace, freeze and confiscate the proceeds of drug trafficking have been concluded with:*

Anguilla
Argentina
Australia
Bahamas
Bahrain
Barbados
Bermuda
Canada
Cayman Islands
Germany
Gibraltar
Guyana
Hong Kong
Malaysia
Mexico
Montserrat
Saudi Arabia
Spain
Switzerland
United States of America

(ii) *Bilateral agreements to trace, freeze and confiscate the proceeds of all serious crimes have been concluded with:*

Italy
Nigeria
Sweden

(iii) *The following agreements or arrangements are in force:*

Australia
Bahamas
Canada
Cayman Islands
Gibraltar
Hong Kong
Mexico
Spain
Switzerland
United States of America

(iv) *Countries which we are able to assist by virtue of the Vienna convention:*

Bangladesh
Bhutan
Bolivia
Chile
China
Costa Rica
Cyprus
Ecuador
Egypt
France
Ghana
Grenada
Guatemala
Guinea
India
Jordan
Madagascar
Nicaragua
Oman
Paraguay
Qatar
Senegal
Togo
Tunisia
Uganda
USSR
UAE
Yugoslavia

Asylum

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the country of origin of those who applied for asylum in each quarter of 1990 and 1991, as listed in his answer of 21 October, *Official Report*, column *338*.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* The information requested is given in the table. The figures

are for principal applicants excluding dependants. The 1990 figures for some nationalities understate because of delays in recording, particularly for the fourth quarter.

Applications[1] [2] received for asylum in the United Kingdom, by nationality, 1990-91.

	1990[3]			
	Quarter 1	*Quarter 2*	*Quarter 3*	*Quarter 4*
Europe and Americas				
Bulgaria	20	15	40	55
Colombia	20	50	30	80
Romania	5	20	80	190
Turkey	100	160	235	565
USSR	15	15	25	40
Others	25	30	25	65
TOTAL	190	290	440	1,000
Africa				
Angola	95	195	460	365
Congo	5	10	30	20
Ethiopia	165	300	935	505
Ghana	225	175	290	200
Somalia	380	325	665	485
Sudan	50	45	70	85
Togo/Ivory Coast	5	10	25	45
Uganda	355	405	565	565
Zaire	240	245	640	485
Others	80	100	240	185
TOTAL	1,600	1,810	3,920	2,945
Middle East				
Iran	75	60	95	100
Iraq	95	115	335	350
Lebanon	80	50	275	590
Others	15	10	10	25
TOTAL	260	230	715	1,065
Asia				
China	35	60	60	75
India	300	305	350	450
Pakistan	170	165	360	600
Sri Lanka	700	630	785	1,095
Others	50	70	80	175
TOTAL	1,255	1,225	1,640	2,400
Other and unknown nationality	55	55	90	135
GRAND TOTAL	3,360	3,615	6,800	7,545

Applications[1] [2] received for asylum in the United Kingdom, by nationality, 1990-91.

	1991			
	Quarter 1	*Quarter 2*	*Quarter 3*	*Quarter 4*
Europe and Americas				
Bulgaria	100	140	80	—
Colombia	50	25	30	—
Romania	170	110	170	—
Turkey	750	510	510	—
USSR	55	60	60	—
Others	25	45	90	—
TOTAL	1,150	895	920	—
Africa				
Angola	1,390	1,910	1,240	—
Congo	70	60	110	—
Ethiopia	525	510	420	—
Ghana	665	930	520	—
Somalia	595	630	450	—
Sudan	145	115	450	—
Togo/Ivory Coast	200	425	560	—
Uganda	805	305	120	—
Zaire	1,430	2,220	1,600	—
Others	200	810	1,200	—

	1991 Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
TOTAL	6,015	7,915	6,680	—
Middle East				
Iran	155	135	120	—
Iraq	310	155	180	—
Lebanon	505	85	70	—
Others	25	95	110	—
TOTAL	995	465	480	—
Asia				
China	115	155	130	—
India	575	510	480	—
Pakistan	915	915	720	—
Sri Lanka	1,420	990	750	—
Others	85	230	430	—
TOTAL	3,105	2,800	2,500	—
Other and unknown nationality	[4]435	—	—	—
GRAND TOTAL	11,700	12,075	10,590	—

[1] Excluding dependants.
[2] Provisional figures, rounded to the nearest 5.
[3] 1990 figures are estimates which understate for some nationalities, particularly for the fourth quarter. In total applications in 1990, excluding dependants, are estimated at over 22,000 (over 30,000 including dependants).
[4] Includes applications in January and February 1991 from nationalities not specifically identified above. From March 1991 these are included in the "others" category for the relevant geographical area.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many grants of *(a)* asylum and *(b)* exceptional leave to remain were made in each month of 1988 to 1991 or the nearest available date.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* The information requested is given in the table. Comprehensive monthly figures from January 1991 are not yet available.

Grants[1] [2] of asylum or exceptional leave to applicants for asylum in the United Kingdom, 1988-90

	Grants of asylum	Grants of exceptional leave
1988		
January	20	55
February	35	90
March	25	70
April	35	55
May	30	190
June	35	115
July	20	145
August	20	130
September	35	120
October	80	220
November	235	245
December	55	155
1989		
January	105	225
February	85	260
March	90	365
April	170	415
May	270	440
June	385	450
July	90	275
August	115	380
September	265	335
October	290	255
November	245	290
December	110	205
1990[3]		
January	160	320
February	115	240
March	95	210
April	65	235
May	55	210
June	60	130
July	75	165
August	55	135
September	75	265
October	110	200
November	75	230
December	55	90

[1] Excluding dependants.
[2] Figures rounded to the nearest 5.
[3] 1990 figures are provisional.

ENERGY

Miners' Coal Entitlement

Mr. Eadie: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what information he has on British Coal's plans with regard to the buy-out of mineworkers', former mineworkers' and their widows' coal entitlement at the end of the 1991-92 financial year.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: This is a matter for British Coal.

Mr. Eadie: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will ensure that provision is made in any future measures to privatise the coal mining industry to protect the concessionary fuel entitlement of mineworkers, former mineworkers and their widows.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Government will ensure that existing concessionary fuel entitlements from British Coal will be safeguarded following privatisation of the industry.

Nuclear Electric plc

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement about the objectives he has set for Nuclear Electric plc.

Mr. Wakeham: Yes. The Government wish to preserve the nuclear option in order to maintain adequate diversity and security of electricity supply and obtain the benefits of this environmentally clean source of energy.

To secure the future of the nuclear option the company must demonstrate to the public that nuclear power is safe, clean and economic and that it should continue to have a major role in electricity supply in the longer term. I have therefore set the following objectives for Nuclear Electric plc:

(i) to increase profit and reduce total and unit costs;
(ii) to achieve a continued increase in electricity generation, provided that this is economically justified;
(iii) to achieve a progressive reduction in the company's dependence on the levy;
(iv) to complete Sizewell B to time and cost;
(v) to achieve a reduction in the costs of re-processing, de-commissioning and waste disposal and greater certainty about these costs;

All these objectives should be achieved whilst maintaining the company's excellent safety record.

PRIME MINISTER

Overseas Visits

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister what was the cost to the Exchequer of his visits abroad in 1990.

The Prime Minister: The cost of my visits abroad as Prime Minister in 1990 was £93,830.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister how many days he has spent abroad since assuming office.

The Prime Minister: I have spent 41 days abroad on official duties.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for 12 November.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

BCCI

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister how many letters he has received from Gibraltar concerning the closure of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International.

The Prime Minister: I have received many representations concerning BCCI.

Indonesia

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Prime Minister when he last met representatives of the Indonesian Government; and what was the purpose of that meeting.

The Prime Minister: I met Dr. Habibie, the Indonesian Minister for Research and Technology on 19 June. We discussed a number of issues including commercial co-operation, particularly in the aerospace sector.

East Timor

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has had regarding the Indonesian occupation of East Timor; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: We receive frequent representations on the subject of East Timor. We support the efforts of the United Nations Secretary General to promote a settlement acceptable to all parties.

No. 10 Downing Street

Mr. Gould: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what recent assessment he has made of the current standards of horticulture in the gardens of 10 Downing street;

(2) what consideration he has given to the security implications of the proposed contracting out of the management of the Downing street gardens.

The Prime Minister: The security implications of a contractor maintaining gardens in Downing street are considered in the same way as they are when other contractors' staff undertake work in Downing street or its gardens. The standards of gardening in 10 Downing street are high. Those standards will be maintained or improved when the work is bought in from the private sector.

WALES

Waiting Lists

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will state the number of patients waiting for non-urgent in-patient treatment waiting *(a)* more than one year, *(b)* more than 18 months and *(c)* 24 months or more, in Wales as a whole and by health authority in 1979, 1987 and the present.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Information concerning patients waiting for non-urgent in-patient treatment in Wales is collected centrally only on the basis of those waiting more than one year and became available for the first time in 1981. The available information is given in the following table:

Non-urgent cases waiting more than one year for admission as an in-patient as at 31 March

District health authority	*1981*	*1987*	*1991*
Clwyd	701	533	1,091
East Dyfed	49	363	939
Gwent	1,665	1,825	2,567
Gwynedd	422	175	719
Mid Glamorgan	3,386	2,761	2,306
Pembrokeshire	653	1,328	634
Powys	—	—	—
South Glamorgan	2,501	1,696	1,884
West Glamorgan	749	458	1,882
Wales	10,126	9,139	12,022

In March 1974 there was a total of 72,904 patients on hospital waiting lists in Wales; by March 1979 the figure had risen to 97,359 an increase of 24,455.

The number of patients treated in 1974, 1979 and 1990 was:

	1974	1979	1990-91
In-patient	328,793	349,695	482,445
New out-patient	444,032	428,739	551,464

The overall percentage increase/decrease in number of patients treated is as follows:

	1974-79 Per cent.	1979-90 to 1991 Per cent.
In-patients	Up 6	Up 38
New Out-patients	Down 3	Up 29

The latest information for 1990 also shows that 92 per cent. of patients admitted from a waiting list in that year had waited less than 12 months.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he plans to meet *(a)* health authorities, *(b)* county health councils and *(c)* leaders of the health service unions to discuss waiting lists.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: My right hon. Friend is to meet the chairmen of Welsh health authorities on 20 November when waiting lists and the length of time patients have to wait for treatment will be discussed. He has no plans at present to meet community health councils or leaders of health service unions. I am always happy to receive constructive comments in writing at any time.

Renal Patients

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list his initiatives to assist renal patients; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Dialysis facilities for patients suffering from end-stage renal failure have been provided at the following locations:

	Dialysis stations
North Wales	
Main Renal Unit—Rhyl	7
Subsidiary Renal Unit—Bangor	6
Subsidiary Renal Unit—Wrexham	6
South West Wales	
Main Renal Unit—Swansea	15
Subsidiary Renal Unit—Carmarthen	9
South East Wales	
Main Renal Unit—Cardiff	11
Subsidiary Renal Unit—Cardiff	6
Subsidiary Renal Unit—Merthyr Tydfil	6

Proposals for a unit at Newport have been invited from Gwent health authority. We have also established a kidney transplant unit at the Cardiff royal infirmary. The treatment of most renal patients, however, is in the hands of district health authorities.

Lithotripters

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he proposes to install lithotripters in *(a)* north Wales and *(b)* south Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The final report of the all-Wales project group on lithotripsy, which is considering the need for and specification of lithotripter facilities for Wales and appraising location options, is expected to be submitted early in the new year.

Roads and Public Transport

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what financial support he has given to each of the counties of Wales in the last three years for capital and revenue expenditure on *(a)* roads and *(b)* public transport; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: By agreement with the local authority associations, the bulk of revenue and capital funding to individual local authorities is provided through revenue support grant and basic credit approvals. These are not hypothecated to particular services. As an exception to this rule, transport schemes costing over £5 million attract transport grant; total support in the last three financial years is as follows:

County	1989-90 (£000s)	1990-91 (£000s)	1991-92 (£000s)
Clwyd	558	1,207	938
Dyfed	3,982	1,463	2,704
Gwent	8,349	6,966	14,708
Gwynedd	—	—	281
Mid Glamorgan	8,031	9,737	14,536
Powys	—	—	—
South Glamorgan	6,760	8,757	22,973
West Glamorgan	11,738	22,780	10,780
Total	39,418	50,910	66,920

RNIB Needs Survey

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consideration he has given to the report "Blind and Partially Sighted Adults in Britain—The RNIB Needs Survey"; what action he will be taking in relation to its findings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The Department has secured a copy of this report within the last week and we are studying it with interest. It is the result of a survey carried out in 1986-87, complementary to the wider disability surveys carried out by OPCS, whose reports were published in 1989-90.

We already have a programme of action in hand to improve services for people with visual impairments. In 1990 the Welsh Office issued a working group report "Co-ordinating Services for Visually Handicapped People" and in May of that year published a major guidance circular on best practice in the provision of support and care to people with physical or sensory disabilities.

That advice has been followed up by full guidance on the implementation in Wales of our comprehensive programme to improve community care for all groups which is set out in chapter 11 of the "Caring for People" White Paper [Cm 849]. In addition, the Welsh Office will publish shortly the report of the social services inspectorate inspection of services for people with visual impairment in Gwynedd. This was carried out with RNIB assistance and will be used with the RNIB national survey findings as the basis of a seminar on further guidance early next year.

GP Budget Holders

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many GPs in Wales are budget holders; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Seven GP practices in Wales, comprising a total of 46 GPs, have been recognised as fund-holders from 1 April 1991.

Parents Charter

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State, for Wales (1) what is his estimate of the cost of distributing details of the charter for parents to each of the headteachers of Wales;

(2) how many copies of charter for parents he has distributed; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he proposes to make moneys available to local education authorities to enable their headteachers to inform parents of the contents of the charter for parents.

Mr. David Hunt: The charter for parents in Wales sets out in a single document the rights of parents with respect to the education of their children, the choices they can exercise, the information they can obtain about schools' performance and the influence they can have on the way schools are run. As such it is an invaluable reference document to which all parents should have access. I therefore sought the co-operation of the chairmen of governors and headteachers of all schools in Wales to have the document delivered to parents through pupils at their schools. The cost of distributing supplies to schools for that purpose is £11,911.20 and is being met by my Department. I am also making arrangements for copies of the charter to be made available to parents whose children are not yet at school through playgroup and nursery schools associations. Copies of the charter have also been made available to others on request. So far a total of 486,761 copies of the charter have been distributed.

Marginal Hill Farms

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to visit a marginal hill farm in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I have visited many hill farms throughout Wales and will continue to do so in the future.

School Transport

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he is satisfied with the practice of local education authorities in interpreting the statutory walking distance for school transport in the rural areas of Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I have no reason to believe that LEAs are not properly observing the statutory provisions in the Education Act 1944 relating to walking distances in determining eligibility for transport from home to the nearest appropriate school for attendance. It is for the LEAs themselves to determine what constitutes an appropriate school.

Housing Revenue Account Subsidy

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he will consult local authorities and other appropriate bodies regarding his proposals for housing revenue account subsidy in Wales in 1992-93.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The Welsh Office is today consulting local authorities, the Council of Welsh Districts and other interested bodies on proposals for determining each authority's entitlement to subsidy in 1992-93. Comments on the proposals are invited by 9 December. I am placing copies of the consultation proposals in the Library of the House together with estimates of the rent guidelines and management and maintenance allowances for each authority.

For rent guidelines we propose an average increase of £2·14 per week with increases for individual authorities ranging from £1·13 to £3·40 per week over the guideline rent which applies in the current year. This will continue the process of encouraging sensible levels of rent which better reflect the value of the properties concerned.

For management and maintenance allowances, we propose to increase the average allowance per dwelling from £712 to £766. The increase in the allowances for individual authorities will be based on the targeting system introduced in the current year which takes into account the condition of each local authority's stock.

The rent guidelines and the management and maintenance allowances are the assumptions the Government make in calculating each authority's entitlement to subsidy. It is for each council to set its own rent levels and to decide how much to spend on managing and maintaining its stock within its obligations under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

CAP Products

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will bring up to date the information on surplus common agricultural policy products in his answer dated 12 May 1986, *Official Report*, column *367;* and if he will add corresponding information for other common agricultural policy products.

Mr. Curry: The information, which covers all products on which there was relevant expenditure, is as follows:

Mecu

	1986	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Export refunds					
Cereals	1,652	3,071	2,925	2,597	2,444
Rice	60	95	61	45	29
Sugar	1,238	1,516	1,566	1,451	926
Olive Oil	29	23	64	93	135
Oilseeds	2	64	25	6	1
Fruit and Vegetables	77	67	64	79	81
Wine	11	20	44	45	55
Tobacco	32	43	43	62	62
Milk and Milk Products	1,982	2,258	3,014	2,869	1,931
Beef	1,214	878	769	1,343	1,110
Pigmeat	75	112	172	199	174
Eggs and Poultry	98	152	194	234	179
Non-Annex II Products	503	590	602	552	512
MCA's	170	227	143	57	76

	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Food Aid	264	259	243	133	86
Total	7,407	9,375	9,929	9,765	7,801
Public storage					
Cereals	559	346	2,022	804	1,440
Rice	0	0	0	0	36
Sugar	1	2	−1	−1	0
Olive Oil	50	53	86	47	42
Oilseeds	0	0	2	7	4
Wine	5	6	592	369	202
Tobacco	11	18	28	122	116
Milk and Milk Products	447	409	931	460	959
Beef	282	213	1,372	790	982
Pigmeat	5	0	0	0	0
Total	1,359	1,046	5,032	2,598	3,780

Notes:
(i) The figures for public storage costs since 1988 are not compatible with earlier costs as stock is now depreciated on entry into intervention. Furthermore the cost of depreciation of 1988 stock is being reimbursed over the 5 years 1988-92.
(ii) 1987 expenditure was for 10 months only and 1988 expenditure was for 11½ months only.
Sources: EAGGF Guarantee Financial Reports.

Finance Statistics

Mr. Biffen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the total value of national aids to agriculture paid by each European Community country over the latest available 12 month period and the corresponding value of common agricultural policy payments.

Mr. Curry: The Government do not keep comprehensive details of the national subsidies and other state aids available to farmers in other member states, since to do so would not be a cost effective use of resources. All state aids are, however, subject to the provisions of articles 92 to 94 of the treaty of Rome, and member states are required to obtain the Commission's approval in advance for new state aids and modifications to existing aids and to send an inventory of all state aids to the Commission annually. The Government monitor, through their embassies in member states, the introduction of new state aids and modifications to existing aids, and draws any that seem to be of doubtful legality to the attention of the Commission.

Departmental Staffing

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the departments within his Ministry where he intends to increase staffing levels, indicating the numbers involved in each case, and when he expects the increases to take effect; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: I intend to increase staffing levels in the financial year 1992-93 as a result of the outcome of the recent public expenditure survey round. Additional staff will be placed primarily within divisions dealing with environmental issues and with work arising from the movement towards a single market. The funds allocated will pay for about 275 posts, but the precise total, and the breakdown between divisions will depend on decisions on the grade and mix of staff chosen.

Humming Birds

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with European Commission officials regarding the transportation of wild-caught humming birds and other nectar-feeding birds in the context of the proposed EC directive on transport of live animals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) on 7 November at col. *246*.

Suckler Cow Premium

Mr. Robert Hicks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he intends to authorise payments of the suckler cow premium; and if he will pay this at the maximum rate allowed.

Mr. Curry: As I announced on 4 November, Agriculture Ministers have fixed the rates of suckler cow premium for the 1991-92 scheme year at the same rates which applied last year, viz £51·69 per head in the less favoured areas and £47·43 per head elsewhere. A statutory instrument putting these rates into effect is expected to be laid before Parliament later this week and payments to those who have already submitted their applications for premium will be made as soon as possible thereafter.

Common Agricultural Policy

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in which sectors he expects to increase his Ministry's spending in 1991-92 for the intervention board and other aspects of the common agricultural policy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Based on latest forecasts of production, market and trade conditions, it is likely there will be increased CAP market support expenditure (class III, vote 1) in the beef, sheepmeat and sugar sectors, offset by reductions in the cereals, milk products and oilseed sectors. Expenditure on this non-cash limited vote, which is largely reimbursed by the Community, is sensitive to a variety of unpredictable changes. If necessary increased provision will be sought at the time of the Spring Supplementary Estimates. My reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) on 6 November at column *163* gives expected changes on Intervention Board Administration expenditure (class III, vote 2).

Agricultural Produce Marketing

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, further to his answer to the hon. Member for South Shields on 5 November, *Official Report*, column *78*, if he will give the amount he intends to fund the organisations that promote the marketing of agricultural produce in *(a)* 1991-92 and *(b)* 1992-93; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: I have made provision for the following amounts:

	1991-92 £	1992-93 £
Food From Britain	4,500,000	4,800,000
Meat and Livestock Commission	249,000	264,000
Home-Grown Cereals Authority	120,000	120,000
Potato Marketing Board	300,000	300,000

Fishing Vessels

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions have taken place with European Governments and the Government of the United States of America to ensure that fishing vessles which use the Irish sea will be protected from submarine activity.

Mr. McLoughlin: I have been asked to reply.

Discussions took place at the recent 17th assembly of the International Maritime Organisation which resulted in an assembly resolution concerning the avoidance by submerged submarines of fishing vessels and their gear.

EMPLOYMENT

Claimants

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many unemployed claimants aged between 18 and 25 years have been unemployed for six months or more.

Mr. Jackson: Unemployment figures by age and duration are calculated on a quarterly basis. In July 1991, the latest available date, the number of unemployed claimants in the United Kingdom aged 18 to 24 years who had been unemployed for six months or more was 263,274.

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment by how many the unemployment claimant count has risen since October 1990.

Mr. Jackson: Between October 1990 and September 1991, (the latest date for which figures are available), United Kingdom seasonally adjusted unemployment rose by 755,800.

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to computerise the matching of claimant details with job vacancy detail.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service Executive Agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the Agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the percentage increase in the number of unemployed claimants over the last 12 months; and what has been the percentage increase in claimant advisers during the same period.

Mr. Jackson: In the 12 months to September 1991, the total number of unemployed claimants in the United Kingdom, on the unadjusted basis, has increased by 46 per cent. Over the same period the number of claimant advisers, whose main function is to help longer term unemployed people, has increased by almost 24 per cent.

Local Offices

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many of the new integrated offices are located in what were previously unemployment benefit office premises; and what percentage this is of the newly converted offices.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service Executive Agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Training

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the annual performance target for employment training places for 1991-92; and what has been the attainment in the first six months of the current year.

Mr. Jackson: Plans are to provide an average of 149,000 trainees in training on employment training (ET) in Great Britain in 1991-92. By 12 September an estimated 130,000 trainees were in training.

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make it his policy to provide for the training of those with special needs.

Mr. Jackson: It is the Government's policy to provide training for people with special needs through its arrangements with training and enterprise councils and through specialist residential training colleges. Many people with special needs will of course be covered by the Government's guarantees and aim.

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the annual performance target for employment training places for 1990-91; and what was the outturn.

Mr. Jackson: An average of 215,000 trainees in training on employment training (ET) was planned in Great Britain in 1990-91. An average number in training of 196,000 was achieved.

Workers' Hours

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many British workers work more than (i) 40 hours a week, (ii) 50 hours a week and (iii) 60 hours a week, including overtime.

Mr. Jackson: The following table gives the estimates requested.

Usual hours[1] of work of employee and self-employed—Great Britain, Spring 1990

Hours per week	Thousands
More than 40	11,015
More than 50	3,687
More than 60	1,314

Source: Labour Force Survey, Spring 1990
[1] Usual hours of work including overtime

Claimant Adviser Interviews

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the average duration of claimant adviser interviews 12 months ago; and what it is now.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service Executive Agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Skills Analysis

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to analyse the skills of those registering as unemployed and available for work.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service Executive Agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Rehabilitation Courses

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are undergoing a course of rehabilitation (i) at employment rehabilitation centres and (ii) with outside agencies funded by the Employment Service; and what is the average weekly cost of these courses.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service Executive Agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Unemployed, Newham

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish details of the occupational breakdown of the unemployed register in the London borough of Newham.

Mr. Jackson: The information requested is not available.

Vacancy Statistics

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many vacancies were notified to employment offices and jobcentres in each of the past 10 years; and if he will publish a table showing (i) the actual number, (ii) the percentage of the total and (iii) the split between part-time and full-time.

Mr. Jackson: Following is the available information.

(i) The table shows the total number of vacancies in the United Kingdom, on the seasonally adjusted basis, notified to jobcentres for each year from 1981 to 1990.

(ii) Vacancies notified to jobcentres do not represent the total number of vacancies in the economy. The latest research indicates that nationally only about a third of all vacancies are notified to jobcentres.

(iii) Information on the number of vacancies notified to jobcentres split between part-time and full-time is only available for Great Britain, and on the unadjusted basis, from July 1986 onwards. The table shows the number of vacancies notified to jobcentres in Great Britain for each year from 1987 to 1990 and the split between full-time and part-time jobs.

(i) Vacancies notified to jobcentres in the United Kingdom (seasonally adjusted annual total)

Year	Vacancies
1981	1,799,300
1982	1,989,500
1983	2,180,300
1984	2,327,000
1985	2,419,400
1986	2,546,300
1987	2,716,700
1988	2,773,900
1989	2,712,500
1990	2,413,300

(iii) Vacancies notified to jobcentres in Great Britain (unadjusted annual total)

Year	Vacancies	Of which full-time vacancies	Of which part-time vacancies
1987	2,668,597	2,033,699	634,898
1988	2,725,832	2,035,023	690,809
1989	2,702,549	1,949,953	752,596
1990	2,372,129	1,667,182	704,947

Office Staff Statistics

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many staff were employed in (i) jobcentres and (ii) unemployment benefit offices in each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service Executive Agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Labour and Social Affairs Council

Mr. Summerson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the outcome of the meeting of the Labour and Social Affairs Council held in Brussels on 6 November; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: The Council addressed only one item—the proposed directive on pregnant workers. Agreement was reached on the two most important remaining provisions of the proposal, concerned with dismissal and in particular with the level of maternity pay and benefits.

On maternity benefits, the Council rejected the approach proposed by the European Commission of a quantified link with previous earnings. Instead, the Council agreed the principle that member states must at a minimum set the level of maternity benefit at the level of benefits that are paid when people have to be absent from work for reasons of health.

The Council also agreed a number of important protections for the health and safety at work of women who are pregnant or who have recently given birth.

The United Kingdom and all but one of the other member states supported this agreement.

The United Kingdom in addition recorded its concern at the proposed legal basis for this directive under the Treaty of Rome. The United Kingdom does not agree that such matters as leave, pay and other employment rights fall under article 118A of the Treaty, which is explicitly concerned with health and safety at work. The United Kingdom therefore registered its abstention in the voting on this directive. The Social Affairs Council is likely to adopt its formal common position at its next meeting.

The United Kingdom was represented by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth).

Training Schemes

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the cost of running training schemes through each of the previous methods; what is the cost of running training schemes through training and enterprise councils and local enterprise companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Prior to the introduction of TECs and local enterprise companies in 1990-91 training schemes were run from the Department's area offices. Area office running costs were not separately identified from those of regional and head office.

During 1990-91 expenditure on TEC management fee in England and Wales was £36·195 million.

For 1991-92 the published estimate shows expenditure of £124·342 million on TEC management fee and residual area office running costs for England and Wales.

Running costs for programmes in Scotland are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

RNIB Needs Survey

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what consideration he has given to the report "Blind and Partially Sighted Adults in Britain—The RNIB Needs Survey"; what action he will be taking in relation to its findings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The Department already provides considerable help for visually impaired people, but we take seriously any indication that more needs to be done. We are therefore considering the recent RNIB report very carefully.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment will be meeting the RNIB in the near future to discuss this Department's services for people with disabilities in the light of the survey evidence.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Gulf States (Ministerial Visit)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the recent visit of the Minister of Trade to the Gulf states.

Mr. Sainsbury: I visited Kuwait and Bahrain between 29 October and 3 November.

In Kuwait I met the Amir, Crown Prince, six Ministers, the Governor of the Central Bank and senior Kuwaiti officials. In Bahrain I met the Crown Prince, the Prime Minister and two senior Ministers. In Kuwait I was accompanied by seven senior British business men. In Bahrain I visited the "Rebuild Kuwait 91" exhibition at which 150 British companies were represented, the largest national group.

My visit strengthened the already excellent bilateral commercial relations with Bahrain and Kuwait and enabled me and the business team accompanying me to pursue various export opportunities.

Bankruptcy

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many bankruptcy petitions have been presented in Wales *(a)* in 1990 and *(b)* in the current year.

Mr. Redwood: During 1990 there were 855 bankruptcy petitions presented to the county courts in Wales. From January to September 1991 there have been 1,081.

Dressed Leather, Japan

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he intends to make to Japan to abolish the quota system that they place on imports of dressed leather; and what other action he proposes to take in this area.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 11 November 1991]:* Following a complaint to the GATT by the EC Commission and the USA, the Japanese Government replaced their quotas on imports of dressed leather and leather footwear with a 60 per cent. rate of import duty with effect from 1 April 1986. Lower rates, between 20 per cent. and 27 per cent. are applied to limited quantities of these products.

The British Government and the European Commission have taken every opportunity to press the Japanese Government to reduce these unacceptably high levels of import duty and substantially increase the quantities admitted at the lower rates. They will continue to do so, both bilaterally and in the GATT Uruguay round negotiations. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will certainly raise this problem with the newly-appointed MITI Minister, as he did with his predecessor.

Exploited Labour

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what representations he has made and plans to make to countries which export goods to Britain manufactured using children or adults who are not paid a living wage;

(2) what plans he has to deal with the threat faced by the British textile and footwear industry from unfair competition from imports produced with cheap and exploited labour;

(3) what plans he has to determine which imports into Britain have been produced using forced child labour and to take steps to ban such imports.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 11 November 1991]:* The Government urge all states who have ratified international instruments covering slavery, servitude, forced labour and similar institutions and practices to meet their obligations under those instruments, and also urges those states who have not done so to ratify at the earliest opportunity. This is carried out by the Government at all levels.

I am not aware of any specific cases which would justify making representations of the sort that the hon. Member mentions. Moreover, there would be severe practical difficulties in trying to identify goods which had been produced with allegedly forced or sweated labour, given the varied and complex channels of production and distribution in the textile and footwear industries. Customers can, of course, determine for themselves the acceptability of buying any particular product which may otherwise be lawfully supplied.

More generally, it is highly doubtful whether social conditions can be improved by restricting trade; indeed, opening up trade is more likely to contribute to economic growth in the developing world, which is a prime objective of the current GATT Uruguay round negotiations, and thus help to improve social conditions in those countries. Labour costs do not of themselves create unfair competition. Where competition is genuinely unfair, appropriate trade policy measures will remain available. The export interests of UK industry, including the textile and footwear sector, which has a meritorious record in this respect, also have to be borne in mind in striking the final balance.

Multi-fibre Arrangement

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the current position of the multi-fibre arrangement and bilateral agreements resulting from it.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 11 November 1991]:* Our latest information is that 27 signatories of the multi-fibre arrangement (MFA) including the Community have accepted or provisionally accepted the protocol extending the MFA until the end of 1992. With the guidance of member states the Commission is now negotiating the necessary extensions to the bilateral agreements with individual exporting countries.

Israel

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the level of imports and exports between Israel and the United Kingdom each year since 1970 *(a)* as a percentage of all United Kingdom exports and imports and *(b)* at 1990 prices.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 11 November 1991]:* The available information is published in table 1B of the annual editions of "Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom" (HMSO), available in the Library of the House. Statistics on United Kingdom trade with individual countries, in 1990 prices, are not available.

Negative Certificates

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to introduce legislation which prohibits the use of negative certificates for companies who trade with Arab companies and who wish to trade with Israel.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 11 November 1991]:* None.

Textile and Clothing Markets

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to ensure that increased access to the United Kingdom textile and clothing markets is linked to reciprocal access and adoption by the relevant countries of market principles.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 11 November 1991]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Lee) on 6 November at column *126*.

Care Home Proprietors

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry why his investigations division is currently examining the affairs of the British Federation of Care Home Proprietors; when he expects these investigations to be completed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 11 November 1991]:* I cannot comment on the affairs of individual companies. I am prepared to consider any information the hon. Member may provide which might warrant an inquiry. Investigations under the Companies Act are confined to limited companies.

ENVIRONMENT

Property Valuation

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he has any plans to amend the Domestic Property (Valuation) Regulations 1991 to enable a garage or carport to be disregarded if it is required for meeting the needs of the disabled occupant;

(2) if he has any plans to amend the Domestic Property (Valuation) Regulations 1991 to enable an additional room to be disregarded if it is predominantly used by or required for meeting the needs of the disabled occupant.

Mr. Portillo: We are discussing with organisations representing disabled people their representations that other rooms and features should be disregarded within the valuation arrangements.

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if his Department has any plans to amend the Domestic Property (Valuation) Regulations 1991 to enable the extra space within a property which is required by a wheelchair user to be disregarded.

Mr. Portillo: Under the regulations extra space required by a wheelchair user may be disregarded if it is a feature of a specially adapted additional bathroom, kitchen or lavatory. We are discussing with organisations representing disabled people their representations that other rooms and features should be disregarded within the valuation arrangements.

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations his Department has received from organisations of and for disabled people with regard to the Domestic Property (Valuation) Regulations 1991.

Mr. Portillo: We have received representations about these regulations from the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation (RADAR), the Association of Disabled Professionals, and the Disablement Income Group.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if it remains his policy to restore the benefits of the Rating (Disabled Persons) Act 1978.

Mr. Portillo: Our policy was stated in the consultation paper, "A New Tax for Local Government". It is that necessary adaptions to the homes of disabled people should be disregarded in assessing the band into which the property should fall for the purposes of the council tax.

Community Charge

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he proposes to take against those local authorities, up to and including Bristol, which are least effective at collecting the community charge to prevent their continuing to create greater community charge in 1992 than they did in the current year.

Mr. Key: We have provided local authorities with stronger powers to collect the community charge than were available for domestic rates. These include attachment of earnings and deductions from income support. If authorities use the powers vigorously this should achieve a high collection rate. We have made it clear that there will be no amnesty for non-payers.

SSSIs

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will identify all the sites of special scientific interest suffering partial loss or long-term damage from April 1990 to March 1991.

Mr. Baldry: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly with the details requested.

Voluntary Sector Forum

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many meetings of the voluntary sector environment forum have been held.

Mr. Baldry: There has been one meeting of the full forum. The working group set up at that meeting to consider DOE funding for Environmental work by the voluntary sector has met four times. The next meeting of the forum will be on 14 November.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the voluntary sector environment forum has produced any reports to Ministers on its work to date.

Mr. Baldry: The forum has a joint departmental and voluntary sector membership. A number of position papers have been produced by the members, and the forum's working group on DOE funding for environmental work by the voluntary sector has produced an interim report, which will be considered by the forum at its meeting on 14 November.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on progress made by the voluntary sector environment forum; and if he will set out the terms of reference of both the voluntary sector environment forum and the Advisory Committee on Business and the Environment.

Mr. Baldry: The forum has made useful progress in its discussions, particularly through the work of its working group on DOE funding for environmental work by the voluntary sector, which has helped to inform decisions on the second year of the operation of the environmental grant fund.

The terms of reference of the Forum as agreed at the first meeting are:

To provide a national forum for discussion between Government and environmental voluntary organisations on generic questions relating to the role of the voluntary sector in environmental protection, enhancement and related issues, and problems facing them in pursuing environmental goals, including:

—increasing the contribution of voluntary organisations (particularly non-environmental bodies) to environmental work;

—how the Government and voluntary sector can work together;

—Government support for the voluntary sector;

—helping the voluntary sector develop partnerships with other agencies; and

—how voluntary organisations could use their experience in environmental work to contribute to the Government's environmental policies.

The terms of reference of the Advisory Committee on Business and the Environment are:

—to provide for a strategic level dialogue between Government and business on environmental issues, both of an immediate and topical interest and of a longer term nature.

—in liaison with other appropriate organisations, to help mobilise the business community in demonstrating good environmental practice and management, building on existing initiatives and activities.

—to provide a link with, and focus attention on, international business initiatives on the environment.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on how many occasions Ministers or officials of his Department have met the voluntary sector environment forum.

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside chairs the main Forum, which has met once. The working group on DOE funding for environmental work by the voluntary sector has a joint membership of voluntary sector and departmental officials and has met four times.

Shellfish

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he will take to protect the United Kingdom marine environment from hazards associated with the introduction of non-native shellfish.

Mr. Baldry: My Department received a recommendation from the former Nature Conservancy Council that a number of non-native species should be added to schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, including the following species of non-native shellfish: American hard shell clam; noble crayfish; signal crayfish; Turkish crayfish and Pacific oyster. The effect of such changes would be to make it illegal to release specimens of these species into the wild in Great Britain. We have consulted widely on the recommendations and expect to make an announcement shortly.

Smoking

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether Her Majesty's Government intend to ban smoking from all public places.

Mr. Baldry: We have no plans at present to legislate against smoking in public places. We intend instead to publish guidance later this year in the form of a code of practice, encouraging the voluntary implementation of smoking policies by owners and managers of all places visited by the public. Our policy is that non-smoking should be the norm in all public places, with separate facilities for smoking where appropriate.

The Government are committed to achieving the goal of a smoke-free environment and will monitor the effects of this initiative closely.

Zoos

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the number of dispensations granted under section 14(2) of the Zoo Licensing Act 1981 in each year since 1981.

Mr. Baldry: The Zoo Licensing Act 1981 came into force in April 1984. The number of dispensations issued under section 14(2) of the Act in each calendar year is as follows:

	Number
1984	29
1985	43
1986	8
1987	15
1988	7
1989	15
1990	12
[1]1991	11

[1] To date.

Wild-caught Birds

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will list those species of wild-caught birds which are traded and where doubt exists as to the sustainability of such trade, as recommended by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee.

Mr. Baldry: In section 5 of its report on the wildlife trade, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee listed 47 species about which it was concerned. Copies of the report —which indicated that the European Community has already taken action to restrict or prohibit trade in most of the species listed—were placed in the Library of the House last month.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what response he has made to the proposal of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities that the "other services" standard spending assessment should include an indicator of economic deprivation taking into account the extent of unemployment;

(2) what response he has made to the London Boroughs Association's proposal to alter the standard spending assessment by removing the need for the London Regional Transport adjustment.

Mr. Key: My right hon. Friend is considering all the representations which he has received from local authority representatives on standard spending assessments and will announce his proposals for 1992-93 shortly.

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the "social services (children)" standard spending assessments for the London boroughs of Greenwich, Woolwich and Lewisham with the child population of each of those boroughs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: There is no London borough of Woolwich. The information for Greenwich and Lewisham, as requested, is shown in the following table.

	SSA for children's social services 1991-92 £ million	*Children aged 0 to 17 years*
Greenwich	14·070	51,746
Lewisham	22·890	52,352

The children's social services SSA is not simply based on the number of children in an area but takes account of a number of other factors which reflect the cost of providing a standard level of service.

Infant Mortality (Greenwich)

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from the London borough of Greenwich about the impact of the borough's infant mortality rates on its social services spending; and what has been his response.

Mr. Key: The London borough of Greenwich has made several representations that the children's social services standard spending assessment should include an indicator based on infant mortality rates. They have not tried to quantify the possible impact of the borough's infant mortality rates on its social services spending. My right hon. Friend is considering all representations received from local authorities on standard spending assessments and will announce his proposals for 1992-93 shortly.

Non-domestic Rates

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish an estimate of the actual total yield from the national non-domestic rate for the financial year 1990-91 and of the expected total yield for 1991-92.

Mr. Portillo: We estimate the total rate yield in England for 1990-91 to be £10,737 million and for 1991-92, £12,066 million.

Bank of Credit and Commerce International

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of the total local authority funds at risk following the closure of the BCCI.

Mr. Key: My Department wrote on 27 September to local authorities in the United Kingdom asking them about deposits with BCCI. Returns were due to be submitted by 7 November. The information we have received to date is listed below.

Authorities with deposits with BCCI

Local Authority	*Deposit £000s*
Western Isles	23,062
Bury	6,500
Harlow	4,000
Rochester on Medway	4,000
Westminster	3,575
Lisburn	3,000
Southwark	3,000
Mansfield	2,400
Wigan	2,150
Three Rivers	2,000
Banff and Buchan	2,000
Ross and Cromarty	1,800
Greater Manchester	

Local Authority	Deposit £000s
Fire and Civil Defence	1,783
South Bedfordshire	1,350
York	1,300
Barrow in Furness	1,200
Stockport	1,150
Allerdale	1,050
Alnwick	1,050
Selby	1,000
Mid Bedfordshire	1,000
Rother	850
Dover	750
Clackmannan	700
Bristol	600
Guildford	600
Fareham	500
Durham, City	300

Landfill Sites, Leicestershire

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many landfill sites he has discovered in Leicestershire; and how much has been given in supplemental credit allowance to pay for surveys.

Mr. Baldry: The discovery of landfill sites is a matter for local authorities, not the Secretary of State. Since the initiation in 1990-91 of the supplementary credit approval (SCA) programme for landfill gas works at closed landfill sites, the Department has approved SCAs for 13 sites in the Leicestershire county area. The number of the sites and the amounts for which SCAs have been approved for each authority (which may include both surveys and remedial works) are listed in the following table:

	Sites	£
Leicestershire county council	6	598,237
Blaby district council	1	230,000
Hinckley and Bosworth borough council	2	40,000
Leicester city council	3	155,000
North West Leicestershire district council	1	108,759
Total		1,131,996

Local Government Finance

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a list for each local authority showing the proposed basic credits approvals for 1992-93 broken down by service block as appropriate.

Mr. Portillo: Basic credit approvals for 1992-93 for individual local authorities will be announced in due course. I will arrange for a copy of this information to be placed in the Library of the House of Commons when it is available.

Bathing Water

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will announce the results of the survey of bathing water quality in 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: Results from the survey carried out during the 1991 bathing season showed that 76 per cent. of the 453 identified bathing waters in the United Kingdom met the mandatory coliform bacteria standards of the EC Bathing Water Directive. This compares with 77 per cent. in 1990 and 76 per cent. in 1989.

These results are encouraging because overall compliance has remained steady in spite of the worse summer weather this year.

Completion of improvement schemes for some 20 bathing waters in the £2 billion clean up programme has helped to offset the effects of the poor weather and it is clear that the programme, which was expanded and accelerated last year, is beginning to deliver tangible environmental improvements. Many more schemes are due to be completed in the next few years so that by 1995 virtually all our bathing waters will be up to the required standard.

The 1991 results for the United Kingdom are set out in summary form. I shall arrange for a more detailed summary of results to be placed in the Library and we shall also be sending the detailed results to the Commission of the European Communities.

Bathing Waters survey—1991 Results for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. (Compliance with Bathing Water Directive (76/160/EEC): Coliform Standards).

	Pass	Fail	Total
England And Wales			
NRA Regions			
Northumbrian	21(21)	12(11)	33(32)
Yorkshire	19(17)	3(5)	22(22)
Anglian	29(27)	4(2)	33(29)
Thames	2(3)	1(0)	3(3)
Southern	45(48)	22(18)	67(66)
Wessex	36(39)	3(0)	39(39)
South West	105(118)	28(15)	133(133)
North West	10(10)	23(23)	33(33)
Welsh	45(35)	6(15)	51(50)
Total	312(318)	102(89)	414(407)
Scotland	15(12)	8(11)	23(23)
Northern Ireland	16(15)	0(1)	16(16)
Grand Total	343(345)	110(101)	453(446)

(Results for 1990 are in brackets).

Urban Programmes

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what resources he is providing for his Department's urban group of programmes following the autumn statement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: The Government are making available an extra £100 million over the next two financial years to regenerate our inner cities and reclaim derelict land. The details for each programme are set out in the tables. These extra resources will ensure we capitalise on the progress we are already making in tackling run-down parts of our urban areas.

The urban development corporations (UDCs) are currently responsible for regenerating nearly 16,000 hectares of underused inner city land. We are proposing additional resources totalling £47 million, bringing the total Government input to over £650 million over the next two years. These will enable the UDCs to make further and faster headway revitalising these areas.

The further resources of £30 million for derelict land grant will bring the total available to over £220 million over the next two years, including over £20 million of forecast receipts ploughed back into the programme. These further resources will accelerate progress in reclaiming land for economic and environmental purposes, with a particular emphasis on badly contaminated land, reflecting the Government's continuing commitment to environmental policies.

The city grant programme, which encourages developers to bring derelict land and buildings back into productive use, will be boosted by an additional £18 million over previously planned levels, bringing the total grant available to £193 million over the next two years.

We have already announced that the eleven city challenge pacemakers will receive a total of £82·5 million each year for up to five years, from urban and housing programmes, to take forward their winning plans. These resources, together with the input by the local authorities and their private, voluntary and community partners, will be directed at achieving the comprehensive and lasting regeneration of those key localities.

Department of Environment Urban Block

£ million (rounded to nearest £ million)

	1991-92 Provision	*1992-93 Previous plan*	*1992-93 New plan*	*1993-94 Previous plan*	*1993-94 New plan*	*1994-95 New plan*
City Grant[1]	51	76	84	79	89	91
UDCs	[2]502	305	[2]332	303	323	305
Derelict Land Grant[1]						
Gross	88	94	109	98	113	115
Receipts	−12	−11	−11	−11	−11	−11
Net	76	83	98	87	102	104
Urban Programme[1]	242	244	249	246	246	252
City Action Teams[1]	8	8	8	9	9	9
Research	1	1	1	1	1	1
Total Urban Block	880	717	772	724	769	762

[1] The city challenge pacemakers will receive £82·5 million resources each year, from 1992-93 for up to five years, drawn from these and Housing programmes.

[2] Figures reflect completion of LDDC transport infrastructure projects e.g. Limehouse Link.

Individual UDC allocations

(£ million rounded)

	1991-92 current provision	*1992-93 previous plan*	*1992-93 new plan*	*1993-94 previous plan*	*1993-94 new plan*	*1994-95 new plan*
LDDC	248·7	96·0	101·0	98·4	101·4	99·9
MDC	28·8	30·0	32·0	28·0	29·0	28·5
BCDC	36·4	35·0	36·5	36·0	36·0	36·3
TDC	53·1	36·0	38·5	35·0	36·0	35·0
TPDC	28·1	30·1	31·6	30·1	30·6	30·0
TWDC	37·5	37·0	40·5	36·0	37·5	36·0
BDC	27·1	9·3	9·3	8·3	9·3	8·0
CMDC	16·0	17·0	17·0	17·0	17·0	7·5
LDC	12·6	3·0	5·0	1·0	4·0	3·2
SDC	13·3	12·0	13·0	13·0	13·0	12·0
Uncommitted	—	—	8·0	—	9·0	9·0
Total	501·5	305·4	332·4	302·8	322·8	305·4

NORTHERN IRELAND

Traffic, Donaghadee

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the change in traffic volume on the Newtownards road, Donaghadee near Cottown school over the past 10 years.

Mr. Needham: Figures for the past 10 years are not available. Between 1981 and 1988 traffic volume increased by approximately 21 per cent. from 2,518 vehicles per day to 3,050.

Work Forces

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what percentage of the economically active population of Northern Ireland are Protestant; and what percentages of the work forces of the Bank of Ireland were Protestant in the most recent figures available;

(2) what percentage of the economically active population of Northern Ireland are Protestant; and what percentage of the work force of Allied Irish Banks Plc were Protestant in the last available survey;

(3) what percentage of the economically active population is Protestant; and what percentage of the work force in the public sector is Protestant.

Mr. Needham: It is estimated from the 1990 labour force survey[1] that 60 per cent of the economically active population in Northern Ireland are Protestant.

The Fair Employment Commission's report "A Profile of the Workforce in Northern Ireland: A Summary of the 1990 Monitoring Returns" published in April this year, indicates that 65 per cent of the public sector work force are Protestant.

A report by the Fair Employment Agency published in March 1986 indicated that 42 per cent of the workforce of the Bank of Ireland and 28 per cent of that of Allied Irish

Banks were Protestant. More recent information derived from statutory monitoring returns has not yet been published by the FEC.

[1] The labour force survey is based on a random sample of approximately 1 per cent of domestic properties and estimates produced from it are subject to sampling error.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of the economically active population within the area of the Eastern health and social services board are Protestant; and what percentage of the board's work force are Protestant.

Mr. Hanley: It is estimated from the 1990 labour force survey[1] that 68 per cent. of the economically active population within the area of the Eastern health and social services board is Protestant.

The board has indicated that at 1 January 1991 54 per cent. of its work force was Protestant.

[1] The labour force survey is based on a random sample of approximately 1 per cent. of domestic properties and estimates produced from it are subject to sampling error.

Milk Marketing Board

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the monopoly powers of the Northern Ireland Milk Marketing Board; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: Under Community law the United Kingdom is authorised to grant the milk marketing boards the exclusive right to buy from producers in their area the milk which they produce and market without processing, provided it satisfies certain minimum requirements. This right is coupled with an obligation on the boards to purchase the milk in question.

CRISP Programme

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much public money has been committed to the CRISP—community regeneration initiative special project—programme and to urban development grants; and how much money from other sources is committed to those programmes.

Mr. Hanley: Public expenditure under the urban development grant scheme is shown in the following table:

Urban development grant

	£ million
1982-83	Nil
1983-84	1·055
1984-85	1·595
1985-86	3·789
1986-87	8·009
1987-88	13·443
1988-89	9·424
1989-90	5·845
1990-91	6·499
1991-92	[1]8·300

[1] Estimate.

No funds from any other source have been committed to this scheme. The Government have allocated £8 million to the CRISP programme which, in addition, receives funding from the International Fund for Ireland. The international fund also provides finance for the urban development programme in towns outside Belfast and Londonderry.

I have asked the chairman of the fund to write to the hon. Gentleman and will place a copy of his letter in the Library.

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland under what authority public money has been committed to urban development grant and CRISP—community regeneration initiative special project—programme.

Mr. Needham: The Social Need (Northern Ireland) Order 1986.

Fair Employment

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many consultants have been appointed by the Fair Employment Commission to advise small firms on the implementation of fair employment practices; and if he will publish their names and addresses.

Mr. Needham: This is a matter for the Fair Employment Commission. I understand from the chairman that 76 consultants have been appointed and I have asked him to write to the right hon. Gentleman. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

Low Fat Milk

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether it is intended to retain low fat milk within the milk marketing scheme operated by the Northern Ireland Milk Marketing Board.

Mr. Hanley: I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the reply which my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food gave to the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) on 6 November at columns *165-66*.

Road Deaths

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons have been killed in road accidents in Northern Ireland in each of the past five years; how many road accident deaths in Northern Ireland have been associated with excess alcohol consumption; how many due solely to exceeding the speed limit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: The information requested is as follows:

	1986	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Total killed in road accidents	236	214	178	181	185
Alcohol-associated road deaths[1]	48	48	27	41	53
Road deaths due to excessive speed[2]	52	63	51	53	35

[1] These figures include both drivers and pedestrians killed with alcohol in their blood.

[2] It is not possible to say how many road deaths in Northern Ireland were due solely to exceeding the speed limit, the figures given refer to deaths caused by excessive speed for the road traffic or weather conditions.

Schools

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many schools in Northern Ireland have applied for local management of schools; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: Schools in Northern Ireland do not apply for local management of schools. From 1 April 1991, all controlled and maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools but excluding special schools have been funded on the basis of a formula. All secondary schools and colleges of further education have fully delegated budgets.

Inter-party Talks

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for what reason the Conservative party in Northern Ireland has been excluded from the inter-party talks on the future government of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Brooke: The Conservative party in Northern Ireland is no different from the Conservative party nationally. The Conservative party nationally has been represented by my hon. Friend the Minister of State and myself.

RNIB Needs Survey

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consideration he has given to the report "Blind and Partially Sighted Adults in Britain—The RNIB Needs Survey"; what action he will be taking in relation to its findings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: Although the report was based on a survey confined to Great Britain, its findings will be given careful consideration by Northern Ireland Departments and appropriate lessons drawn.

Security Forces (Live Rounds)

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many live rounds have been fired by the security forces since 1970.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 7 November 1991]:* I understand that army records show that approximately 150,800 rounds have been fired by the police and army since 1970.

Plastic Bullets

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have died as a result of the use of plastic bullets since 1970.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 7 November 1991]:* Since 1970, 14 people have died as a result of being struck by plastic baton rounds, a further two people have also died as a result of being struck by rubber rounds, the use of which was phased out in 1975.

DEFENCE

Nuclear Safety

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will now make it his policy to publish details of the membership of the nuclear-powered warships safety committee.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No.

Perisher Exercise

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy not to proceed with the Perisher exercise in the Firth of Clyde later this month.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I will write to the hon. Member.

Indonesia

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last met representatives of the Indonesian Government; and what was the purpose of that meeting.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State last met representatives of the Indonesian Government when he visited that country in September. A wide range of issues of mutual interest was discussed.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Income Support

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many individuals came off income support because last year's social security uprating took the standard retirement pension above the income support level.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 1 May 1991 at column *249*. The latest available information gives us no reason to change the estimate then given.

Benefits

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the number of unemployed claimants and lone parents on supplementary benefit or income support receiving financial help with mortgage interest each year since 1979; and what each of these numbers was as a percentage of total unemployed claimants and of total lone parents.

Miss Widdecombe: Estimates are given in the table.

Supplementary benefit/Income support

	Unemployed claimants		*Lone parent claimants*		
Year	*Number with mortgage*	*As a percentage of all unemployed claimants*	*Number with mortgage*	*As a percentage of all lone parent claimants*	*As a percentage of total lone parents*
1979	23,000	4	17,000	6	2
1980	50,000	6	19,000	6	2
1981	98,000	8	27,000	7	3
1982	135,000	8	28,000	7	3
1983	131,000	8	35,000	8	4
1984	151,000	8	38,000	8	4

Year	Unemployed claimants		Lone parent claimants		
	Number with mortgage	As a percentage of all unemployed claimants	Number with mortgage	As a percentage of all lone parent claimants	As a percentage of total lone parents
1986	200,000	10	50,000	9	5
1987	160,000	9	58,000	9	6
1988	114,000	8	62,000	9	6
1989	88,000	8	67,000	9	[1]6
1990	88,000	9	77,000	10	—

[1] Based on a provisional estimate of total lone parents.

Notes:
(1) No Enquiry was undertaken in 1985.
(2) Figures for numbers of claimants are rounded to the nearest 1,000.
(3) Figures from 1983 onwards are not comparable with earlier figures because Enquiry data was collected on a different basis.
(4) Supplementary benefit was replaced by income support in 1988.
(5) No estimate of the number of lone parents is available for 1990.

Source: Income Support Annual Statistical Enquiries.
Population Trends 65.

Child Benefit

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what administrative costs are expected as a result of the introduction of a higher amount of child benefit for the oldest child.

Mr. Jack: The administration of child benefit is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Pensioners' Savings

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what pensioners' average real income from savings was *(a)* in 1979 and *(b)* in the most recent year for which figures are available; and if he will estimate the figure for 1992;

(2) what proportion of newly-retired pensioners had income from savings, other than their second or more pension, at retirement in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* the most recent year for which figures are available; and if he will estimate the figure for 1992;

(3) what proportion of newly-retired pensioners had two or more pensions at retirement in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* the most recent year for which figures are available; and if he will estimate the figure for 1992.

Miss Widdecombe: The average real income of single pensioners and pensioner couples from savings is estimated at £9·50 per week in 1979 and £19·90 in 1988 (both figures are at 1988 prices).

In 1979, 68 per cent. of newly-retired single pensioners and pensioner couples received income from savings, the corresponding figure for 1988 was 78 per cent.

In 1979, 50 per cent. of newly-retired pensioners and pensioner couples received income from both state benefits and an occupational pension; the corresponding figure for 1988 was 62 per cent.

Source: Family Expenditure Survey.

Note: Newly-retired pensioners are defined as single women aged 60-64, single men aged 65-69 and couples in which the man is aged 65-69. Single pensioners are defined as being aged 60 or over for women and 65 or over for men; pensioner couples are those where the man is aged 65 or over. No estimates of these figures are available for 1992.

Policies

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what policies he is bringing forward in the current parliamentary session to develop and enhance the social security system.

Mr. Jack: We intend to continue this Government's programme of developing the social security system in line with our priorities and of ensuring that it is effectively delivered.

In addition to the measures that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced to the House on 21 October, we expect to publish a discussion paper on the options for the equalisation of state pension age; to establish a new child support unit and to introduce, after the consultation now under way, detailed regulations under the Child Support Act passed in the last Session; to bring into operation the two new benefits for disabled people; to implement the changes to income-related benefits already announced which will help families with children, and particularly lone parents, to work if they wish to do so; to implement the citizens charter and, in particular, to introduce a charter for the customers of the Benefits Agency; and to improve further the quality and effectiveness of the delivery of services to customers through the development of the Department's executive agencies.

Mobility Allowance

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he will make a statement about the entitlement to mobility allowance payments of claimants where cases fall within the scope of the European Court of Justice judgment in respect of Mr. R. Newton.

Mr. Scott: The effect of this judgment is that mobility allowance beneficiaries falling within its scope will continue to receive payment even though they have taken up residence in another European Community member state. The independent adjudicating authorities are already dealing with such cases in this way.

Income Support

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, further to his answer of 5 November, *Official Report*, column *93*, on what date he will *(a)* issue a circular to local authorities about notifying those newly eligible for

income support as a result of the uprating statement and *(b)* announce the results of his consideration of further steps.

Miss Widdecombe: The circular was issued to local authorities on 8 November. Any announcement about other steps, which will be taken in good time for the uprating, will be made as and when appropriate.

Local Offices

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many benefit claim offices in Nottingham have been closed to the public at any time during the past year during official opening hours because they were becoming overcrowded or because staff were over-pressed; which offices closed; and for how many days.

Miss Widdecombe: No Nottingham offices have closed during the last year because they were becoming overcrowded or because staff were over-pressed.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will set out, for each of his Department's offices in the country, the number of hours in each month of the last year that they were closed during normal daily opening hours of 9 am to 5.30 pm.

Miss Widdecombe: I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency that the information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Disability

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the moneys available from the European Community for helping people with disabilities in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* other member states.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is not held centrally. However, according to information received from the European Commission the total figures are as follows:

Specific measures for disabled people

HELIOS (1988-1991) 33 million ecu over 4 years
TIDE (1992-1994) 100 million ecu over 3 years
HORIZON (1991-1993) 180 million ecu over 3 years

Other Community programmes, actions and initiatives focusing on disabled people

European Social Fund (ESF)
European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)

(These form part of the Structural Funds for which a total of 2,607 million ecu were allocated for 1989-1993—350 million ecu in respect of the United Kingdom).

ERASMUS (1990-1992) 100 million ecu over 3 years
LINGUA (1989-1993) 200 million ecu over 5 years
ARION (1990-1991) 420 thousand ecu over 2 years
Youth for Europe (1988-1991) 18·5 million ecu over 4 years.

In most cases it is not possible to say how much of the sums involved were paid to recipients in the United Kingdom or in any other member state, payments being dependent on applications received or projects undertaken.

Departmental Circulars

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the circulars issued by his Department since 1 January 1991 *(a)* to local authorities and *(b)* to other organisations or individuals.

Miss Widdecombe: Housing benefit and community charge benefit circulars issued by the Department to local authorities are available in the Library. The other information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

RNIB Needs Survey

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what consideration he has given to the report "Blind and Partially Sighted Adults in Britain—The RNIB Needs Survey"; what action he will be taking in relation to its findings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: I shall be meeting RNIB soon to discuss the implications of the survey.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will be meeting the organisations of and for blind people to respond to the findings of the report "Blind and Partially Sighted Adults in Britain—The RNIB Needs Survey".

Mr. Scott: I have written to the Director General of the RNIB, accepting his invitation to meet to discuss the report. A date has yet to be arranged.

Occupational Deafness

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans there are to include deafness suffered as a result of working in turbine halls of nuclear power stations as an occupational deafness qualifying for industrial injuries disablement benefit.

Mr. Scott: The Industrial Injuries Advisory Council advises the Secretary of State on the prescription of occupations under the industrial injuries scheme. The council issued a report "Occupational Deafness" (Cm. 1245) in October 1990 which recommended certain changes to ease the administrative problems in processing claims for occupational deafness. Some new procedures were introduced in April this year and subject to these being satisfactory further improvements are planned. The results will be monitored and when we are satisfied that the new procedures are working well we can then consider what scope there is for extending the present list of prescribed occupations.

Pensioners

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is the cost of administering the policy of withdrawing pension entitlement from pensioners resident in hospital for six weeks or more;

(2) what is the saving to the national insurance fund of not paying the state pension to persons resident in hospital for more than six weeks;

(3) if he has any plans to change the practice of withdrawing pension entitlement from those resident in hospital for more than six weeks in a year.

Miss Widdecombe: As with most social security benefits, the amount of retirement pension payable is reduced after the beneficiary has been in hospital for more than six weeks. A further reduction is made after 52 weeks.

These arrangements are based on the view that state funds should not make double provision for the same needs. As the national health service provides free

maintenance as well as free treatment, it has always been the policy that maintenance benefits, also paid out of state funds, should not continue to be paid in full indefinitely. We have no plans to change this policy.

Information on the total saving to the national insurance fund and the administration costs involved is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Social Fund

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if social fund inspectors' review decisions are binding on local offices; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: A determination made by a social fund inspector, under section 34(4)(b) of the Social Security Act 1986, must be implemented by a social fund officer.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish his estimates of *(a)* the amount included in his departmental budget to cover the 20 per cent. poll tax concessions required from those on income support and *(b)* the amount to be actually paid in poll tax by all those on income support.

Miss Widdecombe: Income-related benefit levels were adjusted in April 1989 to include help towards the 20 per cent. contribution that beneficiaries have to pay. That help is now an integral part of benefit levels which were uprated in April 1990 and April 1991. The estimated cost of the adjustment for 1991-92 is £580 million for all income-related benefits. These benefit levels will be uprated further from April 1992. The total cost of community charge due to be paid by people on income support in the current year is estimated to be £200 million.
Source: Modelling using data drawn from the 1986/7/8 Family Expenditure Surveys at 1991-92 prices and benefit.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give an estimate of the total amount of poll tax collected in 1990-91 from direct deductions from benefit.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide an up-to-date list of each television advertising campaign carried out, or to be carried out, by his Department during 1991-92, and of each other publicity campaign costing more than £100,000, giving for each *(a)* the topic, *(b)* the commencement date, *(c)* the duration and *(d)* the advertising, promotional and public relations companies involved.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* One television campaign has been carried out by the Department in 1991-92 for family credit. A television campaign explaining the new disability benefits being introduced next April is still at the planning stage. Budget provision exists for a further campaign on family credit but no detailed plans have been made.

The following campaigns will cost more than £100,000:

Topic	*Commencement date*	*Duration*
Family credit	2 September 1991	Five weeks
Disability	to be confirmed	to be confirmed

The Department's agency, appointed through COI, is BMP DDB Needham.

The Benefits Agency has carried out no television campaigns, and has no plans to run any publicity campaigns costing more than £100,000 in the period in question.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether his Department has sent unsolicited direct mail as part of the distribution of publicity material.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* The Department has not sent out unsolicited direct mail to individuals as part of the distribution of publicity material.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give separate figures for the spending by his Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what are his latest estimates for 1991-92 and budgets for 1992-93.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* For information from 1979-80 to 1980-91, I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 25 April 1991 at columns *540-41*.

For 1991-92 and 1992-93 the information is as follows:

The total estimated outturn for publicity in 1991-92 is £12·27 million. Of this £4·4 million has been allocated to advertising.

Department of Social Security (other than Benefits Agency) 1991-92

	£ million
Television, radio and press (final allocation between media has not yet been made).	4·4
Other materials	7·87

The estimated provision for the 1992-93 social security publicity budget is £11·51 million. Decisions on media have not yet been made.

Benefits Agency 1991-92

	£ million
Television, radio and newspaper advertising	None planned
Information material (such as leaflets and posters)	4·8

1992-93: bids are currently being formulated and no figures are yet available.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total expenditure by his Department on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his estimate for 1991-92 and budget for 1992-93.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* Functions commonly associated with press and public relations are carried out by the Department's information division and the Benefits Agency information services branch.

For information for the years 1979-91, I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 22 May 1991 at column *535*.

Discussions on the proposed 1992-93 budgets are not yet complete. The estimated expenditure for 1991-92 is in the tables:

	£ million
Headquarters and agencies other than Benefits Agency	
Publicity	12·270
Staff	0·653
Running costs	0·451
Benefits Agency	
Publicity	7·829
Staff	1·070
Running costs	0·226

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Indonesia

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what food and health aid is being given to East Timor by Her Majesty's Government in response to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe's standing committee resolution passed in Helsinki on 28 June 1991.

Mrs. Chalker: Her Majesty's Government are currently considering how humanitarian aid might be provided to the people of East Timor.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Priestly Functions

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners, in the last recorded period of 12 months, what total sum was received in respect of each of the following *(a)* the reading of banns of marriage, *(b)* wedding services, *(c)* burial services and *(d)* any other fees for performance of priestly functions in Church of England churches.

Mr. Alison: It is estimated that fees paid to incumbents and parochial church councils for the year to 31 March 1991 totalled £13 million. Of this total it is estimated that £8·1 million related to statutory church and churchyard parochial fees including those for marriages and funerals, £4·6 million to cemetery and crematorium fees and £0·3 million to surrogate fees. I regret that more detailed information is not held centrally.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

European Property Purchases

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he has to ensure full legal protection for United Kingdom citizens purchasing property elsewhere in the European Community.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Housing policy is a matter for member states, not the Community. A United Kingdom national purchasing property elsewhere in the Community is therefore subject to local legal requirements, in which Her Majesty's Government have no locus to intervene.

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received about United Kingdom residents who have purchased apartments in Los Alisios in Los Caniallos, Tenerife; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Representations on behalf of British nationals who have purchased private property overseas are not recorded by property name.

I have however received a letter dated 17 October 1991 from my hon. Friend, on behalf of a constituent who purchased property at the Los Alisios complex in Los Cristianos, Tenerife. I replied to him on 11 November 1991.

Hong Kong

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs with what countries, other than Vietnam, his Department has discussed the removal of Vietnamese boat people from Hong Kong.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The steering committee set up under the comprehensive plan of action adopted by the 1989 Geneva international conference on Indochinese refugees last met on 30 April 1991. Since then, the British and Hong Kong Governments have discussed the return of screened-out migrants from Hong Kong bilaterally with a number of Governments, and international organisations apart from Vietnam, notably the ASEAN member countries, Japan, Australia, United States, Canada, UNHCR and IOM.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Hong Kong officials have been dismissed for corruption during each of the last three years.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The statistics are as follows:

Year	*Dismissal*	*Compulsory retirement*
1 April 1988 to 31 March 1989	11	1
1 April 1989 to 31 March 1990	4	1
1 April 1990 to 31 March 1991	10	0

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if independent observers will be allowed to witness the removal of Vietnamese boat people from Hong Kong; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Independent observers and the media were invited to witness the repatriation of the so-called double-backers from Hong Kong to Vietnam on 8-9 November.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what have been the results to date of discussions by Her Majesty's Government over negotiations with the Argentine Government about their wish to carry out exploration of the seabed around the Falklands Islands to search for oil and minerals; how much revenue this is expected to bring in; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The Argentine Government have recently announced a plan to permit exploration for oil covering a large part of the Argentine mainland and off-shore waters; but they have not proposed to us that they should carry out exploration of the seabed around the Falklands Islands.

Wilton Park

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the level of funding provided by his Department to Wilton Park in each of the past three years; and which other countries provide financial support to the institution.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The net cash funding provided by the FCO was as follows:

	£
1988-89	282,709
1989-90	206,945
1990-91	293,674

No other country provides regular direct financial support for Wilton Park conferences. Governments and institutions in other countries help recruit conference participants and often meet their travel costs and conference fees.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which British hon. Members have participated in Wilton Park conferences in the last two years.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The hon. and right hon. Members who have participated in these conferences are:

1990
Bruce George
Hon. Tim Sainsbury
Rt. Hon. William Waldegrave
Virginia Bottomley
Rt. Hon. David Howell

1991
Joan Lestor
Ted Rowlands
Bruce George

Kashmir

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's position concerning the situation in Kashmir.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Government's position on Kashmir remains as set out in my reply to the Adjournment debate on 25 July at cols. 1359-60.

Indonesia

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps have been taken by Her Majesty's Government to implement an arms embargo in respect of Indonesia in response to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe's standing committee resolution passed in Helsinki on 28 June 1991.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: None. An embargo would be neither appropriate nor effective.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met representatives of the Indonesian Government; and what was the purpose of that meeting.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: On 31 May 1991, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs met the Indonesian Foreign Minister, Mr. Ali Alatas, in the margins of the EC/ASEAN Foreign Ministers meeting in Luxembourg. The purpose of the meeting was to exchange views on matters of regional and international interest.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how long the meeting with Jose Ramos-Horta of the National Council of Maubere Resistance on 7 November lasted; and what items were discussed.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Mr. Ramos-Horta called on officials for about an hour on 7 November when he outlined the current situation in East Timor.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has had regarding the Indonesian occupation of East Timor; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We receive frequent representations on the subject of East Timor. We support the efforts of the United Nations Secretary-General to promote a settlement acceptable to all parties.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Indonesian Government regarding attacks by the Indonesian military on East Timorese churches; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We regularly draw the attention of the Indonesian authorities to our concern about reports of human rights abuses in East Timor. We will continue to do so.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what efforts have been made by Her Majesty's Government to secure the implementation of United Nations General Assemby resolution 35/27/1980.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The United Kingdom abstained on resolution 35/27/1980 in the belief that this would best assist the proccess of reconciliation and the search for a diplomatic solution to the East Timor question. The United Kingdom fully supports the United Nations Secretary General's efforts to promote a solution acceptable to both sides and has encouraged Indonesia and Portugal to co-operate to this end.

SCOTLAND

Roads (Spending)

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will outline the forecasts of road traffic growth which he has used to determine the grant received in respect of roads spending by Scottish local authorities.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No account is taken of forecasts of road traffic growth in the grant aided

expenditure assessment of road maintenance which is used in the distribution of aggregate external finance to authorities. The assessment (which is agreed with COSLA in the distribution committee of the working party on local government finance) is based primarily on the lane length of non-trunk roads in each authority with a secondary indicator adjustment for estimated traffic volume in prior years.

Rents-to-mortgages Scheme

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the progress of his rents-to-mortgages scheme.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The pilot rent-to-mortgage scheme, open to tenants of Scottish Homes and the new town development corporations in Scotland from October 1989, was extended to tenants of Scottish local authorities from 1 April 1991. Information on sales and applications in process, based on returns to 31 October 1991, is shown in the table. Experience of the pilot scheme to date is encouraging. More than 1,000 tenants have already bought their homes under the scheme or are in the process of doing so. The scheme will continue to be closely monitored.

	Sales	*Applications in process*
Scottish Homes	198	104
New town development corporations	51	17
Local authorities	—	637
TOTAL	249	758

Strathclyde Regional Council

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what financial support his Department has given to Strathclyde regional council in the last five years in respect of *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue expenditure on (i) roads and (ii) public transport, and if he will outline projected support for each of the next three years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Capital allocations for roads and transport are issued as one amount. The total allocations issued to Strathclyde regional council for the last five years and the provisional allocations for the next two years are as follows:

	£ million
1987-88	63·5
1988-89	57·1
1989-90	76·7
1990-91	75·0
1991-92	75·6
[1]1992-93	74·3
[1]1993-94	74·6

[1] Provisional.

No decisions have yet been taken on allocations for 1994-95.

These allocations took account of the overall amounts available nationally and of the detailed expenditure proposals in Strathclyde's transport policies and programmes documents and financial plans.

In addition, capital grant towards expenditure on rail rolling stock contained within those allocations has been paid to Strathclyde as follows:

	£ million
1987-88	0·7
1988-89	1·6
1989-90	17·2
1990-91	8·0
1991-92	2·5

A further £0·6 million is available for 1991-92.

Funding for all aspects of revenue expenditure on both roads and public transport is a matter for the regional council. Central Government support to local authorities through revenue support grant and non-domestic rate income is given on an unhypothecated basis and support for individual services cannot be separately identified.

Raspberry Producers

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details of measures introduced by the Government within the last three years to assist Scotland's raspberry producers to offset the effect of Eastern European dumping in EC markets.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Action to prevent low-priced imports of soft fruit from disrupting the Community market is the responsibility of the EC Commission. The United Kingdom Government have taken the lead in the Council of Ministers in calling upon the Commission to exercise its responsibilities in this respect.

As for other sectors of agriculture, soft fruit producers are eligible for aid under general support schemes, not related to the production of a specific commodity. Schemes introduced or revised since 1988 are the farm and conservation grant scheme 1991 (superseding the farm diversification grant scheme 1988 and the EC element of the farm and conservation grant scheme 1989); and a scheme to support investments in marketing and processing which offer lasting economic benefit to producers under Council Regulation (EEC) No. 866/90. In addition, a special scheme was introduced in 1988 to assist raspberry growers to replace plantations of Glen Clova canes with more viable varieties.

The EC Commission is understood to be considering possible structural measures specifically to help the Community soft fruit industry adjust to competition from third countries.

Ferry Services

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details of profits made by Caledonian MacBrayne for the Kyle to Kyleakin ferry service in each of the last 15 years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Details of operating deficits and surpluses analysed by area of operation are given in Caledonian MacBrayne's annual report and accounts which are presented annually to Parliament and are available in the Library. For reasons of commercial confidentiality the company does not disclose information about operating deficits and surpluses achieved on specific routes.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what subsidy is paid for the year 1991-92 to Caledonian MacBrayne to operate the Islay ferry service; what specific aspects of this service are in receipt of subsidy; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 11 November 1991]:* Under the terms of the undertaking between my right hon. Friend and Caledonian MacBrayne Ltd., deficit subsidy is paid to the company in support of services considered to be necessary to maintain or improve economic or social conditions in the Highlands and Islands. Deficit subsidy is therefore intended to eliminate the overall deficit incurred by the company in operating a network of approved services, and is not related to deficits incurred on specific routes. The company's annual report and accounts, which are presented to Parliament, identify the operating deficit incurred by Caledonian MacBrayne in providing ferry services in different areas, including Islay/Gigha. For reasons of commercial confidentiality, however, the company does not disclose detailed information about profits or losses incurred on individual routes.

RNIB Needs Survey

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration he has given to the report "Blind and Partially Sighted Adults in Britain—The RNIB Needs Survey"; what action he will be taking in relation to its findings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend has not yet received a copy of the report. Once that is to hand, he will consider the implications for blind people in Scotland.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was *(a)* the number of private beds in NHS hospitals and *(b)* the number of beds in private hospitals in Scotland for each year since 1 January 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: As at 31 December each year, the number of private beds in NHS hospitals in Scotland was as follows:

	Number
1978	149
1979	114
1980	94
1981	94
1982	105
1983	108
1984	109
1985	110
1986	111
1987	112
1988	113
1989	113
1990	113

Following is the estimated number of beds in private hospitals, excluding nursing homes, as at 31 March each year since 1987:

	Number
1987	334
1988	355
1989	353
1990	376
1991	376

This information, which is based on returns from health boards, was not collected centrally before 1987.

National Health Service Trusts

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central of 6 November, if he will list those moneys apportioned to the allocation provided to health boards for patient care and which was for the purpose of assisting in the preparation and proposals to establish each proposed national health service trust in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is as follows:

Board	*Allocations for hospital and community health services*		*Resources for preparation of trust proposals*	
	1990-91 £ million	*1991-92 £ million*	*1990-91 £ million*	*1991-92 £ million*
Argyll and Clyde	148·525	163·304	—	0·072
Ayrshire and Arran	114·917	127·044	—	—
Borders	34·374	38·172	—	—
Dumfries and Galloway	55·920	62·586	—	—
Fife	105·540	118·283	—	—
Forth Valley	99·296	110·820	0·065	—
Grampian	188·383	208·194	0·100	0·070
Greater Glasgow	519·285	539·365	—	0·042
Highland	81·664	88·576	—	—
Lanarkshire	168·511	185·057	—	—
Lothian	327·277	352·533	—	0·050
Orkney	6·298	7·293	—	—
Shetland	7·533	8·341	—	—
Tayside	189·667	204·414	—	—
Western Isles	10·812	12·727	—	—
TOTAL	2,058·002	2,226·709	0·165	0·234

Goose Damage, Islay

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all claims for compensation submitted to the Nature Conservancy Council from the Island of Islay for goose damage to land outwith sites of special scientific interest; the sum of each claim; when he expects a decision to be reached; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No claims for compensation have been made. An application for grant was made to the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland

(NCCS) on 11 October 1991 towards the cost of supporting the Greenland populations of barnacle and white fronted geese outwith sites of special scientific interest this winter. The application was made by the secretary of the Islay, Jura, Colonsay and Gigha branch of the National Farmers Union of Scotland on behalf of 60 farmers under section 134 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. In total it amounts to £762,450, including an administrative charge of £99,450. Section 134 empowers NCCS to give financial assistance in respect of expenditure incurred in doing anything which in the opinion of the NCCS is conducive to nature conservation.

The application is being considered by NCCS in the light of their review of the problems for agricultural land outwith the sites of special scientific interest posed by the feeding habits of migratory Greenland geese and of how those problems might best be handled in the shorter and longer term.

Birds of Prey

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many birds of prey were found poisoned *(a)* in Tayside region and *(b)* broken down by estate boundary within Tayside region, for 1990-91 and so far in the current year.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 8 November 1991]:* The wildlife incident investigation scheme of the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department received reports of two birds of prey which were found poisoned in Tayside in 1990-91. The site of one of these incidents was identified as part of Dunanean estate. No reports of poisonings have been received in the current year.

Scottish Natural Heritage

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the estimated budget for Scottish Natural Heritage in 1991-93.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 8 November 1991]:* My right hon. Friend will shortly announce the resources to be allocated to Scottish Natural Heritage.

Nature Conservancy Council (Compensation Claims)

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many claims are currently pending against the Nature Conservancy Council Scotland under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 for compensation of profit forgone; if he will list the location and landowner concerned in each of these cases; how many involve proposals to afforest sites of special scientific interest; how many cases will be going before the Lands Tribunal; and how much has been budgeted for by Nature Conservancy Council Scotland in 1991-92 to meet such compensation claims.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 8 November 1991]:* The information is not held by the Scottish Office Environment Department. I shall ask the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total cost to the Nature Conservancy Council, of the recent Lands Tribunal award made to Mr. John Cameron in compensation of profit forgone when interest and legal charges are taken into account.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 8 November 1991]:* The total payment to be made to Mr. John Cameron has not yet been determined. I understand from the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland that Mr. Cameron has yet to submit his claim for legal fees.

Further Education Colleges

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what he estimates to be the costs to the further education colleges under the provisions of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Bill of providing for themselves support such as architectural, legal and financial services previously provided by local authorities.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 11 November 1991]:* Expenditure by education authorities on administration and support services for further education colleges will be included in the funds transferred to the Secretary of State's budget for funding the colleges. An element for these services will be included in the grant to colleges who will be free to purchase them from the most cost-effective source.

Day-patient Waiting Lists, Lothian

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each specialty, the current day-patient waiting list figures in the Lothian health board area, and the average day-patient waiting times; and indicate for each specialty *(a)* the number and *(b)* the percentage awaiting day-patient treatment for (i) over six months, (ii) over 12 months, (iii) over 18 months, (iv) over 24 months and (v) over 36 months.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 11 November 1991]:* The information available is contained in the tables. Information on patients waiting over 18 months and over 36 months is not at present collected centrally.

NHS hospitals in Lothian health board—(a) day case waiting lists and time spent on day case waiting list: by specialty; (b) average wait

	(a) Day case waiting list at 30 June 1991				*(b) Average (median) wait in year ending 31 December 1990 (days)*
	Number	*Percentage waiting 6 months and over*	*Percentage waiting 12 months and over*	*Percentage waiting 24 months and over*	
All Specialties[1]	3,619	18·6	7·3	2·6	25·4
Acute Specialties	2,878	14·5	4·2	0·6	23·0
General surgery	986	17·7	7·6	1·0	28·9

	(a) Day case waiting list at 30 June 1991				(b) Average (median) wait in year ending 31 December 1990 (days)
	Number	Percentage waiting 6 months and over	Percentage waiting 12 months and over	Percentage waiting 24 months and over	
Orthopaedic surgery	135	1·5	0·7	—	27·5
ENT surgery	285	9·1	5·6	1·4	59·5
Ophthalmology	223	13·0	0·4	—	88·5
Urology	439	17·5	0·2	0·2	34·5
Oral surgery and oral medicine	6	16·7	—	—	3·9
General medicine	172	11·6	—	—	13·5
Paediatric surgery	307	11·7	2·3	0·3	35·8
Paediatric medicine	6	—	—	—	14·8
Gynaecology	318	16·4	6·3	0·6	12·7
Other acute	1	—	—	—	27·7
Supra-Area Specialties	741	34·4	19·4	10·3	77·2
Neurosurgery	2	—	—	—	10·5
Plastic surgery	739	34·5	19·5	10·3	79·6

[1]The following specialties have no waiting list at 30 June:
Orthodontics and paediatric dentistry; restorative dentistry; dermatology; rehabilitation medicine; respiratory medicine; general practice; acute mixed; cardiothoracic surgery; neurology; radiotherapy; spinal paralysis; obstetric specialties; long stay specialties; psychiatric specialties; mental handicap; special categories.

Drinking Water

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those water sources which have yet to be chemically dosed to reduce absorption of lead into drinking water supplies; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 11 November 1991]:* There are over 600 water treatment works in Scotland, of which about two-thirds do not have chemical dosing which could affect levels of lead in tap water. Not all supplies require such dosing and those currently without it are mainly small supplies or are from borehole sources. Around 90 per cent. of the population are served by supplies which do not receive this form of treatment.

Only one scheme designed to meet the requirements of the EC Drinking Water Directive as regards lead remains to be completed next year; this is part of a major treatment works reconstruction. The Water Supply (Water Quality) (Scotland) Regulations 1990 set a stricter standard for lead than the directive and all water authorities are now assessing their water supply zones to identify any where this standard may be exceeded. These assessments will determine zones in which further treatment will be considered.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Assisted Places

Mr. Sumberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any proposals to phase out the assisted places scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: There are no plans to phase out the assisted places scheme. The scheme remains a key part of this Government's policy to provide wider choice in education for parents and we are committed to it.

Adult Education

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what increase or decrease in student numbers he forecasts for non-vocational adult education in the next five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: My Department does not make forecasts on the basis requested. However, we anticipate a steady increase over the next five years in the number of full-time equivalent students studying at further education colleges.

Sport

Mr. Stevens: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on funding for sport.

Mr. Atkins: Local authority gross revenue spending in England and Wales on sport and recreation has risen from £720 million in 1985-86 to £1,028 million in 1989-90, the latest available figure.

Subject to the approval of Parliament, the Sports Council's grant in aid next year will be £48·7 million, over £2 million up on this year.

The newly established Foundation for Sport and the Arts will draw about £20 million a year from the further cut of 2·5 per cent. in pool betting duty included in this year's Finance Act, and about £40 million a year from the pools themselves. Some two-thirds will be used for athletic sports or athletic games. The Football Trust has also benefited from a cut in the pool betting duty by an additional £20 million since 1990.

Private sector sponsors provide some £200 million per annum for sport.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the relocation of the Sports Council to Nottingham.

Mr. Atkins: Relocation is a matter for the Sports Council. I understand that at present it has no plans to relocate its headquarters out of London.

Ms Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he intends to publish his Ministry's review of sport.

Mr. Atkins: When it is completed.

Further and Higher Education

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has any new proposals to increase the number of those participating in further and higher education courses.

Mr. Eggar: Participation in further and higher education is at record levels. Our education reforms of the past few years and the new measures announced in the recent White Papers will promote continuing expansion through the 1990s and beyond. This House can play a major part in that expansion by supporting the Further and Higher Education Bill, which was introduced in another place on 4 November.

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how his Department is ensuring that sixth-form colleges, schools and higher education colleges are receiving sufficient funds to cope with the number of students aged over 16 years.

Mr. Eggar: In fixing education's share of each year's local authority grant settlement, the Government take account of a range of new developments and the scope for savings. One of those developments is the projected national trend, based on the latest data available at the time, in the number of students aged over 16 in schools and colleges.

City Technology Colleges

Mr. Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the operation of the city technology college programme.

Mr. Eggar: The CTC programme is forging ahead. We now have thirteen CTCs open and running with a further two due to open in the next two years. Our expenditure plans provide for a start to be made on extending the benefits of the programme more widely through the education service.

Education Funding (Nottinghamshire)

19. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science by how much funding towards education in Nottinghamshire provided by the Government has increased since 1979.

Mr. Fallon: Net recurrent spending on education in Nottinghamshire increased from some £138 million in 1979-80 to some £338 million in 1989-90, the latest year for which information on actual spending is available. That represents a real terms increase of some 22 per cent. These figures exclude spending on Nottingham Polytechnic, which transferred to the PCFC sector in 1989.

Parental Choice

21. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make a statement on the progress of the Government's policies for parental choice in central London.

Mr. Fallon: Parents in central London—like parents everywhere else in the country—have had the right since 1980 to choose which school their child should attend—provided places are available. More recently they have benefited from both the introduction of more open enrolment and the option of pursuing grant-maintained status for their children's school. And they will benefit in the same way as other parents from the proposals in our parents charter.

Grant-maintained Schools

23. **Mr. Barry Porter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the average number of applications for places at grant-maintained schools in the current and in the last year.

Mr. Eggar: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, what changes he is planning to make in the funding of grant-maintained schools.

Mr. Eggar: We are currently consulting about proposed changes for 1992-93, including the calculation of the amount of grant which grant-maintained schools receive in recompense for the money which LEAs spend centrally on items such as administration.

School Buildings

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much was spent on school buildings in 1981 and at the present time; and what the change is in real terms.

Mr. Fallon: Gross capital expenditure on local authority, voluntary, and grant-maintained schools in 1989-90 is some £755 million which compares with expenditure of £391 million in 1980-81—an increase in real terms of some 14 per cent. Over the same period capital expenditure per pupil has risen from £49 to £112—a 34 per cent. rise in real terms. Between 1980-81 and 1989-90 recurrent spending on repairs and maintenance rose by some 25 per cent. per pupil in real terms.

SERC Chairman

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will dismiss the chairman of SERC.

Mr. Alan Howarth: No.

Education Spending and Exam Results

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the relationship between spending by local education authorities and examination results.

Mr. Fallon: The available data show no direct relationship between spending by local education authorities and the examination results their pupils achieve. Appropriate spending levels are bound to be affected to some extent by each authority's circumstances; some authorities obtain good results at much lower cost than others.

NUT (Advertising Campaign)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received about the advertising campaign by the National Union of Teachers.

Mr. Fallon: None.

Special Needs Education

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what criteria are used to allocate funds for children with disadvantages and special needs in primary schools in Liverpool.

Mr. Fallon: It is for Liverpool local education authority to decide what criteria to use in its local management of schools formula to allocate funds to schools.

Liverpool uses a social disadvantage factor based on the number of pupils entitled to free school meals, and a special needs factor based on a system of monitoring reading standards at ages seven and 11. The tests currently used to assess reading standards are the primary reading test for seven-year-olds, and Young's Cloze procedure for 11-year-olds.

Local Management of Schools

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish in the *Official Report* in descending order the proportion of each English shire county's education budget which is allocated to schools under the local management of schools scheme.

Mr. Eggar: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) on 14 October at columns *67-73*.

Capital Funding

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list in tabular form the amount of the capital bids for *(a)* county and voluntary controlled schools, *(b)* voluntary aided schools and *(c)* further education, for each local education authority that has submitted its application for 1992-93.

Mr. Eggar: The information requested is set out in the table.

Capital Expenditure bids 1992-93

Bids for annual capital guidelines (ACGs) for county and controlled schools and further and higher education colleges and bids for capital allocations for voluntary aided and special agreement schools

(£000s)	*County and Controlled Schools*	*Further and Higher Education Colleges*	*VA and SA Schools*
LEA			
Barking	6,032	0	467
Barnet	8,022	2,422	1,201
Bexley	11,413	305	1,918
Brent	15,884	1,209	71
Bromley	6,702	350	71
Croydon	15,120	2,003	1,000
Ealing	27,633	2,245	798
Enfield	13,460	1,753	1,927
Haringey	5,256	575	214
Harrow	16,865	983	95
Havering	6,434	426	50
Hillingdon	8,937	39	100
Hounslow	16,540	55	847
Kingston	1,946	678	99
Merton	8,804	150	174
Newham	13,017	1,651	390
Redbridge	6,271	141	66
Richmond	3,968	815	*388
Sutton	8,205	110	1,821
Waltham Forest	19,505	1,180	0
City of London	0	43	0
Camden	3,292	262	1,160
Westminster	18,767	0	3,146
Greenwich	5,334	400	340
Hackney	8,041	600	193
Hammersmith	5,329	144	1,712
Islington	9,718	1,796	2,256
Kensington	5,976	70	1,677
Lambeth	6,773	2,502	1,141

(£000s)	County and Controlled Schools	Further and Higher Education Colleges	VA and SA Schools
Lewisham	13,287	1,107	815
Southwark	3,244	304	826
Tower Hamlets	14,484	6,443	1,520
Wandsworth	31,477	2,385	120
Birmingham	29,760	5,018	4,550
Coventry	8,816	163	2,849
Dudley	7,058	200	1,377
Sandwell	6,056	533	409
Solihull	1,766	411	910
Walsall	3,769	1,350	20
Wolverhampton	14,281	1,306	760
Knowsley	5,718	1,000	235
Liverpool	14,995	3,515	4,972
St. Helens	4,406	1,680	1,040
Sefton	4,665	464	1,879
Wirral	6,854	200	230
Bolton	3,349	720	6,307
Bury	2,807	795	330
Manchester	29,020	8,645	1,538
Oldham	8,235	482	1,138
Rochdale	12,757	1,439	474
Salford	9,228	961	707
Stockport	2,643	345	34
Tameside	3,697	450	336
Trafford	3,223	550	1,656
Wigan	8,266	1,269	1,567
Barnsley	7,233	1,027	100
Doncaster	1,071	395	10
Rotherham	5,770	1,344	64
Sheffield	19,386	537	1,124
Bradford	27,433	4,315	1,219
Calderdale	3,220	557	46
Kirklees	5,795	2,280	798
Leeds	39,449	3,698	5,570
Wakefield	10,295	730	206
Gateshead	8,599	2,545	757
Newcastle	24,804	3,855	1,171
North Tyneside	7,954	150	454
South Tyneside	6,738	953	84
Sunderland	8,637	903	1,384
Avon	8,904	3,880	568
Bedfordshire	7,860	187	865
Berkshire	21,703	957	350
Buckinghamshire	12,412	2,846	957
Cambridgeshire	27,817	7,793	1,809
Cheshire	26,912	1,487	3,012
Cleveland	6,357	471	392
Cornwall	18,476	3,467	344
Cumbria	19,402	2,014	1,989
Derbyshire	41,748	2,315	657
Devon	19,165	2,885	2,578
Dorset	20,581	1,002	2,900
Durham	27,604	4,771	1,562
East Sussex	51,921	2,170	586
Essex	58,584	3,462	163
Gloucester	16,294	2,199	2,277
Hampshire	21,795	5,620	534
Hereford & Worcester	11,168	1,880	1,156
Hertfordshire	23,519	1,000	509
Humberside	22,411	1,791	947
Isle of Wight	6,425	278	0
Isles of Scilly	96	0	0
Kent	39,215	5,568	3,403
Lancashire	31,020	12,708	5,279
Leicestershire	25,923	1,449	890
Lincolnshire	26,435	5,267	794
Norfolk	9,347	1,363	628
North Yorkshire	10,160	240	733
Northampton	8,087	729	489
Northumberland	7,343	250	857
Nottingham	20,549	3,974	1,353
Oxfordshire	20,179	833	2,315
Shropshire	10,403	920	12
Somerset	9,071	987	2,866
Staffordshire	18,048	1,958	2,364
Suffolk	18,343	2,897	569
Surrey	19,319	2,045	*3,077
Warwickshire	10,802	47	1,058
West Sussex	11,093	471	759
Wiltshire	12,175	2,045	708
Total	1,492,401	184,158	125,247

Notes:

1. The figures should be treated with caution. They represent the initial bids made by local education authorities and take no account of subsequent amendments to those bids.
2. All figures are in thousands.
3. The above information includes bids for FE major building projects which, for procedural reasons, it is not possible to consider. Time constraints preclude their deletion at the time of writing.
4. The information does not include bids for FE major building projects which LEAs have started without Departmental approval.
5. The bids for capital allocations at voluntary aided (VA) and special agreement (SA) schools do not include bids for Minor Improvement Projects. Grants for minor works will be allocated to LEAs by formula.
6. VA and SA schools bids marked "*" include an estimate for committed projects (i.e., based on 1991-92 submissions) since LEA bids for such expenditure have not yet been received.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a list for each local authority comparing the capital allocations for the education service in 1989-90 with the latest available outturn information.

Mr. Eggar: The table shows capital allocations to each local education authority in 1989-90, together with final outturn expenditure on education capital in that year.

Capital spending and allocations on education by LEAs, 1989-90
(£ million cash)

LEA	Gross expenditure Final outturn	Allocation
Barking	1·765	·245
Barnet	2·343	·996
Bexley	3·870	·864
Brent	10·644	·463
Bromley	6·280	·663
Croydon	15·947	1·008
Ealing	5·947	·540
Enfield	7·740	1·153
Haringey	5·020	2·275
Harrow	5·408	·650
Havering	5·398	1·341
Hillingdon	15·324	·991
Hounslow	10·260	·529
Kingston	2·973	·316
Merton	9·273	5·243
Newham	10·188	3·590
Redbridge	5·900	2·028
Richmond	2·476	·540
Sutton	5·443	·649
Waltham Forest	11·853	8·013
ILEA	50·780	11·957
Birmingham	10·663	5·327
Coventry	19·705	2·670
Dudley	5·549	2·531
Sandwell	5·703	2·080
Solihull	4·191	·744

LEA	Gross expenditure Final outturn	Allocation
Walsall	5·712	·921
Wolverhampton	3·551	·985
Knowsley	2·869	2·366
Liverpool	4·163	·907
St. Helens	2·244	1·851
Sefton	3·362	2·471
Wirral	3·629	2·469
Bolton	4·645	1·286
Bury	1·832	·605
Manchester	14·385	5·271
Oldham	3·932	2·272
Rochdale	4·003	2·475
Salford	6·579	3·806
Stockport	5·464	1·519
Tameside	2·591	·746
Trafford	6·795	5·171
Wigan	2·369	1·364
Barnsley	2·733	·276
Doncaster	1·651	·684
Rotherham	3·020	·840
Sheffield	13·393	5·211
Bradford	14·388	8·584
Calderdale	4·845	2·607
Kirklees	4·752	·808
Leeds	16·468	3·464
Wakefield	6·237	3·212
Gateshead	5·753	1·052
Newcastle	6·086	1·566
North Tyne	1·783	1·577
South Tyne	5·912	3·372
Sunderland	6·512	3·859
Isles of Scilly	·143	·149
Avon	11·049	3·877
Bedfordshire	7·556	2·022
Berkshire	20·203	5·876
Bucks	12·274	7·780
Cambridgeshire	22·488	6·594
Cheshire	24·159	3·487
Cleveland	6·812	5·324
Cornwall	9·021	6·279
Cumbria	9·005	6·753
Derbyshire	20·754	11·909
Devon	20·194	14·177
Dorset	6·547	3·667
Durham	6·233	2·133
East Sussex	16·542	9·171
Essex	26·260	17·305
Gloucs	10·030	6·089
Hampshire	30·552	8·453
Hereford and Worcester	9·450	2·534
Hertfordshire	14·989	4·832
Humberside	11·427	7·601
Isle of Wight	2·021	1·628
Kent	19·446	8·610
Lancashire	19·272	15·057
Leicestershire	12·998	7·533
Lincolnshire	7·375	3·010
Norfolk	7·982	3·788
North Yorks	8·193	2·209
Northants	9·484	4·034
Northumberland	3·102	·901
Nottinghamshire	8·563	3·215
Oxfordshire	11·085	3·758
Shropshire	5·565	5·045
Somerset	8·70	3·088
Staffordshire	11·104	4·927
Suffolk	10·511	6·086
Surrey	26·536	5·735
Warwickshire	5·339	1·729
West Sussex	11·882	1·966
Wiltshire	7·607	2·866

Note: Expenditure is given in cash terms; it includes provision from within the Department of the Environment's urban programme, and covers schools, further education, youth and other educational services.

Nuclear Structure Facility

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether the increase in science spending announced in the autumn statement will allow the continuation of the nuclear structure facility beyond its intended closure date.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The research councils will be considering any changes to their forward programmes when the increases to the science budget announced in the autumn statement have been allocated. Mr right hon. and learned Friend has invited the views of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils on this allocation and he will be making a statement in due course.

I understand that the Science and Engineering Research Council has yet to decide the precise date during 1992-93 when the nuclear structure facility would close.

Teacher Vacancies

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has received the Association of London Authorities' survey on teacher vacancies in London.

Mr. Fallon: Yes, we were particularly pleased to note the improvements reported in teacher vacancies. The association found that London boroughs had succeeded in filling all but a handful of vacancies for the new school year. Our own survey came to much the same conclusion.

Teacher Training

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what were the total numbers of (a) men and (b) women commencing teacher training courses in each year from 1988 to the present year.

Mr. Eggar: The figures requested are as follows:

Enrolments of first-year home students on initial teacher training courses in England and Wales: by gender

	1988-89	1989-90	[1]1990-91
England			
Male	5,426	5,337	6,209
Female	13,016	14,359	16,928
Total	18,442	19,696	23.137
Wales			
Male	486	540	516
Female	1,060	1,190	1,172
Total	1,546	1,730	1,688
England and Wales			
Male	5,912	5,877	6,725
Female	14,076	15,549	18,100
Total	19,988	21,426	24,825

[1]Provisional figures

NATIONAL FINANCE

Manufactures

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the proportion of imported (i) semi-manufactures, (ii) finished intermediate and (iii) finished capital good consumed/used by United Kingdom manufacturers in 1970, 1979, 1984 and 1989.

Mr. Mellor: No estimates are available.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish a table showing the Japanese and United Kingdom figures for the increase in consumer prices and export unit values for manufactures between 1979 and 1990 together with those of France, Germany, Italy and the USA.

Mr. Mellor The information requested can be obtained from data published in "OECD, Main Economic Indicators" for consumer prices, and in "Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics", its annual supplement and "International Financial Statistics" for export unit values, copies of which are in the Library.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the current visible and invisible import content of United Kingdom manufactures, excluding oil, relative to 1979 and 1970.

Mr. Mellor: No current estimates exist, the latest available analysis is for 1985. The CSO's published input-output tables for that year and the two earlier years[1] show the imported and domestic content of manufactures. These Publications are available in the Library.

[1] "Input-Output Tables for the United Kingdom, 1985" table four, "Input-Output Tables for the United Kingdom, 1979" table K, "Input-Output Tables for the United Kingdom, 1970" table K.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of United Kingdom imports of manufactures are re-exported (i) in the same form and (ii) after further processing in the United Kingdom: and what the corresponding figures were in 1970, 1979 and 1984.

Mr. Mellor: No estimates are available.

Trade Statistics

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing the figures for the volume of gross domestic product and of United Kingdom exports of goods and services as shown in tables 25 and 29 of part 6 of the OECD National Accounts 1960-1989, less oil and gas.

Mr. Mellor: The estimates given in tables 25 and 29 of the OECD: publication cannot be readily adapted to remove oil and gas. Series can, however, be derived from data available here in the UK.

Gross domestic product at constant factor cost excluding the contribution of the oil and gas extraction industry given in the usual index number format (1985 = 100):

Year	
1960	60·9
1961	62·2
1962	63·2
1963	65·4
1964	69·6
1965	71·6
1966	73·0
1967	74·4
1968	77·7
1969	79·4
1970	80·9
1971	82·4
1972	85·4
1973	90·7
1974	89·9
1975	88·6
1976	90·0
1977	91·6
1978	94·3
1979	96·0
1980	93·1
1981	91·0
1982	91·9
1983	94·3
1984	96·6
1985	100·0
1986	103·5
1987	108·7
1988	114·2
1989	118·1
1990	119·2

The volume of exports of oil and oil products at 1985 prices is available from 1983 on the Central Statistical Office's database as series BOWX and exports of goods and services at 1985 prices is available as series DJCV. From these series it is possible to calculate an index of goods and services less oil on UK definitions.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish a table showing for EC countries, the United States of America and Japan for 1970 to 1973, 1973 to 1979, 1979 to 1989 and 1985 to 1989, the percentage increase in (i) gross domestic product less oil and gas, (ii) manufacturing output, (iii) real incomes as well as the increase in the number of, (iv) employed and (v) unemployed persons, together with the balance of trade in manufactures as a percentage of gross domestic product together with a table showing the increase in gross domestic product and manufacturing output in per capita terms.

Mr. Mellor: Such information as is readily available on comparable bases can be obtained from the following international publications:

(i) gross domestic product less oil and gas

Table R1 in "National Accounts ESA Aggregates 1970-1989 Theme 2 Series C" published by Eurostat gives annual growth rates for gross domestic product at market prices. Data on a comparable basis are not available for gross domestic product excluding oil and gas;

(ii) manufacturing output

Page 16 of the US Department of Labour publication "International comparisons of manufacturing productivity and unit labour cost trends 1990".

(iii) real incomes

Information on compensation of employees which includes all payments in cash and in kind made by employers in remuneration for the work done by their employees is given in Table J in "National Accounts ESA Aggregates 1970-1989 Theme 2 Series C" published by Eurostat;

(iv) employment

Information on occupied population is given in Table O in "National Accounts ESA Aggregates 1970-1989 Theme 2 Series C" published by Eurostat;

(v) unemployed persons

Separate tables are given for each country in "Main Economic Indicators Historical Statistics 1969-1988" published by OECD. Later data are available in the monthly "Main Economic Indicators" also published by OECD;

(vi) balance of trade in manufactures as a percentage of gross domestic product

The balance of trade in manufactures can be calculated from data in "Foreign Trade by Commodities: Series C" published by OECD and gross domestic product can be obtained from Table 1 for each country in "National Accounts ESA Aggregates 1970-1989 Theme 2 Series C" published by Eurostat;

(vii) gross domestic product per capita

Information on gross domestic product at market prices per head of total population can be found in Table B2 in "National Accounts ESA Aggregates 1979-1989 Theme 2 Series C" published by Eurostat;

(viii) manufacturing output per head

Page 15 of the US Department of Labour publication "International comparisons of manufacturing productivity and unit labour cost trends 1990".

Copies of all these publications are available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the changes made since October 1989 in the way trade figures have been collected, analysed or presented.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 7 November 1991]:* Following are the main changes:

(a) Adjustments to statistics of oil exports. Since October 1989 better methods have been used to measure direct exports of crude oil from offshore fields, including adjustments for any such trade reported late to Customs and Excise.

(b) Improved seasonal adjustments. Since January 1990 seasonal factors for the current month and the preceding month have been estimated afresh each month using all the latest available information. This replaced the previous method of calculating factors at the beginning of each year for all of the following twelve months.

(c) Progressive development of detailed methodology. Various small refinements have been made to the statistics, such as more elaborate adjustments for differences in the length of a month and improved deflators for some high-value commodities.

Farms

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish a table showing the increase in incomes of farmers in terms of constant prices in 1979 and in the latest available year compared with the average of 1967 to 1971 together with the increase in the direct and indirect cost of agricultural support to the consumer/taxpayer.

Mr. Mellor: The table shows United Kingdom aggregate farm income, and public expenditure in support of agriculture in the United Kingdom. Agricultural market support through the CAP means that EC consumers pay more for their food than they would do in a free market. The estimated cost to United Kingdom consumer, based on work by the OECD, is given in the table. All figures are in constant 1985 prices.

Year	*Farm income (£million)*	*Public expenditure (£million)*	*Estimated consumer cost (£million)*
[1]1967-71	2,555	1,481	nil
1979	1,956	1,130	3,000
1989	1,242	1,033	4,600
[2]1990	972	1,469	5,400

Notes:

[1] Average.

[2] Forecast.

Figures for public expenditure relate to the financial year beginning in the year shown.

Consumer cost is based on OECD estimates of the cost to EC consumers scaled down to relect the United Kingdom share of consumption.

Aggregate farm income is defined in chapter 6 of *Agriculture in the United Kingdom 1990*, HMSO, 1991.

Public expenditure in support of agriculture is defined in chapter 9 of *Agriculture in the United Kingdom 1990*. It includes the cost of market support reimbursed by the EC; and excludes indirect support for agriculture such as free or subsidised advisory services and research and development.

Manufacturing Industry

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish a table showing for the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, the United States of America and Japan for each year since 1970 the percentage, to one place of decimals, of gross domestic product invested in manufacturing industry, together with the amount invested in terms of dollars per person employed in manufacturing at current prices and exchange rates.

Mr. Mellor: The latest readily available information in respect of gross fixed capital formation by the manufacturing industry, of gross domestic product at current prices in national currencies and of the numbers employed in the manufacturing industries can be obtained from tables 3,1 and 15 respectively for most of these countries in "National Accounts Detailed Tables Volume II 1976-1988" published by the OECD. Exchange rates to convert the national currencies into dollars are given in table 3 in the Appendix to "National Accounts Main Aggregates Volume I 1960-1988" also published by OECD.

Copies of these publications are available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table for each quarter since 1967 of indices of *(a)* the wholesale price of materials and fuels purchased by manufacturing industry other than food, drink and tobacco, *(b)* the wholesale price of home sales of manufacturing industry other than food, drink and tobacco and *(c)* the unit value of imports of basic materials, as defined in the overseas trade statistics, with 1975 as 100.

Mr. Mellor: I have placed tables showing the first two series in the Library of the House. Unit value indices for recent years are not available on a 1975 base but the indices for imports of basic materials on a 1985 base can be found in table C15 of the "Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics" and its annual supplement, available from the Library of the House, or on the Central Statistical Office database which may be accessed through the Library. No information is available for years prior to 1970.

Producer Price Index
Materials and fuel purchased by manufacturing industry other than the food, drink and tobacco manufacturing industries
1975 = 100
Quarterly averages

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
1967	30·9	30·4	31·0	33·1
1968	35·4	34·7	34·7	34·7
1969	34·4	36·0	36·6	37·3
1970	37·9	38·0	37·7	37·7
1971	38·8	39·6	39·6	39·0
1972	39·3	39·7	41·0	43·0
1973	46·3	49·4	55·5	62·4
1974	83·1	85·8	87·2	91·0
1975	92·6	96·3	101·7	109·4
1976	113·3	126·2	129·9	137·6
1977	140·7	143·5	143·6	139·1
1978	134·2	137·8	138·5	145·4
1979	153·8	158·3	163·4	174·9
1980	185·1	180·0	178·4	180·7
1981	186·9	192·0	200·7	209·0
1982	212·3	295·7	207·5	217·0
1983	228·4	222·8	226·9	231·1
1984	240·5	240·9	246·7	260·4
1985	275·8	257·2	249·6	247·0
1986	243·0	225·3	217·0	233·3
1987	238·9	235·6	244·9	246·8
1988	250·5	253·3	255·7	260·6
1989	268·1	269·1	265·0	272·2
1990	271·7	262·1	263·4	268·3
1991	261·3	260·3	259·0	

Note: This table reflects the changes over three base years (i.e., 1975/80/85) and the effects of reclassification from 1968 SIC to 1980 SIC from 1983.

Producer Price Index
Products of manufacturing industries other than food, drink and tobacco manufacturing industries—home sales
1975 = 100
Quarterly averages

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
1967	45·0	45·0	45·3	45·6
1968	46·5	46·9	47·1	47·3
1969	47·8	48·1	48·6	49·2
1970	50·4	51·8	52·8	54·2
1971	56·1	57·5	58·4	58·8
1972	59·5	60·5	61·6	63·0
1973	63·5	64·7	66·6	69·1
1974	75·0	80·8	84·5	88·6
1975	94·5	98·6	101·8	105·1
1976	110·1	114·3	119·1	124·3
1977	130·9	137·0	140·6	143·3
1978	146·6	149·7	152·9	155·8
1979	160·5	166·1	172·4	178·5
1980	187·3	193·7	198·8	201·9
1981	204·8	208·8	211·5	215·0
1982	220·5	223·8	226·0	228·1
1983	231·6	235·7	238·3	241·0
1984	244·9	248·8	251·4	254·7
1985	260·6	264·9	267·6	269·7
1986	273·7	276·2	278·3	280·5
1987	285·0	288·5	291·2	294·0
1988	298·7	302·4	305·6	308·8
1989	314·7	318·7	322·2	325·9
1990	332·6	338·2	341·9	346·5
1991	353·7	356·9	358·7	

Note: This table reflects the changes over three base years (i.e., 1975/80/85) and the effects of reclassification from 1968 SIC to 1980 SIC from 1983.

Economic Policies

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the long-term objective of the Government's economic policies.

Mr. Maples: The Government's central objective is to create the basis for improved living standards and public services by promoting sustainable, non-inflationary economic growth.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will bring up to date the information given in his written answer of 20 February 1990, *Official Report*, column 696, concerning the amount of mortgage interest payable each year as a percentage of (a) disposable income and (b) consumers' expenditure; and if he will (c) add figures (i) for the percentage of gross domestic product and (ii) the years 1970-78.

Mr. Mellor: The latest estimates are as follows:

Mortgage interest payable as a percentage of

	Personal disposable income (a)	Consumers' expenditure (b)	Gross domestic product (c)
1970	2·6	2·8	2·1
1971	2·7	2·9	2·1
1972	2·7	2·9	2·1
1973	3·2	3·6	2·5
1974	3·7	4·1	2·9
1975	3·4	3·8	2·6
1976	3·4	3·8	2·6
1977	3·5	3·8	2·6
1978	3·0	3·3	2·3
1979	3·5	4·0	2·8
1980	4·4	5·1	3·5
1981	4·5	5·1	3·6
1982	4·8	5·4	3·8
1983	4·5	5·0	3·6
1984	5·3	5·9	4·2
1985	6·6	7·3	5·2
1986	6·4	7·0	5·2
1987	6·8	7·3	5·4
1988	7·2	7·6	5·7
1989	9·4	10·2	7·6
[1]1990	10·6	11·7	8·6

[1] Figures affected by introduction of the community charge in England and Wales.

In the first half of 1991 mortgage interest accounted for 10·0 per cent. of disposable income and for 11·5 per cent. of consumers' expenditure. It is not possible to give the corresponding percentage of GDP because the interest figures are not available in seasonally adjusted form whereas money GDP exists as a seasonally adjusted series only.

Sports Council

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions Her Majesty's Treasury has had with the Sports Council about funding the relocation of the Sports Council and associated jobs to Nottingham; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Chancellor of the Exchequer has not discussed this question with the Sports Council.

EC Budget

Mr. Butler: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the reasons why United Kingdom contributions to the EC budget are expected to increase from £0·9 billion in 1991-92 to £2·2 billion in 1992-93.

Mr. Maude: The autumn statement provided a forecast of the UK's net payments to EC institutions of £0·9 billion

in 1991-92 and £2·5 billion in 1992-93. The uneven profile results from the timing of adjustments to UK contributions, mainly because contributions are paid on the basis of agreed estimates and adjusted in the light of outturn, and from subsequent correction to the UK's abatement. The net contribution in 1991-92 is unusually low as the result of a refund in 1991 of contributions overpaid in 1990 and higher than usual abatement in 1991, reflecting adjustments paid in 1990 to make good underpayments in the previous year.

VAT

Mr. Madden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the average penalty imposed in Yorkshire on those who submit value added tax returns late by *(a)* one week, *(b)* two weeks, *(c)* three weeks and *(d)* four weeks.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Customs do not maintain statistics for individual counties or regions. The penalties imposed for late submission or payment of VAT returns do not vary with the length of the period between due date and receipt by Customs. Nationwide, the average penalty imposed on defaulting traders (including those who may have received more than one penalty) over the current and preceding financial year is:

	Average penalty £
Financial year ending 31 March 1989	266.24
Financial year ending 31 March 1990	375.42
Financial year ending 31 March 1991	429.39
1 April 1991 to 30 September 1991	441.41

Mr. Madden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many appeals against penalties imposed for incorrect and late payment of value added tax have been upheld in the current year, to date, by value added tax tribunals in Yorkshire.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Customs do not maintain statistics for individual counties or regions. Nationwide in the current calendar year to 31 October a total of 50 appeals were upheld or partly upheld against penalties for incorrect declaration of value added tax. For the same period, the total number of appeals upheld or partly upheld against penalties for late payment of value added tax is 94.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many representations he has received calling for the time required to elapse form date of supply for bad debt to obtain value added tax relief to be reduced from 24 months to 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Between March 1990 and March 1991 about 150 representations were received seeking a reduction in the two-year waiting period for bad debt relief,which was part of the comprehensive scheme for bad debt relief enacted in the Finance Act 1990. In response, my right hon. Friend announced in his Budget statement that the waiting period would be halved to one year.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will empower value added tax tribunals to take mitigating circumstances into account when determining penalties on incorrect and late value added tax returns.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Consideration of this matter is currently forming part of the thorough review of value added tax penalties announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget statement. As my right hon. Friend said, the aim is to bring forward proposals for any changes required to the penalty regime in the 1992 Finance Bill.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the value added tax threshold in the United Kingdom and in each of the other EC countries.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The VAT registration threshold in the United Kingdom is £35,000 annual turnover.

Belgium, Spain and Italy have no minimum VAT registration threshold.

For other member states of the EC the thresholds are as follows:

Threshold based on annual turnover

Denmark
DKr 10,000 (£888·49)
France
FF 70,000 (£7061·79)
Germany
DM 20,000 (£6872·85)
Greece
DR 1,000,000 (£3113·32) (Supply of goods)
DR 250,000 (778·33) (Supply of services)
Ireland
IR £32,000 (£29384·75) (Supply of goods)
IR £15,000 (£13774·10) (Supply of services)
Luxembourg
LFrs 200,000 (£3330·55)
Portugal
Esc 800,000 (£3205·12) (Industry)
Esc 500,000 (£2003·20) (Professions)

Threshold based on annual VAT payable after input tax deduction

Netherlands
DFl 2174 (£3717·19)

Sources: VAT Monitor
Tax News Service

Rates of exchange: as at 31 October 1991.

EC (National Incomes)

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the national income, 3 per cent. of that figure and the budget deficit of each member state in the EC indicating the differences in accounting treatment where relevant.

Mr. Maples: Following is the information, for the latest year[1] available:

	GDP	*3 per cent. of GDP*	*[2]GGFD*
UK (£ billion)	550·6	16·5	3·6
Belgium (BF billion)	6,027·9	180·8	402·1
Denmark (Kr billion)	776·0	23·3	3·7
France (FF billion)	6,113·1	183·4	86·3
Germany (DM billion)	2,235·6	67·1	−5·5
Greece (Dr billion)	8,798·4	294.0	n.a.
Ireland (IrP billion)	20·0	0·6	1·8
Italy (Lit trillion)	1,188·0	35·6	121·1
Luxembourg (BF billion)	223·3	6·7	−6·9
Netherlands (Fl billion)	474·4	14·2	24·5
Portugal (Esc billion)	4,420·4	132·6	281·5
Spain (Pta trillion)	40·2	1·2	1·3

Source: OECD National Accounts volume II, 1977-89, except for UK figures from *Financial Statistics.*

[1] Latest year is 1989 except for UK (1990); Spain (1988); Ireland (1987); Luxembourg and Portugal (1986).

[2] General government financial deficit, positive number indicates government borrowing.

The Dutch presidency text defines the budget deficit as "the net balance to be financed on a cash basis". However, data for this concept are available. Data for general Government financial deficits are not available for most countries, and are therefore generally used to make international comparisons of budget deficits. Most countries, however, focus on other aggregates in their national budgets. The main differences between the net balance to be financed on a cash basis and the GGFD are that the former is measured on a cash basis, the latter on an accruals basis; and the GGFD excludes privatisation proceeds.

Figures for the United Kingdom are based on the national accounts. Figures for other countries are standardised to conform to the United Nations system of national accounts. No figures are available for the general Government financial deficit of Greece. More recent data and forecasts of Government deficits of member states are published by the European Commission in "European Economy", Supplement A, May 1991.

Employees' Benefits (Taxation)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has any proposals to modify the restrictive rules in section 80 of the Finance Act 1988 concerning the tax charge on special benefits for employees; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude Where employees or directors acquire shares as a result of their employment, and because of their ownership of those shares they subsequently receive a "special benefit", that "special benefit" is currently taxable in some circumstances. For example, such "special benefit" might flow from an entitlement to subscribe to a "rights" issue, or from a right to shareholder priority in a public offer. The Government do not think it is right to charge tax on a benefit that is available to all or substantially all shareholders, where a majority of the shares in relation to which the benefit is actually received are held otherwise than by people who acquired them as employees. We therefore propose that exemption from the charge should apply to any benefit received in these circumstances on or after today. Legislation to this effect, which will include some minor consequential changes, will be introduced in the Finance Bill 1992.

Employees' Expenses and Benefits

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much overtime has been agreed in the Inland Revenue to clear the outstanding P11D forms; and when he expects this work to be up to date.

Mr. Maude: The bulk of P11D forms are received in the first part of the tax year and dealt with in a targeted programme finishing in December. That programme is proceeding to target. No overtime has been centrally allocated to this specific task. However, the Inland Revenue's regional controllers can use part of their budgets for overtime, and some work on P11D forms may have been done during locally arranged overtime.

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many P11D forms on hand on 13 June 1991 had been outstanding for more than three months.

Mr. Maude: None was reported as having been outstanding for more than three months.

Deep Gain Securities

Mr Hind: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he plans to change the tax treatment of deep gain securities.

Mr. Maude: The deep gain legislation provides a tax regime for bonds which are issued at a discount to par but which cannot be taxed according to the deep discount rules. The deep gain rules charge all of an investor's return to income tax. However, it has recently been brought to our attention that many ordinary bonds, carrying a full coupon, and issued at a small discount to par, but not containing the characteristics of true deep gain securities are, in strictness, so classified if they contain standard event of default or event risk clauses.

We have therefore decided to restore the position to what everyone previously believed it to be: bonds already in issue which are deep gain securities solely by virtue of the inclusion of standard event of default or event risk clauses will be treated as not being deep gain securities. We intend to introduce legislation in the next Finance Bill to take these bonds out of the deep gains legislation.

In the meantime, and with my agreement, the Inland Revenue will not treat securities issued on or before 12 November 1991 as deep gain securities where they fall to be so treated only by reason of a redemption which may be made before maturity, and that redemption is

—outside the scope of paragraph 1(3A), Schedule 11, Finance Act 1989, or of paragraph 2(13) of that Schedule, as the case may be; and

—occasioned by the happening of an event (other than the exercise of a put option) prescribed in the terms of issue of the security as an event on the happening of which the security will or may be redeemed.

This concession may not be applied if the terms of the security as respects the events occasioning such redemptions before maturity are materially amended after 12 November 1991.

For tranche issues, securities issued after 12 November 1991 will be treated as not being deep gain securities if they fall to be so treated only by reason of a redemption which may be made before maturity if they are issued under the same prospectus as a security described above or on terms such as to make them fungible, either immediately or after the first payment of interest in respect of the security, with a security described above.

The Government also intend to set in place a new tax regime for bonds issued after today. The precise terms of the legislation covering these bonds will depend on the outcome of consultations which the Inland Revenue will be undertaking with interested parties. But the Government's intention is that securities issued after today will not fall to be treated as deep gain securities only by reason of a redemption which may be made before maturity in pursuance of a term of issue of the security and

—the term provides that the security will or may be redeemed on the happening, before maturity, of an event which is not at the time of issue certain or likely to occur;

—if the security provides for early redemption on the happening of more than one such event, it is not at the time of issue certain or likely that any one or more of them will occur;

—the term is such as to protect the holders of the security against the consequences of the event prescribed; and

—a reduction in tax liability is not a main benefit to be expected from the inclusion of the term and in particular, is not an arrangement, or part of an arrangement to facilitate early redemption of the security.

The Government propose that this amendment should not operate to remove any transfer or redemption of a security from the charge on deep gains when

—the security would be a deep gain security but for the proposals described above;

—the security is redeemed before maturity on the happening of an event described above; and

—the security is held on redemption by a person connected with the issuer, or as the case may be the transfer is by such a person within 12 months before the redemption.

In the meantime, in anticipation of such legislation, and with my agreement, the Inland Revenue will, by concession, not enforce liabilities in respect of transactions in securities which are strictly deep gain securities under current law, but would not be were legislation on these lines in effect.

Public Expenditure

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will publish the figures in table 2.2 in Cm 1520, including the latest estimated outturn for 1990-91, as a percentage of gross domestic product;

(2) if he will publish in *(a)* cash, *(b)* 1990-91 prices and *(c)* as a proportion of gross domestic product, the figures as used in table 2·3 in Cm 1520, including the latest estimated outturn for 1990-91 and with the series extended back as far as is possible;

(3) if he will publish in 1990-91 prices, an update of table 2·3 in Cm 1520, including the latest estimated outturn for 1990-91;

(4) if he will publish an update of table 2·2 in Cm 1520, including the latest estimated outturn for 1990-91.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* Information on general Government expenditure by function in the period 1978-79 to 1990-91 in cash, real terms (1990-91 prices) and as a percentage of GDP has been placed in the Library of the House. The figures given are consistent with those published in the autumn statement press notice. Corresponding data for earlier years are not available on a consistent basis.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish an extended version of table 3·5 of the "Autumn Statement Statistical Supplement", including departmental planning totals for each year back to 1978-79, on as consistent a basis as possible and in 1990-91 prices.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* Information on the planning total by department in real terms (1990-91 prices), in the period 1984-85 to 1994-95 is given in the following table. The figures given are consistent with those published in the autumn statement. Corresponding data for earlier years are not available on a consistent basis.

Planning total by department in real terms[1]

	1984-85 outturn	*1985-86 outturn*	*1986-87 outturn*	*1987-88 outturn*	*1988-89 outturn*	*1989-90 outturn*	*1990-91 outturn*	*1991-92 estimated outturn*	*1992-93 new plans*	*1993-94 new plans*	*£ billion 1994-95 new plans*
Defence	24,468	24,225	23,703	23,347	22,040	22,522	21,800	21,360	21,630	21,130	20,760
Foreign Office	843	820	847	851	854	943	936	990	1,000	1,020	1,000
Overseas Development	1,732	1,678	1,691	1,598	1,780	1,811	1,743	1,880	1,920	1,950	1,950
Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	2,633	3,087	2,095	2,237	1,823	1,587	2,107	2,140	1,960	1,910	1,910
Trade and Industry	2,228	1,971	2,570	826	1,553	1,400	1,118	900	840	780	780
ECGD	757	468	381	190	134	388	372	230	100	60	30
Energy	3,632	882	−278	244	−494	503	1,189	880	540	440	380
Employment	4,391	4,441	5,014	4,833	4,451	4,101	3,778	3,400	3,460	3,340	3,280
Transport	3,982	3,769	3,532	3,275	3,154	3,849	4,721	5,270	6,220	5,680	5,110
DOE—Housing	4,873	4,158	3,913	3,689	3,359	3,371	6,899	7,130	6,950	6,860	6,870
DOE—Environment	1,835	1,644	1,288	1,181	774	1,208	1,263	1,280	1,150	1,100	1,050
DOE—PSA	—	—	—	—	—	—	114	90	60	30	10
DOE—Local Government	21,771	21,156	22,260	22,582	21,744	21,188	20,392	26,420	27,740	28,020	28,450
Home Office	3,957	3,726	3,969	4,224	4,261	4,585	5,045	5,370	5,370	5,520	5,590
Legal departments	727	767	850	957	1,042	1,221	1,308	1,560	1,580	1,590	1,600
Education and Science	4,690	4,596	4,656	4,901	4,971	6,258	6,643	6,840	7,110	7,220	7,330
Arts and Libraries	384	388	448	456	478	484	496	520	550	520	520
Health	19,248	19,267	19,984	20,782	21,338	21,685	22,509	24,020	25,180	25,870	26,520
Social Security	56,536	58,328	60,850	60,387	57,089	56,609	56,075	60,800	63,100	65,600	66,800
Scotland	10,032	9,734	9,875	9,730	9,833	9,733	9,690	10,950	11,210	11,270	11,390
Wales	3,772	3,733	3,952	4,046	4,130	4,119	4,436	4,920	5,190	5,220	5,270
Northern Ireland	5,750	5,764	5,873	5,977	6,279	6,210	5,871	6,050	6,280	6,390	6,470
Chancellor's departments	3,713	3,846	4,189	4,256	4,277	4,548	4,597	4,490	4,500	4,500	4,550
Cabinet office, etc.	288	296	298	310	316	325	349	370	410	410	410
European Communities	1,390	1,104	1,403	2,057	1,162	2,512	2,013	850	2,200	2,210	2,440
Reserve	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3,580	6,900	10,040
Privatisation proceeds	−2,916	−3,649	−5,820	−6,364	−8,166	−4,577	−5,345	−7,480	−7,150	−4,740	−4,600
Adjustment	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	300	—	—	—
Planning total	180,717	176,199	177,543	176,573	168,181	176,581	180,119	191,500	202,700	210,800	215,900

[1] Cash figures adjusted to 1990-91 price levels by excluding the effect of general inflation. The deflator series used is that for GDP at market prices adjusted to remove the distortion caused by the abolition of domestic rates.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will publish an update of table 2.5 in Cm 1520, including the latest estimated outturn for 1990-91, with a back series to 1978-79;

(2) if he will publish the figures in table 2.5 in Cm 1520, including the latest estimated outturn for 1990-91, with a back series to 1978-79 *(a)* in cash prices, *(b)* in 1990-91 prices and *(c)* as a percentage of gross domestic product.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* I am arranging for copies of tables setting out information on general Government expenditure by detailed function in the period 1986-87 to 1990-91 in cash, real terms (1990-91 prices) and as a percentage of GDP to be placed in the Library of the House. The figures are consistent with those published in the autumn statement press notice. Corresponding data for earlier years could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Public Investment

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the level of public investment as a proportion of gross national product for *(a)* all EC countries, *(b)* Japan and *(c)* the United States of America in the period 1970 to 1991.

Mr Maples *[holding answer 11 November 1991]:* Data for gross domestic product and public investment for the period 1977 to 1989 are published by the OECD in "National Accounts 1977-89".

Civilian Employees

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when an announcement will be made on the issue of additional payment for civilians in Ministry of Defence employment in Northern Ireland.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 11 November 1991]:* The matter is under discussion with the Ministry of Defence.

HEALTH

Ealing Health District

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were treated in *(a)* Ealing health district and *(b)* Ealing hospital since the inception of each; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested for Ealing health authority is given in the table. The information for Ealing hospital is not held centrally. My hon. Friend may wish to write to Lady Eccles of Moulton, the chairman of Ealing health authority, for details.

NHS hospital activity—Ealing district health authority

Year	*In-patient*[1] *cases treated*	*Day case attendances*	*Total out-patient attendances*
1982	17,597	3,332	106,481
1983	18,449	3,357	111,113
1984	19,733	3,733	104,799
1985	20,092	3,703	108,128
1986	19,644	3,530	104,678
1987-88	19,341	2,512	98,013
1988-89	24,741	3,821	91,417
1988-89	25,196	3,821	91,417
1989-90	23,024	3,734	95,098
[2]1990-91	23,354	4,040	105,593

[1] Hospital discharges and deaths 1982 to 1988-89; Finished consultant episodes 1988-89 to 1990-91.
[2] Provisional.

NHS Statistics

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of *(a)* heart transplant, *(b)* kidney replacement, *(c)* hip replacement and *(d)* eye cataract operations carried out in the national health service in (i) 1979 and (ii) the most recent year for which the figures are available; and if he will estimate the figures for 1991-92.

Mr. Dorrell: The table gives the number of operations for 1979 and for the latest year available. The rate of heart and kidney transplant operations is dependent on the availability of suitable organ donors. Future numbers cannot therefore be reliably estimated. Information on the projected number of hip replacement and cataract operations is not held centrally.

Operation	*1979*	*1990*	*Latest year 1990-91*
Heart transplant[1]	3	329	
Kidney transplant[1]	842	1,870	
Hip replacement	[2]28,800		[3]44,477
Eye cataract	[2]39,700		[3]94,739

[1] Figures supplied by the United Kingdom Transplant Support Service Authority—collected by calendar year.
[2] Estimate from Hospital In-Patient Enquiry.
[3] Figures from 1990-91 Regional Outturn Reports—collected by financial year.

Hospitals

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total investment in hospitals in each of the past three years; how many entirely new hospitals are now under construction; and how many hospitals were closed down in each of the past three years.

Mr. Dorrell: Health authority capital expenditure in the last three years has been as follows:

	£million
1988-89	1,082
1989-90	1,306
1990-91	1,514

There are 106 building schemes each costing over £1 million under construction. These include extensions and adaptations to existing hospitals as well as new schemes. There is no central record of the number of building schemes which are entirely new hospitals.

Figures for hospital closures are no longer routinely collected centrally as changes in the use of buildings are not a good measure of services to patients provided by the NHS.

Dental Checks

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has concerning the extent to which children at school are currently having a regular dental check through the school dental service; and if he will publish in tabular form the percentage of children who had a check-up in the most recent 12-month period for which figures are available in respect of each local authority in England and Wales.

Mr. Dorrell: District health authorities have responsibility for the screening of the teeth of children in state

funded schools at least three times in each child's school life. The percentage of school children inspected in each district health authority in England and Wales during the year ended 31 March 1990 is shown in the table.

District health authority	*Percentage of school children inspected*[1]
Northern RHA	62·8
Hartlepool[2]	71·3
North Tees	85·8
South Tees	50·1
East Cumbria	72·0
South Cumbria	66·2
West Cumbria	88·7
Darlington	58·5
Durham	21·8
North West Durham	49·8
South West Durham	73·8
Northumberland	77·5
Gateshead	66·9
Newcastle	61·7
North Tyneside	78·1
South Tyneside	58·3
Sunderland	48·7
Yorkshire RHA	60·9
Hull	39·1
East Yorkshire	60·3
Grimsby	64·1
Scunthorpe	61·9
Northallerton	64·9
York	46·4
Scarborough	55·9
Harrogate	57·1
Bradford	70·8
Airedale[2]	92·6
Calderdale	49·6
Huddersfield	65·6
Dewsbury	70·2
Leeds Western	57·2
Leeds Eastern	57·4
Wakefield	69·7
Pontefract	72·2
Trent RHA	60·7
North Derbyshire	63·3
South Derbyshire	73·7
Leicestershire	59·3
North Lincolnshire	70·0
South Lincolnshire	74·1
Bassetlaw	25·8
Central Nottinghamshire	44·4
Nottingham	41·2
Barnsley	53·5
Doncaster	62·8
Rotherham	50·8
Sheffield	83·7
East Anglia RHA	54·7
Cambridge	26·8
Peterborough	63·5
West Suffolk	69·0
East Suffolk	67·5
Norwich	60·2
Great Yarmouth and Waveney	35·9
West Norfolk and Wisbech	47·6
Huntingdon	56·9
North West Thames RHA	55·8
North Bedfordshire	48·6
South Bedfordshire	51·0
North Hertfordshire	50·0
East Hertfordshire	49·3
North West Hertfordshire	45·3
South West Hertfordshire	40·2
Barnet	78·5
Harrow	55·5
Hillingdon	58·3
Hounslow and Spelthorne	82·3
Ealing	60·0
Parkside	53·2
Riverside	46·3
North East Thames RHA	52·3
Basildon and Thurrock	76·8
Mid Essex	36·0
North East Essex	49·0
West Essex	47·1
Southend	33·4
Barking/Havering/Brentwood	60·9
Hampstead	40·7
Bloomsbury	46·8
Islington	35·1
City and Hackney	53·2
Newham	89·3
Tower Hamlets	50·1
Enfield	52·9
Haringey	82·1
Redbridge	38·0
Waltham Forest	32·2
South East Thames RHA	61·8
Brighton	76·2
Eastbourne	68·2
Hastings	59·6
South East Kent	50·4
Canterbury and Thanet	51·2
Dartford and Gravesham	72·7
Maidstone	70·8
Medway	62·4
Tunbridge Wells	60·3
Bexley	43·6
Greenwich	19·0
Bromley	56·2
West Lambeth (2)	76·2
Camberwell	62·0
Lewisham and North Southwark	95·4
South West Thames RHA	48·7
North West Surrey	29·7
West Surrey and NE Hants	40·8
South West Surrey	47·7
Mid—Surrey	58·3
East Surrey	91·7
Chichester	47·5
Mid Downs	46·1
Worthing	50·7
Croydon	63·3
Kingston and Esher	11·4
Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton	18·9
Wandsworth	73·3
Merton and Sutton	51·3
Wessex RHA	58·1
East Dorset (2)	61·1
West Dorset	67·1
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	79·1
Southampton and South West Hampshire	50·5
Winchester	53·5
Basingstoke and North Hampshire	39·6
Salisbury	84·7
Swindon	22·2
Bath	60·9
Isle of Wight	51·7
Oxford RHA	49·6
East Berkshire	66·9
West Berkshire	66·9
Aylesbury Vale	47·5
Wycombe	56·0
Milton Keynes	16·4
Kettering	25·1
Northampton	44·9
Oxfordshire	48·4

District health authority	Percentage of school children inspected[1]
South Western RHA	60·0
Bristol and Weston	55·6
Frenchay	61·3
Southmead	35·5
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	63·1
Exeter	51·2
North Devon	75·2
Plymouth	91·0
Torbay	55·7
Cheltenham	41·5
Gloucester	66·7
Somerset	55·6
West Midlands RHA	64·0
Bromsgrove and Redditch	43·1
Herefordshire	70·4
Kidderminster and District	67·8
Worcester and District	36·6
Shropshire (Salop)	50·2
Mid-Staffordshire	62·7
North Staffordshire	66·9
South East Staffordshire	57·5
Rugby	66·8
North Warwickshire	87·5
South Warwickshire	88·0
Central Birmingham	58·0
East Birmingham	42·8
North Birmingham	36·6
South Birmingham	74·1
West Birmingham	53·0
Coventry	90·9
Dudley	53·1
Sandwell	86·5
Solihull	72·6
Walsall	77·1
Wolverhampton	61·0
Mersey RHA	64·0
Chester	77·4
Crewe	54·0
Halton	75·2
Macclesfield	54·1
Warrington	58·5
Liverpool	57·1
St. Helens and Knowsley	72·5
Southport and Formby	36·3
South Sefton	81·2
Wirral	67·8
North Western RHA	61·3
Lancaster	25·0
Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde	33·8
Preston	34·0
Blackburn, Hynburn and Ribble Valley	58·6
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale	49·4
West Lancashire	27·4
Chorley and South Ribble	26·1
Bolton	75·7
Bury	84·4
North Manchester	83·0
Central Manchester [2]	99·7
South Manchester	54·9
Oldham	84·5
Rochdale	73·3
Salford	35·8
Stockport	73·4
Tameside and Glossop	72·9
Trafford	69·0
Wigan	79·5
Total England	58·7
Wales	57·3
Clwyd	43·2
East Dyfed	40·4
Gwent	44·6
Gwynedd	45·1
Mid Glamorgan	59·8
Powys	67·8
South Glamorgan	63·4
West Glamorgan	84·8
Pembrokeshire	87·9
Total England and Wales	58·6

(1) The 1989-90 data on inspections are available for all school children only. The percentage of children who had a dental check up have been calculated using the June 1989 population estimates for children aged 5 to 16.
(2) 1988-89 data.

Amputees

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken to ensure that at all artificial limb fitting centres there is adequate provision for professional counselling of amputees.

Mr. Dorrell: We know that some centres do employ professional staff specifically for counselling of limbless disabled people. It is not, however, a subject on which we have given central guidance and is a matter for individual health authorities.

Tobacco Advertising

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what assessment he has made of the evidence from New Zealand on the effects of tobacco consumption of the ban on tobacco advertising imposed in December 1990.

Mr. Dorrell: Changes in New Zealand's attitude to smoking led to a decline in tobacco consumption before the imposition of the ban and this decline has continued. At the same time, economic factors such as a fall in incomes have had an impact on consumption. The available data refer to a short time period, during which the "transitory shock" of the publicity surrounding the ban would have been operating. We have asked officials to keep us up to date on the evidence as it becomes available.

South London Hospital for Women

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans his Department has for the future use of the closed South London hospital for women.

Mr. Dorrell: The management of the national health service estate is normally delegated to the appropriate regional health authority which can best assess requirements so far as individual properties are concerned.

Northern Devon Hospital Trust

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many complaints he has received about the Northern Devon hospital trust since it was established.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not held centrally. Such operational matters are the responsibility of the NHS trust board. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir Michael Knight, the chairman of the Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust, for details.

Organ Transplants

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospitals take part in providing organ removal facilities for the transplant programme; and if he will list the number of organs provided by hospitals in the various regions, either on a hospital-by-hospital basis or regionally during the past 12 months.

Mr. Dorrell: Information on human organ removal facilities is not collected centrally. The table gives the numbers of centres providing organs and the numbers of organs retrieved by English regions in 1990, the latest year for which information is available.

Region	*Number of centres providing organs*	*Number of organs provided*[1]
Northern	20	179
Yorks and Humberside	12	126
Trent	13	149
East Anglia	12	97
North West Thames	13	147
North East Thames	21	196
South East and South West Thames	33	279
Wessex	13	140
Oxford	11	125
South Western	12	128
West Midlands	27	270
Mersey	14	106
North Western	22	222
Total	221	2,164

[1] Based on information provided by the United Kingdom Transplant Support Service Authority for 1990.

Cardiologists

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cardiologists per million population there are in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* the United States of America and *(c)* Germany.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There are 1.17 cardiologists per million population in the United Kingdom. Similar information in respect of the United States and Germany is not collected centrally.

Qa Business Services

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the West Midlands regional health authority will re-establish a computer bureau and re-employ ex-Qa Business Services staff; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: This is a matter for the West Midlands regional health authority. However, I understand that AT and T ISTEL has acquired some of the assets of Qa Business Services and will ensure the continuity of information technology services to the group of West Midlands health authorities.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions have taken place between the West Midlands regional health authority, the inter-regional collaboration co-ordinators, Praxis, and the computer firm ICL regarding the transfer of support contracts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Dorrell: The West Midlands regional health authority has been working closely with the administrative receivers of Qa Business Services to ensure the continuity of computer services contracts with NHS authorities; the responsibility for a successful transfer of contracts and hence a successful sale of Qa Business Services is a matter for the administrative receiver. I understand that AT and T ISTEL has acquired some of the business assets which will ensure the continuity of information technology services.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what lessons his Department has drawn for the NHS staff and services, of the recent collapse of Qa Business Services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Management buy-outs are one of the range of options for improving the effectiveness and efficiency of local services which have been successfully implemented in many parts of the NHS. In the case of the administrative receivership of Qa Business Services, the Department is keeping in close touch with West Midlands regional health authority and will ensure that any wider lessons are shared throughout the NHS.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will call for a report from the chairman of the West Midlands regional health authority as to the effects on the regional national health service of the collapse of Qa Business Services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Health services in the west midlands have not been adversely affected by Qa Business Services going into administrative receivership.

West Midlands RHA

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the financial terms involved in the management buy-out of the management services division of the West Midlands regional health authority; what was the surplus generated by the management services division for the national health service in the last financial year it was within the regional health authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The financial and other contractual terms of the management buy-out of the management services division of the West Midlands regional health authority are matters of commercial confidentiality.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guarantees were given to the former employees of the management services division of the West Midlands regional health authority as to their continuity of employment for redundancy and other purposes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: One of the conditions of the management buy-out of the management services division of the West Midlands regional health authority was that regional health authority employees transferring to the new consultancy would transfer with continuous service and on terms and conditions no less favourable than those in their contracts of employment with the regional health authority.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library a copy of the transfer of undertaking regulations which governed the 1989 privatisation of the former management services division of the West Midlands regional health authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 (SI No. 1794) is available in the Library. The management buy-out of the management services division of the West Midlands regional health authority was regarded as a transfer within the terms of those regulations.

GP Fundholders

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the numbers and the size of budgets of the GP fundholders in London.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not held centrally.

Legionnaire's Disease

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how long elapsed before the Liverpool patients diagnosed as having legionnaire's disease were notified of the nature of their illness; and what guidelines and advice his Department issues to hospitals about patients' rights in these matters.

Mr. Dorrell: The timing and nature of the information that patients receive about their medical condition involves the exercise of professional judgment by the individual clinician responsible for those patients' care. The Department does not issue guidance in these matters.

Cot Deaths

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department was informed about the New Zealand research and the factors associated with cot deaths; what steps he then took to assess that research; and what other action was taken.

Mr. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 5 November 1991]*: The Department was first informed about the findings of New Zealand research through letters published in *The Lancet* in July this year. This correspondence indicated that a change in certain of the factors associated with cot death had been accompanied by a reduction in the incidence of cot death. Over the next few months, further information was sought. Four reports, including one from this country not yet published, showed that a reduction in the prone sleeping position of infants had been accompanied by a fall in the incidence of cot death.

I announced on 21 October at column *423* the setting up of an expert group to report to the chief medical officer its findings and recommendations about this latest available evidence. The group's advice was published on 31 October.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 13 November 1991

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Mr. Paul Eric Walker

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Attorney-General whether Paul Eric Walker can now be treated as a new applicant for the purposes of legal aid.

The Attorney-General: Paul Eric Walker is in possession of a valid current legal aid certificate. There is no need for him to apply for a new certificate.

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Attorney-General when Paul Eric Walker first applied for legal aid to the Northern area legal aid office; and if he will make a statement about the reasons for the delay in granting it.

The Attorney-General: Paul Eric Walker first applied for legal aid on 9 May 1990 and his certificate was granted on 22 August 1991. The delay in granting the certificate arose because the Legal Aid Assessment Office had difficulty in establishing Mr. Walker's correct address and a number of changes to his financial circumstances led to further delays while his means were recalculated. Between August and October 1991 Mr. Walker was asked to show cause why his certificate should not be discharged in the light of his most recent failure to co-operate with the means assessment process. The matter was finally resolved in Mr. Walker's favour on 31 October 1991.

TRANSPORT

MV Richard Montgomery

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the last inspection of the vessel Richard Montgomery was carried out on the River Thames; and if he will make a statement on the conclusions arrived at.

Mr. McLoughlin: A very thorough survey was completed early in September this year and a detailed report has been submitted to the Department by the contractor. I hope to be in a position to make a statement very shortly.

TRANSPORT

Lorries

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many inspections in relation to loading and roadworthiness of lorries were undertaken in the last year for which figures were available; how many infringements of regulations were detected; how many prosecutions and convictions secured; and if he will tabulate the results by county and metropolitan district area.

Mr. Chope: Almost 113,000 HGV roadworthiness inspections were carried out at the roadside during 1990-91. These resulted in just under 8,000 vehicles being immediately prohibited from further use, and just over 9,000 being required to have essential repairs undertaken within a maximum of 10 days. In addition, vehicle examiners made almost 98,000 visits to operators during the year to inspect either particular vehicles or maintenance facilities. A total of 114,000 HGVs were checkweighed during the same period. This activity resulted in the issue of just over 8,000 prohibitions. There were about 10,000 prosecutions, and 9,000 convictions.

It is not possible to provide this information by county and district.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to increase the penalties for infringement of loading and roadworthiness regulations in relation to lorries.

Mr. Chope: The Criminal Justice Act 1991 increased level 5 on the standard scale of fines, which is the maximum punishment for overloading and the more serious roadworthiness offences, from £2,000 to £5,000. This will be implemented in October 1992. In addition, infringements can lead to action being taken against operators' and drivers' licences.

Toll Roads

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will ensure that the proposed toll road from Birmingham to Manchester satisfies the environmental impact assessment requirement of EC directive 85/337.

Mr. Chope: EC directive 85/337 applies to major road projects whether or not they are privately financed. Any proposed toll road from Birmingham to Manchester would require an environmental impact assessment before a decision was made to proceed.

Heathrow Airport (Signposting)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to improve directional signing, with particular reference to reaching motorways, on the roads around Heathrow airport.

Mr. Chope: It is planned to revise the directional signing on the primary routes around Heathrow airport in 1994 as part of a general revision of the signing. Consultation on both the primary route network and its signing took place in 1989. Copies of the consultation documents were placed in the Library.

A685

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will look again at the congestion on the A685 road through Kirkby Stephen and provide an estimate of how soon a bypass will be put on the forward programme.

Mr. Chope: The A685 is not a trunk road. The needs of the route are therefore a matter for consideration by the local highways authority, Cumbria county council.

Heathrow Express

Sir Barney Hayhoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with British Rail about progress on the Heathrow express rail link; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I have had a number of discussions with BR on this matter. The Government are keen to see the project go ahead, but it is for BR to determine its priorities within the resources available.

BR Tracks

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures are being taken to make British Rail tracks suitable to accommodate continental Berne standard rolling stock.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail will be able to carry the great majority of containers—up to 9 ft high—and standard European swap bodies between the channel tunnel and its regional freight terminals using low platform wagons, without substantially changing the existing structure gauge. Converting existing lines to continental structure gauge would be extremely costly and disruptive. Apart from the need to alter tunnels and bridges, station platforms would have to be realigned and passenger rolling stock adapted to the new platform dimensions. BR has no plans to do this and does not believe the costs would be commercially justified. However, it is envisaged that the new high speed rail link would be built to continental gauge.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Correspondence

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the average length of time it takes to reply to a letter from an hon. Member.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The length of time it takes to reply to a letter from an hon. Member varies according to the subject. It is our policy to reply to letters from hon. Members as soon as practically possible. We meet our aim of replying within 15 working days in 80 per cent. of cases.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many staff are employed at the migration and visa correspondence unit.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Ten.

Immigration Interviews

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list *(a)* the numbers of people in each queue who are waiting for interviews for entry clearance to Britain and *(b)* the average waiting time in Bombay, Delhi, Dhaka, Islamabad, Karachi, Calcutta, Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: As at 30 September the number of people waiting for interviews for entry clearance to Britain are:

	Queue 1	*Queue 2*	*Queue 3*	*Queue 4*	*Total*
Bombay	0	238	494	197	929
New Delhi	0	331	333	113	777
Dhaka	347	1,247	157	516	2,267
Islamabad	15	1,211	198	449	1,873
Karachi	16	120	36	8	180

There are no queues in Calcutta, Nairobi or Dar-es-Salaam.

The estimated waiting times, in months, are:

	Queue 1	*Queue 2*	*Queue 3*	*Queue 4*
Bombay	0	4	9	12
New Delhi	0	3	7	10
Dhaka	3	5	6	12
Islamabad	3	3	6	9
Karachi	2	3	3	6

Settlement queues are organised as follows:

Queue 1—Persons with a claim to the right of abode, dependant relatives over 70 years, special compassionate cases.

Queue 2—All spouses, and all children under 18 years.

Queue 3—Finance(e)s and others applying for the first time for settlement.

Queue 4—Re-applicants.

During periods of seasonal high demand applicants for visit visas in Islamabad requiring a full interview can expect to wait up to five days. Elsewhere they are dealt with on day of application.

Bank of Credit and Commerce International

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent visit by the Minister of State to Abu Dhabi; and whether he discussed BCCI.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I visited Abu Dhabi from 28 to 29 October. I met Shaikh Zayed, the President of the UAE, and other senior Ministers, who made it clear that bilateral relations remain close and cordial, and should be kept separate from the BCCI affair.

Iraq (Nuclear Activity)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his assessment of the efficacy of the international inspection and surveillance of Iraqi nuclear activity in the period before the Gulf war.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The IAEA conducted regular inspections of Iraq's declared nuclear facilities before the Gulf war. Its reports did not indicate any significant diversions of nuclear materials under safeguards.

Notwithstanding this, we now know that Iraq circumvented IAEA safeguards in seeking to develop a nuclear weapons capability. This is a cause for concern. The IAEA is considering how to strengthen the system, a process to which the United Kingdom, with European Community partners, is contributing.

East Timor

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps are being taken *(a)* by the Government *(b)* by the Government within the Council of Ministers and *(c)* by the Government within the United Nations to make progress towards a just peace in East Timor.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Her Majesty's Government have had bilateral contacts with Indonesia and Portugal to encourage them to work towards a negotiated solution of the East Timor question. The issue is discussed regularly in European political cooperation. We support the United Nations Secretary-General's efforts to encourage Indonesia and Portugal to resolve their differences.

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps are being taken by the Government to put pressure on the Indonesian Government about its human rights record in East Timor.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We regularly draw the attention of the Indonesian authorities to our concern about reports of human rights abuses in East Timor. We will continue to do so.

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to ban supply of military weapons to the Indonesian Government while that Government continue to occupy East Timor.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I refer the hon. Lady to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) on 12 November, at column *481*.

Iraq

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are his current proposals to negate the Iraqi capacity to detonate initiators, launch nuclear capable missiles and assemble super-guns.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We shall continue actively to support the work of the UN Special Commission and the International Atomic Energy Agency in dismantling Iraq's weapons of mass destruction capability under the terms of UN Security Council resolutions 687 and 707, and in carrying out their plans to monitor and verify Iraq's long-term compliance with those resolutions, under the authority of Security Council resolution 715.

Media Funding

Mrs. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will obtain for his departmental library a copy of the documents released to the Congress of People's Deputies by the Russian Justice Minister concerning funding of the *Morning Star* and Pergamon Press by the Soviet Communist party.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are aware of the documents in question. We have asked our embassy in Moscow to obtain the excerpts relating to the reported funding of the *Morning Star* and Pergamon Press by the Soviet Communist party.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Tax-exempt Special Savings Accounts

Mr. French: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about the operation of TESSAs.

Mr. Maude: My right hon. Friend has received a small number of representations about the operation of TESSAs.

Mr. French: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any plans to modify the rules relating to TESSAs.

Mr. Maude: There are no plans to modify the rules relating to TESSAs.

Vocational Training (Tax Relief)

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the ordinary and advanced diplomas proposed in the White Paper, "Education and Training for the 21st Century", would fall within the terms of tax relief for vocational training introduced in the Finance Act 1991.

Mr. Maude: The Government are considering carefully the interaction between the proposals in the White Paper "Education and Training for the 21st Century" and the new tax relief for vocational training.

Inflation and Minimum Lending Rate

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the underlying rate of inflation and minimum lending rate for each of the last 150 months, setting out in each case the difference showing whether it is positive or negative, also marking each month when the economy was in recession with the letter R.

Mr. Maples *[holding answer 12 November 1991]:* There is no single measure of underlying inflation. For the purposes of this answer, it is defined as the RPI less mortgage interest payments. Since 1981 a minimum lending rate has been in operation for only two days. Instead three-month inter-bank rates have been used. There is no agreed definition of recession. For the purposes of this answer, it is defined as occurring when GDP falls for two or more consecutive quarters. GDP figures are available only quarterly, so it is not possible to identify when the economy is in recession month by month. Rs have been placed beside those months which make up recessionary quarters. The information is in the following table:

	Average 3 month inter-bank rate (i)	*RPI excluding mips (ii)*	*Difference (iii)*
1979			
April	11·69	9·1	2·59
May	11·82	9·3	2·52

	Average 3 month inter-bank rate (i)	RPI exclud-ing mips (ii)	Difference (iii)
June	13·12	10·2	2·92
July	13·98	14·7	−0·72
August	14·12	15·0	−0·88
September	14·17	15·9	−1·73
October	14·12	16·6	−2·48
November	16·24	16·7	−0·46
December	16·81	16·9	−0·09
1980			
January	17·16	17·4	R −0·24
February	17·77	17·9	R −0·13
March	18·11	18·6	R −0·49
April	17·64	20·6	R −2·96
May	17·05	20·8	R −3·75
June	16·77	20·0	R −3·23
July	15·88	15·8	R 0·08
August	16·53	15·2	R 1·33
September	16·00	14·7	R 1·30
October	15·98	14·3	R 1·68
November	15·84	14·2	R 1·64
December	14·73	13·9	R 0·83
1981			
January	14·28	13·0	R 1·28
February	13·08	12·6	R 0·44
March	12·65	12·8	R −0·15
April	12·33	12·4	−0·07
May	12·40	12·2	0·20
June	12·66	11·8	0·86
July	13·79	11·4	2·39
August	14·18	12·0	2·18
September	14·78	11·9	2·88
October	16·33	12·2	4·13
November	15·06	12·1	2·96
December	15·44	12·0	3·44
1982			
January	15·13	12·0	3·13
February	14·48	10·6	3·88
March	13·57	9·8	3·77
April	13·77	9·1	4·67
May	13·35	9·2	4·15
June	13·00	8·8	4·20
July	12·37	8·3	4·07
August	11·11	7·6	3·51
September	10·89	7·3	3·59
October	9·79	7·0	2·79
November	9·39	6·7	2·69
December	10·62	6·6	4·02
1983			
January	11·21	6·0	5·21
February	11·34	6·7	4·64
March	10·98	6·0	4·98
April	10·26	4·9	5·36
May	10·26	4·5	5·76
June	9·94	4·5	5·44
July	9·89	4·7	5·19
August	9·87	5·1	4·77
September	9·69	5·2	4·49
October	9·38	5·0	4·38
November	9·30	4·9	4·40
December	9·42	4·8	4·62
1984			
January	9·45	4·5	4·95
February	9·38	4·5	4·88
March	8·95	4·6	4·35
April	8·88	4·9	3·98
May	9·40	4·9	4·50
June	9·45	4·9	4·55
July	11·51	4·5	7·01
August	11·07	4·3	6·77
September	10·83	3·9	6·93
October	10·67	4·2	6·47
November	9·93	4·1	5·83
December	9·82	4·1	5·72
1985			
January	11·68	4·6	7·08
February	13·76	4·6	9·16
March	13·63	5·2	8·43
April	12·76	5·3	7·46
May	12·66	5·3	7·36
June	12·44	5·3	7·14
July	12·04	5·2	6·84
August	11·50	5·3	6·20
September	11·55	5·6	5·95
October	11·55	5·2	6·35
November	11·57	5·2	6·37
December	11·76	5·1	6·66
1986			
January	12·83	4·9	7·93
February	12·65	4·8	7·85
March	11·72	4·0	7·72
April	10·48	3·4	7·08
May	10·22	3·1	7·12
June	9·78	3·3	6·48
July	9·96	3·2	6·76
August	9·84	3·3	6·54
September	10·12	3·4	6·72
October	11·04	3·4	7·64
November	11·17	3·3	7·87
December	11·36	3·5	7·86
1987			
January	11·05	3·6	7·45
February	10·86	3·7	7·16
March	9·97	3·8	6·17
April	9·80	3·6	6·20
May	8·82	3·8	5·02
June	8·90	3·5	5·40
July	9·21	3·7	5·51
August	10·04	3·7	6·34
September	10·16	3·5	6·66
October	9·98	3·9	6·08
November	8·95	4·0	4·95
December	8·77	4·0	4·77
1988			
January	8·97	3·7	5·27
February	9·27	3·6	5·67
March	8·89	3·8	5·09
April	8·30	4·2	4·10
May	8·03	4·4	3·63
June	8·93	4·7	4·23
July	10·55	5·0	5·55
August	11·39	5·0	6·39
September	12·15	5·2	6·95
October	12·04	5·1	6·94
November	12·31	5·1	7·21
December	13·13	5·1	8·03
1989			
January	13·14	5·5	7·64
February	13·02	5·7	7·32
March	13·05	5·7	7·35
April	13·13	5·9	7·23
May	13·14	6·0	7·14
June	14·15	5·9	8·25
July	13·92	5·8	8·12
August	13·85	5·7	8·15
September	14·02	5·8	8·22
October	15·02	6·1	8·92
November	15·11	6·1	9·01
December	15·12	6·1	9·02
1990			
January	15·16	6·1	9·06

	Average 3 month inter-bank rate (i)	RPI excluding mips (ii)	Difference (iii)
February	15·11	6·2	8·91
March	15·29	6·3	8·99
April	15·21	7·9	7·31
May	15·15	8·1	7·05
June	14·97	8·2	R 6·77
July	14·95	8·3	R 6·65
August	15·00	9·1	R 5·90
September	14·91	9·5	R 5·41
October	14·03	9·5	R 4·53
November	13·64	9·2	R 4·44
December	13·80	9·0	R 4·80
1991			
January	13·97	8·5	R 5·47
February	13·25	8·6	R 4·65
March	12·40	8·4	R 4·00
April	11·95	6·8	R 5·15
May	11·53	6·6	R 4·93
June	11·24	6·9	R 4·34
July	11·09	6·8	* 4·29
August	10·89	6·2	* 4·69
September	10·29	5·7	* 4·59

(a) Column (iii) only shows difference between columns (i) and (ii), not the "real" interest rate as usually calculated. For this see OR 12 June 1991, cols. 549-554w.
(b) *GDP figures only available until 1991 Q2.

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the real interest rates in the United Kingdom and Germany for each of the last 60 months using as real rates the difference between MLR and the underlying rate of inflation.

Mr. Maples *[holding answer 12 November 1991]:* Official interest rates, such as the MLR or the German discount rate, are not comparable across countries. International comparisons therefore generally use market interest rates; three-month inter-bank rates have been used in the table.

There is no generally agreed definition of "underlying inflation". For Germany the table uses consumer price inflation excluding rent. For the United Kingdom the retail prices index excluding mortgage interest payments has been used.

There is no single measure of real interest rates. They are most often calculated by deflating the interest rate by an appropriate measure of inflation, rather than from a simple difference between two rates. The table uses the method suggested in my hon. Friend's question.

	United Kingdom 3 month interest rates less RPI excluding mips	German 3 month interest rates less CPI excluding rent
1986		
January	7·9	3·5
February	7·9	3·9
March	7·7	4·6
April	7·1	4·9
May	7·1	5·0
June	6·4	5·0
July	6·7	5·3
August	6·4	5·3
September	6·8	4·2
October	7·7	5·7
November	7·9	6·2
December	7·9	6·4
1987		
January	7·5	5·8
February	7·2	5·0
March	6·2	4·6
April	6·2	4·2
May	5·0	4·0
June	5·4	3·9
July	5·5	3·6
August	6·3	3·4
September	6·7	3·8
October	6·1	4·1
November	5·0	3·0
December	4·9	1·9
1988		
January	5·3	2·7
February	5·7	2·5
March	5·1	2·5
April	4·1	2·4
May	3·6	2·5
June	4·2	2·8
July	5·6	3·9
August	6·4	4·4
September	7·0	3·7
October	6·9	3·8
November	7·2	3·5
December	8·0	3·8
1989		
January	7·6	3·5
February	7·3	4·1
March	7·4	4·2
April	7·2	3·6
May	7·1	4·2
June	8·3	4·2
July	8·1	4·4
August	8·2	4·3
September	8·2	4·5
October	8·9	5·0
November	9·0	5·3
December	9·0	5·0
1990		
January	9·1	5·6
February	8·9	5·7
March	9·0	5·9
April	7·3	6·1
May	7·1	6·2
June	6·8	6·2
July	6·6	6·0
August	5·9	5·7
September	5·4	5·6
October	4·5	5·3
November	4·4	6·0
December	4·8	6·6
1991		
January	5·5	6·6
February	4·7	6·5
March	4·0	6·8
April	5·2	6·6
May	4·9	6·3
June	4·3	5·8
July	4·3	4·7
August	4·7	5·2
September	4·6	5·3

THE ARTS

Devon

Mr. Speller: To ask the Minister for the Arts what assistance is to be given to the county of Devon in the next 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton *[holding answer 12 November 1991]:* The detailed allocation of the Government's grant for the support of the arts is a matter for the Arts Council of Great Britain and, where appropriate, the regional arts boards through which the Arts Council provides support for regional arts development.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Animals (Scientific Procedures)

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of project licences granted under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 for 1990 in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, respectively.

Mrs. Rumbold: Our records show that 613 project licences were issued in Great Britain in 1990. I understand from the Department of Health and Social Services for Northern Ireland, which is responsible for administering the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 in Northern Ireland, that 31 project licences were issued there in 1990.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the numbers of scientific procedures on living animals reported in 1990 authorised by project licences in the following severity categories, *(a)* mild, *(b)* moderate, *(c)* substantial and *(d)* unclassified in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, respectively.

Mrs. Rumbold: Statistical returns of procedures submitted for the purposes of preparing the annual statistical publications are not classified by severity category. Although an applicant for a project licence is required to assess the overall severity of the proposed project, the project licence may authorise a range of procedures with differing severity limits. The assessments of the severity of individual procedures and the assessment of the overall severity of the project as a whole are prospective. The purpose of this assessment is to allow the likely adverse effects on the animals to be used to be weighed against the benefits likely to accrue from the research, as required by section 5(4) of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many of the total institutions in the United Kingdom which use non-human primates have so far conformed with the minimum standards of the code of practice on the housing and care of animals used in scientific procedures introduced in February 1989; and within what time frame the remainder will be required to conform;

(2) how many United Kingdom institutions currently conform to maximum standards outlined in the special considerations of the code of practice relating to cage furniture, opportunities for social interaction, foraging, maximum vertical flight height and training the animals to co-operate for routine procedures.

Mrs. Rumbold: The special considerations of the Home Office code of practice to which the hon. Member refers relate to non-human primates. Since the Home Office code of practice was published, there has been a marked improvement in the standard of facilities for non-human primates in designated establishments. There has also been an encouraging increase in awareness within establishments of the desirability of providing environmental enrichment and appropriate upgrading in accordance with programmes agreed with the inspectorate.

Statistics on the housing of non-human primates are not routinely collected centrally, although the Home Office inspectorate carried out a special survey of large non-human primate holding facilities in 1988. A further review of establishments using these larger primates is planned for next year and one of its aims will be to examine progress made in improving facilities since the 1988 review.

Juveniles (Detention)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the educational training and recreational facilities made available to those children detained in relation to section 53 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933.

Mrs. Rumbold: Juveniles sentenced to detention under section 53 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 may be held either in the prison system, normally in a young offender institution, or in the child care system as the Secretary of State directs. In young offender institutions those under school leaving age receive a minimum of 15 hours education a week. Educational programmes include academic subjects, life and social skills, leisure activities and work skills. Older juveniles are expected to participate in these educational programmes although they are not compulsory: alternative constructive activities are provided for those who decline education.

Arrangements are also made for participation in physical education for at least one hour each weekday on average, with the opportunity to attend additional physical education, sports and recreational activities in the evening and at the weekend.

Detainees held in the child care system also receive a full programme of education and in some exceptional circumstances approval might be given for attendance at a local school. Many child care establishments have good recreational facilities. In addition, approval may be given for suitable offenders to participate in educational and recreational activities within the community under appropriate supervision.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department at what stage of detention of a child detained under the terms of section 53 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933, he or she is eligible for home visits; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Any juvenile offender detained under this power in a young offender institution may be allowed a home visit as part of preparation for release when a date has been approved for him or her to be released on licence. Home visits may also be allowed before release on licence has been approved, under the home leave scheme, at a time depending upon the security classification of the establishment in which the juvenile offender is detained. For example, in open young offender institutions juvenile offenders serving determinate sentences may take their first home leave when they have reached the one third point of their sentences, and juvenile offenders detained for life are eligible for home leave when they have completed nine months in open conditions. On the other hand, in the most secure young offender institutions, juvenile offenders are

not allowed home leave until nine months before they are due to be released. In addition, home visits may be allowed on compassionate grounds at any stage of detention if this is warranted by the circumstances.

Juvenile offenders detained in community homes and youth treatment centres do not become eligible for home visits at any fixed point in their sentences. Such visits are normally allowed as part of each detainee's treatment programme and preparation for release and the time at which this should commence is considered on its merits in each case.

Illegal Parking

Mr. Summerson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the costs of towing away illegally parked vehicles in greater London; and what was the total amount of moneys received in redemption charges since the task was put out to contract.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the removal of illegally parked vehicles was put out to contract initially in three areas of the Metropolitan police district in February 1988. There are now 11 areas covering 11 boroughs or parts of those boroughs. The total cost of the contracted-out services up to the end of 1990-91 was £24·5 million. The redemption charges received in the same period amounted to £19·5 million.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Board

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list *(a)* the names, periods of office and remuneration of the chairman and members of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board *(b)* the number of officials employed by the board and *(c)* the number and proportion of these officials who are located in Scotland.

Mr. John Patten: The names and dates of appointment of the chairman and members of the board are as follows:

	Date of appointment
Chairman	
Lord Carlisle of Bucklow PC QC	1 December 1988
Members	
Mr. James Law QC	29 September 1970
Mr. Charles Whitby QC	20 September 1975
Mr. Barry Chedlow QC	13 January 1976
Mr. David Calcutt QC	5 September 1977
Miss Beryl Cooper QC	12 September 1978
Miss Shirley Ritchie QC	23 June 1980
Sir John Palmer JP	6 March 1981
Mr. Stuart Shields QC	13 March 1981
Mr. Hugh Carlisle QC	22 December 1982
Mr. Colin Fawcett QC	12 April 1983
Mr. Michael Park CBE[1]	8 July 1983
Mr. Martin Thomas OBE QC	9 July 1985
Mr. John Crowley QC	3 July 1985
Sir Arthur Hoole	30 July 1985
Mr. Donald Robertson QC[1]	1 April 1986
Mr. Michael Lewer QC	30 September 1986
Mr. Peter Weitzman QC	8 November 1986
Mr. Conrad Seagroatt QC	15 November 1986
Mr. John Archer QC	2 January 1987
Mr. Owen Thomas QC	18 March 1987
Mr. Leighton Williams QC	26 March 1987
Mr. Graeme Hamilton QC	15 April 1987
Mr. William Gage QC	22 December 1987
Mr. Barry Green QC	24 December 1987
Mrs. Janet Smith QC	29 December 1987
Mr. Thomas Dawson QC[1]	31 January 1988
Sir Derek Bradbeer OBE	18 April 1988
Mr. Crawford Lindsay QC	19 April 1988
Mr. Robert Smith QC	7 November 1988
Lord Macaulay of Bragar QC[1]	12 January 1989
Miss Diana Cotton QC	26 January 1989
Mr. Donald Mackay QC[1]	6 February 1989
Mr. Evan Stone QC	13 July 1989
Mr. Daniel Brennan QC	21 September 1989
Mr. Timothy Preston QC	25 September 1989
Mr. John Cherry QC	21 October 1989
Mr. Kevin Drummond QC[1]	25 April 1990
Mr. Edward Gee	26 July 1990
Mr. David Barker QC	29 September 1990
His Honour James Kingham	24 December 1990
His Honour Lewis McCreery	31 December 1990
His Honour David West-Russell	2 January 1991
His Honour Thomas O Kellock QC	31 July 1991

[1]Scottish Member

The readily available information on remuneration, contained in the board's annual report for the year ended 31 March 1990 (Cm. 1365), is as follows.

The emoluments of Lord Carlisle QC were £50,342 and of the highest paid board member £66,488.

Other members' emoluments, excluding VAT, were within the following ranges:

	1989-90 £ *Number*	*1988-89* £ *Number*
Not exceeding 5,000	4	3
5,001-10,000	2	1
10,001-15,000	1	—
15,001-20,000	4	—
20,001-25,000	5	3
25,001-30,000	4	6
30,001-35,000	5	4
35,001-40,000	4	7
40,001-45,000	3	3
45,001-50,000	5	4
50,001-55,000	2	2
over 55,000	1	—
	40	33

At the end of October 1991 the board had 386 staff; 274 —70·7 per cent.—in Glasgow and 113 in London.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list *(a)* the number of applications for compensation submitted to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board from (i) England and Wales and (ii) Scotland in each of the past five years, *(b)* the average amount of time taken by the board to deal with an application, *(c)* the total amount of compensation paid in each of the past five years and *(d)* the average sum paid to victims of rape and sexual assault; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The number of applications received by the board from England and Wales, and Scotland, in the past five years, with the compensation paid, are given in the table.

	Number of applications			
	England and Wales	*Scotland*	*Total*	*Compensation paid (£)*
1986-87	35,957	6,344	42,301	48,241,764
1987-88	35,940	7,114	43,054	52,042,581
1988-89	36,285	7,100	43,385	69,381,286
1989-90	45,700	7,955	53,655	72,721,563
1990-91[1]	43,432	7,388	50,820	109,330,303

[1] Provisional figures.

The board does not produce statistics on the average time for processing applications, but percentages of cases completed within certain periods of registration are shown in the board's annual reports, copies of which are in the Library.

The board does not keep a central record of the amount of compensation awarded in cases of rape and sexual assault.

Bail

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to introduce a new offence of committing a crime while on bail; and if he will make a statement on Northumbria police's recent report on the subject.

Mr. John Patten: Home Office researchers have been reviewing recent studies by Northumbria police, and others, of offending on bail. In the light of the results of the review, we shall consider urgently what further action could reduce offending on bail.

Independent Television Levy

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has completed his review of the ITV levy rates; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: On 1 January 1990 a mixed levy on profits and advertising revenue was introduced, with the intention of recovering in the 1990-92 ITV contract extension period broadly the same yield as would have arisen under the 66·7 per cent. levy on domestic profits which operated until 1986, other things being equal.

Although advertising revenue is likely to rise in real terms in 1992, to date it has been considerably lower than was expected when the new rates were set. This means that over the three years the levy is likely to raise more than we intended. I therefore propose to adjust the levy rates for the final year of the levy's existence in its current form. The free slice on net advertising revenue—NAR—will be raised from £15 million to £25 million and the rate of NAR levy reduced from 10 to 2·5 per cent. The levy on profits will remain unchanged.

These changes will take effect once the necessary regulations have been approved by both Houses of Parliament.

Psychiatric Patients (Homicide)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many psychiatric patients discharged from Home Office institutions have committed homicide in each of the last five years.

Mrs. Rumbold: I regret that this information is not available.

Burglary

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration he will give to funding crime prevention measures, including improved street lighting, to help reverse the increased level of burglary in Stoke-on-Trent, North constituency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: Grants for specific crime prevention projects are made under the Home Office safer cities programme and the Department of the Environment's estate action and urban programme schemes. These are targeted largely at inner city areas where crime rates are generally higher than elsewhere. Staffordshire police are taking action to tackle the incidence of burglary in Stoke-on-Trent. Measures such as the development of neighbourhood watch schemes and encouraging householders to take steps, often at little or no cost, to secure their property can be simple but effective. Recent research for the Home Office has shown, however, that while good street lighting can help to reduce the fear of crime, it has little effect on crime itself.

Fire Services (Chiswick)

Sir Barney Hayhoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will ensure that there is no reduction in the provison of fire services covering the Chiswick area as a result of reorganisation of the London fire service.

Mr. John Patten: It is for the London fire and civil defence authority to consider the deployment of its resources in the light of the recent review of fire cover in the capital. Should the authority subsequently propose to close any fire stations, or to reduce the number of operational firefighters or appliances, my right hon. Friend's approval would be required under section 19 of the Fire Services Act 1947. My right hon. Friend would not grant this unless we were satisfied that the authority would maintain the nationally recommended minimum standards of fire cover.

Begging and Sleeping Rough

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were *(a)* prosecuted for begging, *(b)* convicted of begging, *(c)* prosecuted for sleeping rough and *(d)* convicted of sleeping rough in each police district in England and Wales in the year ending 31 December 1990.

Mr. John Patten: Information is not yet available for 1990. The table shows the number of prosecutions and convictions for begging and sleeping out offences by police force area in 1989.

Number of defendants prosecuted and convicted for the offences of begging and sleeping out under the Vagrancy Act 1824 by Police Force Area 1989

England and Wales

Police Force Area	*Begging*		*Sleeping Out*	
	Prosecutions	*Convictions*	*Prosecutions*	*Convictions*
Avon and Somerset	15	14	—	—
Bedfordshire	2	1	1	—
Cambridgeshire	10	9	—	—
Cumbria	3	3	—	—

Police Force Area	Begging		Sleeping Out	
	Prosecutions	Convictions	Prosecutions	Convictions
Devon and Cornwall	20	19	—	—
Dorset	3	2	—	—
Essex	—	—	1	1
Greater Manchester	2	1	3	1
Hampshire	5	3	2	—
Hertfordshire	1	1	—	—
Humberside	1	1	2	2
Kent	1	1	—	—
Lancashire	7	3	1	1
London, City of	5	5	—	—
Merseyside	7	6	1	—
Metropolitan Police District (MPD)	1,251	1,188	12	10
North Yorkshire	1	1	—	—
Staffordshire	1	1	—	—
Surrey	1	1	—	—
Sussex	19	17	—	—
Thames Valley	40	37	1	1
West Midlands	2	1	—	—
Wiltshire	3	3	—	—
South Wales	2	1	—	—
England and Wales	1,402	1,319	24	16

No prosecutions were recorded in the Police Force Areas of Cheshire, Cleveland, Derbyshire, Durham, Gloucestershire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Northamptonshire, Northumbria, Nottinghamshire, South Yorkshire, Suffolk, Warwickshire, West Mercia, West Yorkshire, Dyfed Powys, Gwent and North Wales.

Vagrancy Act 1824

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations he has received and from whom in respect of the Vagrancy Act 1824 and its operation.

Mr. John Patten: In the past 12 months we have received 11 representations from right hon. and hon. Members and 16 from members of the public about the Vagrancy Act 1824. We have also responded to 12 parliamentary questions and noted one early-day motion on the subject. These figures include representations from those who support the present legislation or want to see more powers as well as those who oppose it.

United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service about the increases in resources for its work.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Discussions have been continuing between the Home Office and representatives of UKIAS on the resources needed to enable the organisation to respond to an increased workload. An initial payment of £200,000 has been made to UKIAS to enhance the refugee unit and further amounts will be made available for this purpose as they become necessary.

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost to the taxpayer of legal aid provided through the legal aid service and through the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service to asylum seekers for the most recent 12-month period for which figures are available.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand that legal aid for all immigration cases was £2·65 million for 1990-91. No separate figure is available for asylum-related costs. For the year ending March 1991, the Home Office provided UKIAS with £72,690, as part of the annual grant in aid, towards the cost of its refugee unit.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many crimes were *(a)* recorded and *(b)* reported but unrecorded relating to (i) vandalism, (ii) theft from vehicles, (iii) burglary, (iv) wounding, (v) theft of vehicles, (vi) theft from persons, (vii) robbery and (viii) theft from homes, in each police authority area in Wales for every year between 1979 to 1990.

Mr. John Patten: Information available to the Home Office is for recorded crimes—notifiable offences—only and tables are published for police force areas for Wales in table 32 of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales" for the year 1979: for 1980 to 1989 in "Criminal Statistics England and Wales Supplementary Volume 3", table 3.1. Copies of these publications are in the Library, as are tables for 1990. Information about crime reported to the police but not recorded by them is not collected centrally. There is no specific offence of vandalism, but criminal damage is usually regarded as covering this type of offence.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of total crimes was accounted for by *(a)* burglary, *(b)* robbery, *(c)* criminal damage, *(d)* fraud and forgery, *(e)* sexual offences, *(f)* violence against the person, *(g)* theft and *(h)* other offences, in each police authority area in Wales for every year between 1979 to 1990.

Mr. John Patten: Information for the years 1988-90 is contained in the table. Information for earlier years could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Percentage of notifiable offences recorded in Wales by police force area

Number of offences

	Burglary	*Robbery*	*Criminal damage*	*Fraud and forgery*	*Sexual offences*	*Violence against the person*	*Theft*	*Other offences*
1990								
Dyfed Powys	16·5	0·1	17·9	6·4	1·5	8·8	47·9	1·0
Gwent	16·5	0·3	17·1	3·7	1·0	7·0	53·7	0·7
North Wales	22·0	0·2	18·7	3·1	0·8	6·2	48·3	0·7
South Wales	20·2	0·2	20·4	2·2	0·4	3·2	52·9	0·5
1989								
Dyfed Powys	15·4	0·1	19·6	6·4	1·5	8·2	47·7	1·1
Gwent	15·2	0·2	17·6	4·2	1·3	7·8	53·1	0·6
North Wales	21·3	0·2	17·8	5·2	1·5	6·5	46·8	0·7
South Wales	21·2	0·2	19·1	2·3	0·4	3·8	52·4	0·5
1988								
Dyfed Powys	16·3	0·1	19·2	8·0	1·6	6·3	47·5	1·1
Gwent	17·1	0·2	16·1	4·3	1·2	7·3	53·1	0·7
North Wales	25·0	0·2	15·0	5·3	0·9	6·2	46·9	0·5
South Wales	21·5	0·2	16·0	2·3	0·4	3·3	55·9	0·4

Immigration (Carriers' Liability)

Mr. Mudd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will instruct the immigration service not to impose the £2,000 penalty on carriers in circumstances of passengers' non-possession of valid United Kingdom entry documents, in the case of transit passengers required to be permitted to proceed to an onward destination, pursuant to the current instructions under the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Charges are not imposed under the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987 in respect of passengers who fulfil the published criteria of the visa waiver for transit purposes.

Bus Lanes

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what have been the number of prosecutions of motorists for illegal driving in bus lanes during restricted hours in Greater London in each of the last three years.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is not separately identified in the motoring offences statistics collected centrally. However, I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that 16,525 fixed penalties notices were issued by the Metropolitan police during 1990 for the offence of contravening a bus lane, a category which excludes parking offences.

Football Offences Act

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give a breakdown of the dates and venues of the matches from which arose each of the offences under sections 2 to 4 of the Football Offences Act outlined in his answer to the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde of 17 October 1991, *Official Report*, column *188*.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* The information requested is as follows.

Date	*Match*	*Number of arrests*
Section 2 (throwing of missiles)		
17 August	Scarborough *v.* Mansfield Town	3
	Rotherham United *v.* Burnley	1
23 August	Wigan Athletic *v.* Chester City	3
24 August	Newcastle United *v.* Watford	1
5 October	York City *v.* Scarborough	1
	Arsenal *v.* Chelsea	1
Section 3 (indecent or racialist chanting)		
17 August	Arsenal *v.* QPR	2
24 August	Tottenham Hotspur *v.* Chelsea	4
	Wimbledon *v.* West Ham United	1
28 August	Chelsea *v.* Notts County	1
31 August	Chelsea *v.* Luton Town	1
	Arsenal *v.* Manchester City	6
4 September	Newcastle United *v.* Watford	1
7 September	Arsenal *v.* Coventry City	4
	Hartlepool United *v.* Leyton Orient	1
14 September	Newcastle United *v.* Watford	1
21 September	Newcastle United *v.* Millwall	1
Section 4 (going on to the playing area)		
17 August	Doncaster Rovers *v.* Carlisle United	1
	AFC Bournmouth *v.* Darlington	2
	Brighton *v.* Tranmere	1
	Barnsley *v.* Sunderland	3
21 August	Derby County *v.* Middlesbrough	1
31 August	West Ham United *v.* Notts County	1
4 September	Millwall *v.* Brighton	1
	Newcastle United *v.* Plymouth Argyle	1
7 September	Notts County *v.* Liverpool	2
	Derby County *v.* Barnsley	1
	Burnley *v.* Crewe Alexandra	2
	Rotherham United *v.* Hereford United	7
14 September	Stoke City *v.* Fulham	1
	Bury *v.* Huddersfield Town	1
17 September	Swindon Town *v.* Leicester	3
	Stoke City *v.* Hartlepool United	1
21 September	Everton *v.* Coventry City	1
	Hartlepool United *v.* Birmingham City	1
	Rotherham United *v.* Maidstone United	1
28 September	Middlesbrough *v.* Sunderland	2
	Newcastle United *v.* Derby County	2
	Stoke City *v.* Stockport County	2
	Barnet *v.* Cardiff City	2

Royal Parks

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration has been given to the security implications of the contracting out of the management of the royal parks for those public buildings and royal palaces under the protection of the Metropolitan police.

Mr. Heseltine: I have been asked to reply.

The security implications for the royal palaces, public buildings and MoD property of contracting out the garden and landscape maintenance work in the royal parks are considered in the same way as they are whenever a contractor's staff undertakes work in such buildings or their gardens.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Accommodation Strategy

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if any conclusions have yet been reached following his Department's review of its accommodation strategy.

Mr. Leigh: The review is not yet completed.

Taiwan

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the value of British export sales to Taiwan in each of the past 10 years and the equivalent figures for France and Germany.

Mr. Redwood: The information is available from an OECD publication called "Monthly Statistics of Foreign Trade" held in the House of Commons Library.

Enterprise Initiative

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what evaluation there has been so far of the usefulness of his Department's enterprise initiative to *(a)* consultancy companies and *(b)* entrepreneurs in receipt of assisted consultancy advice; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: Since it was introduced in January 1988 the enterprise initiative consultancy scheme has made a major contribution towards overcoming the reluctance of small and medium-sized firms to use outside expertise to improve their competitiveness: more than 90,000 firms have sought assistance under the scheme, the majority of which have never before used consultants.

The need for monitoring and evaluation has been built into the enterprise initiative consultancy scheme from its inception. On going in-house monitoring is supplemented by independent evaluation. This is centered on interview surveys with two samples of assisted firms, carried out by independent consultants, Segal Quince Wicksteed Ltd. The two panels of firms are interviewed shortly after project completion and then again one to two years later. Reports of the first three stages of the four-stage survey programme have been completed and published as follows:

(a) Evaluation of the Consultancy Initiatives by Segal Quince Wicksteed, published in 1989 by HMSO, ISBN 0 11 514677 6.

(b) Second Stage, published by HMSO in 1991, ISBN 0 11 515269 5.

(c) Third Stage, published by HMSO in 1991, ISBN 011 515270 9.

The results of the fourth stage will be published in the new year.

Evaluation has demonstrated the benefit to firms of an assisted consultancy project. It has found that 70 per cent. of assisted firms began to reap clear commercial benefits within a year of their assisted consultancy project and expected to recover their full project costs within three years. Firms had experienced improvements in the relationship between operating costs and turnover; and had experienced wider benefits in terms of improvements to management capability and an increased confidence in running the business.

One of the major aims of the enterprise initiative consultancy scheme is to encourage the use of consultants among small and medium-sized firms. Evaluation has found that 51 per cent. of assisted firms were more likely to use full-price consultancy in future. The benefits to consultancy companies of the scheme are the opportunity to work on projects encouraged and supported by the scheme; and, in the longer term, the general opening up of the small and medium-sized firm market to consultancy.

Indonesia

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will now make it his policy to provide information on export credits made available to Indonesia.

Mr. Lilley: The full range of Export Credits Guarantee Department facilities is available to support short and medium-term transactions with Indonesia subject to the ECGD's normal underwriting judgment being satisfied.

Efficiency Reviews

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he intends to ask the Monopolies and Mergers Commission to undertake an efficiency review of a publicly owned body under section 11 of the Competition Act 1980.

Mr. Redwood: As part of its regular programme of efficiency studies of publicly owned bodies, the commission has been asked to look into the service provided by the Commonwealth Development Corporation. The formal reference was made today. It asks the MMC to look at whether, in carrying out its functions under the relevant legislation, the CDC could improve efficiency, reduce costs and improve the quality of service provided.

The commission will report in five months.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has on the level at which British arms manufacturers are currently supplying equipment to the warring factions in Yugoslavia.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 11 November 1991]:* None. The Twelve members of the European Community agreed an embargo on the supply of arms to Yugoslavia on 5 July 1991. Her Majesty's Government fully supported this initiative and the DTI, in anticipation, revoked all export licences for weapons and military equipment to Yugoslavia on 3 July 1991. These measures were reinforced by the adoption of United Nations Security Council resolution 713 on 25 September which placed a general and complete embargo on all deliveries of weapons and military equipment to Yugoslavia.

Iraq Arms Embargo

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list any chemicals with potential military uses which were exported to Iraq in contravention of the arms embargo.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 11 November 1991]:* There is no evidence that any chemicals under statutory control have been exported to Iraq in contravention of the statement concerning the supply of lethal defence equipment made by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on 29 October 1985.

Development Areas

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what consultations are required by the European Commission prior to the United Kingdom Government exercising its right to create new development areas within the United Kingdom.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 12 November 1991]:* The European Commission's approval is required for assisted area designations made under section 1 of the Industrial Development Act 1982. Consultations would take place as and when changes were proposed, and from time to time under the Commission's own rolling programme to check member states' support programmes.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will now consider conferring development area status on travel-to-work areas within the Borders region in south-east Scotland.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 12 November 1991]:* No. The Government have repeatedly made it clear that they will not make piecemeal changes to, nor conduct a full review of, the assisted areas map during the present Parliament.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the powers the Government have under the Assisted Areas Order 1984 to designate new areas under the regional development provisions.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 12 November 1991]:* The power to designate development or intermediate area status to areas is contained in section 1(1) and (3) of the Industrial Development Act 1982. The Assisted Areas Order 1984 was made in exercise of these powers.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will now review the criteria by which development area status is conferred on new areas within the United Kingdom.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 12 November 1991]:* In designating assisted areas, the Secretary of State is required under the terms of section 1(3) of the Industrial Development Act 1982 to

"—have regard to all the circumstances actual and expected, including the state of employment and unemployment, population changes, migration and the objectives of regional policies".

The particular parameters to be used in constructing the map will be determined when a review is done.

ENVIRONMENT

Royal Parks

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultations were made before the decision to contract out the royal parks was taken.

Mr. Heseltine: It is the Government's policy to buy in services after competitive tender and I see no need for consultation on each occasion that we do so. We are consulting very widely on the future role and use of the royal parks.

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) on what basis the decision to close the royal parks apprentice training centre was taken; and how much money will be saved by the closure;

(2) what will be the future arrangements for apprentice training and who will fix the pay for apprentices, following contracting out of the management of the royal parks; and what arrangements will be made for apprentices to gain experience in a range of parks following contracting out.

Mr. Heseltine: When the gardening and landscape maintenance work is contracted out next March the royal parks will no longer employ any horticultural apprentices and there will be no need for the training centre at Eltham. The Department will, however, require companies awarded contracts in the parks to take part in a new royal parks apprenticeship scheme. The academic part of the training will be provided at Southwark college. Successful tenderers will offer employment to existing apprentices and make arrangements for them to complete their training. They will also be required to take on new apprentices each year to continue training at its present level. Where necessary, arrangements will be made for apprentices to move between parks to get a wide range of experience. It will be for the firms concerned to fix the pay for apprentices, but all firms tendering for contracts are being asked to supply information about their proposed rates of pay and that will be taken into account in awarding contracts.

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which outside consultants have been involved in the drawing up of specifications for the management of each of the royal parks.

Mr. Heseltine: No specifications are being drawn up for the management of the royal parks, which will remain the responsibility of my Department. The firm of Gillespies has been involved in drawing up the specifications for the day-to-day garden and landscape maintenance work in the royal parks.

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what savings he expects to achieve from the contracting out of the management of the royal parks; and what are the redundancy costs involved.

Mr. Heseltine: The contracting-out of the garden and landscape maintenance work in the royal parks is about maintaining and raising standards and spreading those standards to other parts of the country, while ensuring better value for money. The costs of the redundancies and early retirement have been estimated at around £3 million. This is an acceptable, one-off cost to bear for the benefits of moving this work into the private sector.

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what concern with standards of horticulture has led to the appointment of an advisory committee on standards in the royal parks.

Mr. Heseltine: I am determined to ensure that the standards of horticulture in the royal parks are high. Robin Herbert, president of the Royal Horticultural Society, and his panel will provide a source of independent advice to this process.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the running of the royal parks.

Mr. Yeo: We are determined that in future the existing high standards of quality in the royal parks should be maintained and where possible improved. We have recently undertaken two initiatives aimed at achieving this. A review group, under the chairmanship of Dame Jennifer Jenkins, has been set up to look at the role and the use of the parks. The group is concentrating in the first place on Hyde park and Kensington gardens and will be bringing forward proposals for improving their overall quality. The review group's report is due early next year. In addition, tenders are being invited to carry out the garden and landscape maintenance work in the royal parks from March 1992. Management of the royal parks will remain the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. The contracts will be let by the Department to specifications which lay down high standards and will be closely monitored by the park managers.

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations he has received in favour and against the contracting out of the management of the royal parks.

Mr. Heseltine: I have received a number of representations both for and against the exercise.

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what horticultural qualifications and experience will be required for the managers of the royal parks when their management is contracted out.

Mr. Heseltine: The management of the royal parks is not being contracted out. The parks will continue to be managed by suitably qualified and experienced people employed by the Department.

Bathing Waters

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those EC countries which have designated inland bathing waters under EC directive 76/160.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the EC Commission report "Quality of Bathing Water 1989-1990", copies of which are available in the Library.

Red Data Book Birds

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all the red data book birds in the United Kingdom, with details of their current populations.

Mr. Baldry: I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he is taking to preserve, protect and provide habitat for, British red data book birds; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 some 8 per cent. of Britain's wildlife habitat is protected as sites of special scientific interest—some 5,600 sites. Many of these are important nesting, roosting and feeding sites for species listed in the red data books. The Countryside Commission's countryside stewardship initiative and the programme of environmentally sensitive areas implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, also encourage the conservation of features of our countryside that are important to wildlife, including these birds. I have asked for further advice specific to the needs of these species. I will write to the hon. Member when this is available.

Red Kite

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has taken place in 1991 towards re-establishing the red kite as a breeding species in England and Scotland.

Mr. Baldry: A reintroduction programme now co-ordinated by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and the RSPB began in 1989. It has continued in 1991 with the release of further young birds in suitable areas of England and Scotland. These are intended to form the basis of successful breeding population in future years. To date, 78 red kites have been released, of which 62 are known to have survived.

Sleeping Rough

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give his Department's estimates of the number of people sleeping rough for each of the months October 1990 to October 1991, inclusive, and provide a breakdown of the figures for each local authority area.

Mr. Yeo: The most reliable information available to my Department is contained in "1991 Census: Supplementary Monitor on People Sleeping Rough" published by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys on 9 July 1991; a copy was placed in the Library.

Water Abstraction

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the statutory instruments relevant to the abstraction of water.

Mr. Baldry: The annual "Index to Government Orders" gives details of all the public general statutory instruments which are in force including those relevant to water abstraction. The annual volumes of statutory instruments contain, at the end of the last volume for each year, a classified list of local statutory instruments.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment to what changes the conditions governing the abstraction of water have been subject since 1 January 1990.

Mr. Baldry: The abstraction of water is regulated both by statutory provisions and by the terms of the licence for

each abstraction granted by the National Rivers Authority or, for the authority itself, by the Department. The only changes in the statutory provisions have been in the temporary drought orders made under section 131 of the Water Act 1989. Changes in licence conditions are specific to each licence.

River Quality

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the National Rivers Authority's report on river quality in respect of its comparison of river quality in 1985 and 1990.

Mr. Baldry: There have been references in the press to a preliminary draft of this report, but I believe any comment should await the report as approved and published by the authority later in the year.

Council Tax

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will, in establishing the banding of property values for the purposes of collecting the council tax, introduce a mechanism that will protect the clergy who live in large tied property whilst in receipt of limited stipends.

Mr. Key: My Department is presently discussing with representatives of the churches the position of the clergy under the council tax.

Mortgages

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance has been offered to local authorities who wish to purchase the homes of mortgagees facing repossession as a means to enable the mortgagees to remain in their homes as tenants.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 11 November 1991]:* Long-standing rules have enabled local authorities to acquire property from a defaulting borrower where they are themselves the lender and, if they choose, leave the former owner in place as a tenant. Authorities also acquire property with a view to disposal including disposal of a shared ownership lease. Details of these rules are currently set out in schedule 3 to the Housing Revenue Account Subsidy Determination 1990. They may also provide resources to housing associations to enable them to purchase homes to enable the previous owner to remain on shared ownership terms or as a tenant.

Wind Farms

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance has been issued to farmers wishing to have wind farms on their land if they are in *(a)* environmentally sensitive areas, *(b)* national parks, *(c)* areas of outstanding natural beauty and *(d)* outwith any designated area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 11 November 1991]:* Preliminary guidance about renewable energy installations, including wind farms, was given in a written answer by my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning on 28 March at column *543*. Officials in my Department, the Department of Energy and the Welsh Office are preparing a draft planning policy guidance note—PPG —about renewable energy which we hope to issue for public consultation later this month. The draft PPG will include the Government's proposed planning policies for renewable energy installations in designated and other areas.

Coca-Cola Development, Northampton

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the critical conditions highlighted by the European Commissioner for Environment concerning the Coca-Cola development in Northampton.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 12 November 1991]:* The European Commission's letter of 17 October alleges infraction of directive 85/337/EEC in respect of a number of development projects including the proposed Coca-Cola factory at Brackmills, Northampton. The Commission alleges that the developer's environmental statement which was considered by the local planning authority in granting planning permission failed to cover various relevant significant environmental effects. My Department has asked the authority for its comments for the purpose of providing a full response to the detailed points raised by the Commission. In the meantime, I understand that the developer has submitted a new planning application and accompanying environmental statement in respect of a revised proposal.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will provide a summary of the ballots on grant-maintained school status, tabulated according to *(a)* the proportion of eligible parents voting and *(b)* the proportion of votes cast for and against grant-maintained status.

Mr. Eggar: The information requested by the hon. Member is as follows:

Name of school	*Column A*	*Column B*	*Column C*
Skegness Grammar School	80	95	5
St. James' CE School	89	99	1
Hendon School	76	95	5
The GS For Girls Wilmington	83	94	6
Queen Elizabeth's GM Grammar School	65	79	21
Baverstock Grant-Maintained School	68	75	25
The Kings School Grantham	76	80	20
Old Swinford Hospital	79	96	4
Heckmondwike Grammar School	84	97	3
Bankfield High School	83	97	3
Netherthorpe School	68	92	8
Ribston Hall High School	61	73	27
Claremont High School	63	65	35
Southfield School for Girls	81	93	7
Guildford County School	68	67	33
Blessed Hugh More RC Secondary School	81	100	0
Southpark High School	88	97	3
The Longlands School	84	97	3
Simon Digby Comprehensive School	73	98	2
Rickmansworth School	69	81	19

Name of school	Column A	Column B	Column C
Foster's Grammar School	71	63	37
Lord Digby's Grammar School for Girls	69	51	49
Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School	92	95	5
Watford Grammar School	80	54	46
Stratford School	65	51	49
Francis Bacon School	81	95	5
Sale Grammar School for Boys	72	45	55
Wilmington Grammar School for Boys	88	99	1
Chesterfield School	79	35	65
Droylsden County High School	54	15	85
Hadham Hall School	68	20	80
Weald of Kent Grammar School	76	13	87
Ruffwood School	73	3	97
Eckington School	81	25	75
St. Josephs RC High School	62	22	78
Watford Girls Grammar School	66	36	64
Wade Deacon High School	59	23	77
North Halifax High School	72	82	18
Crossley Heath School	68	80	20
Highwood School	57	81	19
Wymondham College	80	89	11
Pate's Grammar School	62	70	30
Audenshaw School	86	91	9
Wilsons School	76	89	11
Queensbury School	84	97	3
London Oratory School	63	96	4
Queen Elizabeth's GM School for Boys	68	61	39
Colyton Grammar School	82	78	22
Bacup and Rawtenstall Grammar School	69	56	44
Castle Hall Grant-Maintained School	76	82	18
Small Heath School	80	56	44
St. Francis Xavier's College	72	60	40
London Nautical School	63	99	1
Beechen Cliff School	69	55	45
Lancaster Royal Grammar School	68	58	42
Long Field High School	85	96	4
Sir James Altham School	52	59	41
Castlemount School	60	97	3
Ramsden School for Girls	57	71	29
Kettering Boy's School	55	91	9
Hindley Park High School	43	85	15
Southlands School	43	83	17
Marling School	70	71	29
Stroud High School	66	63	37
Bishopshalt School	66	77	23
Wolverhampton Girls High School	76	96	4
Adams' Grammar School	78	91	9
Ravensbourne School for Girls	59	27	73
Millais School	79	9	91
Queen Elizabeth's Senior High School	64	30	70
Chichele School	58	39	61
Siddal Moor High School	70	13	87
Gaynes School	66	9	91
St. Helens School	74	48	52
St. Gregory's RC High School	76	4	96
Sir Thomas Rich's School	73	7	93
Preston Manor High School	52	22	78
Bridgewater Hall School	29	66	34
Brindley Hall School	35	59	41
Handsworth Grammar School	81	96	4
Carre's Grammar School	80	85	15
Bournemouth School	81	83	17
The Mountbatten School	54	72	28
The Maplesden Noakes School	66	85	15
Ecclesbourne School	84	64	36
Armthorpe Comprehensive School	60	31	69
The Cornwallis School	54	81	19
St. George's School	59	80	20
Reading School	73	67	33
Chalvedon School	54	52	48
Bullers Wood School for Girls	70	74	26
Sutton Manor High School	87	89	11
The Grammar School for Boys Wilmington	72	45	55
Lancaster Girls Grammar School	67	54	46
King Edward VI School	64	62	38
Failsworth School	66	15	85
Hardley School	64	60	40
Ailwyn Community School	65	17	83
Ripon Grammar School	80	44	56
Woodford County High	69	22	78
Kingsley Park Middle School	60	83	17
Blackfield Middle School	71	27	73
Dearneside Comprehensive School	62	22	78
Swanscombe High School	66	99	1
Cliffe Woods Middle School	53	60	40
Blackpool 6th Form College	68	37	63
Hoo St. Werburgh Middle School	49	19	81
Manor High School	59	98	2
Oldfield School	66	56	44
Bingley Grammar School	72	68	32
Edenbridge Middle School	59	58	42
Kings School	72	40	60
Westcliff High School for Boys	71	69	31
Woodroffe School	62	67	33
St. Bartholomew's School	52	65	35
St. George's CE School	64	89	11
Grange School	70	41	59
Walsingham School	68	96	4
Sexey's School	74	94	6
Alexandra High School	47	31	69
Nonsuch High School For Girls	76	71	29
St Augustine RC School	79	65	35
Queen Elizabeth Grammar School	82	63	37
Beaconsfield High School	73	68	32
Great Barr School	62	52	48
Burgate School	79	88	12
Kingswood School	57	79	21
Caistor Grammar School	62	81	19
Thamesview School	44	71	29
Queensmead School	60	91	9
Manor High School, Oadby	65	27	73
Morecambe High School	66	24	76
Haydon School	67	83	17
Cliffe Woods Primary School Rochester	67	76	24
Aylesford School	56	89	11
Banbury School	60	38	62
Blackthorn Middle School	62	13	87
Chestnut Grove School	58	7	93
Homewood School	63	81	19
Harwood School	64	96	4
King Edward VI School	63	39	61
Parmiters School	72	58	42
Saffron Walden County High School	66	60	40
Hayes Manor School	54	97	3
The Down County Primary School	93	95	5
Dartford Grammar School	78	85	15
Kettleshulme CE Cont Primary School	95	100	0
Kirkbie Kendal School	62	60	40
Clitheroe Royal Grammar School	67	57	43
Ellerdine County Primary School	73	94	6
Watford Girls' Grammar School	75	71	29
Whickham School	78	44	56

Name of school	Column A	Column B	Column C
Moseley Park GM School	62	54	46
St Theresa's RC Girls School	39	32	68
Crossgates Primary School	80	59	41
Drayton Manor High School	55	57	43
Copland Community School	85	99	1
Greenway Comprehensive School	76	99	1
Foster's Boys Grammar School	84	78	22
Lord Digby's Girls Grammar School	81	74	26
Ridgeway JMI School	70	26	74
Newton Bluecoat C of E GM Primary School	89	50	50
Wold Newton Primary School	84	79	21
Vyners School	68	82	18
William Gladstone School	60	98	2
Bourne Primary School	70	91	9
Highams Park School	52	48	52
Southlands Comprehensive School	63	87	13
St. Helen's Primary School	71	87	13
Magdalen CE/Methodist Primary School	83	98	2
Featherstone High School	75	24	76
St. Mary's R.C. Primary School	86	94	6
Appledore CE Primary School	76	89	11
St. Aidan's School	84	97	3
Villiers High School	74	7	93
Weaverham High School	70	45	55
Langley Park Boys School	67	74	26
Coopers School	64	63	37
Boothroyd Junior & Infants School	68	46	54
Collingwood School	66	83	17
Northolt High School	57	76	24
Raines Foundation School	64	74	26
Graveney School	54	87	13
Moulton Primary School	58	42	58
Turnham Junior & Infant School	71	86	14
Mellow Lane School	44	93	7
Townmead School	67	98	2
Arley County Primary School	93	100	0
Sheppey School	45	79	21
Arnewood School	62	79	21
Budmouth School	54	90	10
Burntwood School	73	89	11
Elmbridge School	72	97	3
John Henry Newman School	59	43	57
Kelsey Park School	57	86	14
Lincoln Christ's Hospital School	54	77	23
Oakwood Park Grammar School	81	96	4
The Plume School	56	71	29
Ravens Wood Boys' School	77	91	9
Wood End First School	55	61	39
Wood End Middle School	51	65	35
Northwood School	51	80	20
Senacre High School	54	77	23
Send C of E First School	80	96	4
Manor County First School Byfleet	82	1	9
The Crypt School	61	87	13
St. John the Baptist School	61	79	21
de Stafford School	81	95	5
Greenford High School	65	75	25
Newborough Primary School	80	67	33
Ellen Wilkinson High School	68	88	12
King James 1st Comprehensive School	78	24	76
Dartford Grammar School for Girls	65	87	13
South Farnborough County Infants	67	6	94
Desborough Comprehensive School	62	67	33
Waltham Toll Bar	80	28	72

Name of school	Column A	Column B	Column C
Ravensdale Middle School	61	57	43
Hawkedale 1st School	94	96	4
Oldborough Manor High	51	77	23
Yarborough High School	58	70	30
London Middle School	61	75	25
Gamlingay Village College (Middle School)	63	87	13
Riddlesdown High School	59	56	44
Ash Green School	52	71	29
Glyn School	59	77	23
Redgate Middle School	72	89	11
Silverdale School	81	36	64
Hatchford Junior and Infant School	42	53	47
St. Thomas More RC High School	68	49	51
Snodland CE Primary School	55	77	23
The Skinner's School	84	92	8
King John School	67	74	26
Woolley CE First School	80	86	14
Booth Lower School	61	42	58
Hayes School	65	57	43
Wrotham School	58	77	23
Simon Langton Boys' Grammar School	63	62	38
The Park School	59	94	6
Stoneleigh First School	64	70	30
The Admiral's Middle School	60	66	34
High Oakham Middle School	62	30	70
South Holmwood CE First School	90	98	2
Brookmead County Combined Middle School	65	77	23
Christ Church CE JMI School Chorleywood	84	92	8
Downham Market High School	54	58	42
Eden School	73	98	2
Gordon's School	68	98	2
Norwich Road First and Middle School	58	87	13
St. Paul's CE Primary School	76	17	83
St. Peter's Primary School Tunbridge Wells	81	3	97
Wortley CE Controlled Junior and Infant School	82	90	10
Sir Wilfrid Martineau School	51	31	69
Cranbrook School	66	86	14
Hartshill School	51	57	43
Belmont Primary School	77	52	48
North Rauceby School	82	88	12
Heathside Secondary School	57	80	20
William Alvey CE Junior School	64	86	14
Warmbrook Junior School	75	38	62
Gresham County Primary School	86	90	10
Barnhill School	74	98	2
King John School, Benfleet	52	83	17
Heacham Middle School	75	75	25
Salterlee Primay School	89	84	16
The Philip Morant School	57	59	41
Tudor Grange School	71	45	55
Windmill Ridge Middle School	64	45	55
Borrow Wood Junior School	67	51	49
Boyton Primary School	75	73	27
Denefield School	54	52	48
Walford High School	50	75	25
Brentside High School	44	65	35
Bishop Stopford School	62	22	78
Newstead Wood School	73	82	18
Nower Hill High School	68	40	60
Silverhill Primary School	83	47	53
Langley Grammar School, Slough	59	81	19
Rainham Mark Grammar School	74	73	27

Name of school	Column A	Column B	Column C
Elmwood County Primary School	70	86	14
Bliss Charity Primary School	76	58	42
Crofton Junior School	64	86	14
Parkstone Grammar School, Poole	67	85	15
La Retraite School	83	98	2
Epsom and Ewell High School	60	69	31
Ringwood Comprehensive School	59	87	13
John Fisher School	68	77	23
Ethelburga JMI School	78	96	4
Neroche Primary School	79	27	73
Gartree School	60	83	17
Hassall Green Methodist Primary School	83	91	9
Beaverwood School for Girls	52	68	32
Romanby County Primary School	93	23	77
Castle Hills School, Gainsborough	54	82	18
Dereham Church VA First School	75	75	25
Bowness-on-Solway Primary School	83	93	7
Myton School	57	53	47
Queen Elizabeth High School	65	28	72
Hayton CE Primary School	97	76	24
Newlands Spring County Primary School	83	79	21
Northampton School for Boys	56	68	32
Bridport County Primary School	72	10	90
Cheam High School	57	63	37
Lodge Park School	52	79	21
Fulston Manor School	60	85	15
Westfield County First School	53	26	74
Parkside First School	47	86	14
Underhill Junior School	73	43	57
Baines School	61	82	18
Cromer High School	58	58	42
Robinswood Primary School	68	64	36
Huntingfield Primary School	60	98	2
Deighton High School	54	88	12
Thomas Whitehead VA Lower School	71	83	17
Blindley Heath CE First School	88	98	2
Angley School	70	87	13
Hamilton County Primary School	68	44	56
The Canterbury High	51	86	14
Sir Roger Manwood's School	81	88	12
Trinity School	74	86	14
The City of Portsmouth Boys' School	66	81	19
The North Kesteven School	72	82	18
West Hatch High School	75	93	7
Atherstone Upper School	67	75	25
Robert Napier School, Gillingham	55	90	10
Crofton School, Fareham	72	53	47
Borough Green CP	71	74	26
The Robert Pattison School	71	86	14
The Downs School	64	78	22
Atherstone Lower School	56	77	23
Marshland High, West Walton	68	68	32
Manor JMI School, Walsall	67	65	35
Torells Comprehensive School, Grays	50	72	28
Clifford School, Sheffield	76	66	34
St. George's Middle School, Norfolk	80	29	71
The Malling School	61	78	22

Note: Column A represents the percentage of eligible parents voting.
Column B represents the percentage of "yes" votes of those voting.
Column C represents the percentage of "no" votes of those voting.

Science and Engineering Research Council

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has received the annual report of the Science and Engineering Research Council for 1990-91; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The annual report of the Science and Engineering Research Council—SERC—for 1990-91 has been submitted to me under the requirements of the Science and Technology Act 1965, and a copy is being placed before the House today.

The report describes a challenging year for the council when important decisions were taken about future research priorities. The report describes important developments in science and engineering. These include, among many others.

a. The completion of the MERLIN network of radio-telescopes. In November 1990 I had the pleasure of opening the new 32 metre radio-telescope at Cambridge—the central element of the project. With the linking together of the seven telescopes in the network, the UK now has a facility equivalent to a telescope 230 kilometres in diameter. Observations from the MERLIN system will allow British astronomers to maintain their position in the forefront of their field.

b. The exciting discovery by a team at Cambridge of light-emitting polymers. This is an excellent example of collaboration between physicists and chemists in tackling problems in the important field of materials science. Light-emitting polymers have now been produced of a similar efficiency to conventional light-emitting diodes and the development of such materials to cover the whole of the optical spectrum is now in progress.

c. The Clean Technology programme. This is a joint venture by the SERC and the AFRC which promotes long-range opportunities for research into prospective new clean technologies. Examples of work in progress include investigation of alternatives to bulk chemicals and the concentration and disposal of dilute waste.

d. The identification of a third form of carbon structure in addition to diamond and graphite. These closed cage structures have become known as "fullerenes" after Buckminster Fuller, the architect of the geodesic dome. As well as opening up whole new fields of carbon chemistry and materials science their discovery also promises new insights into the mechanisms of star and planet formation. A group at Sussex university has played a leading role in identifying these structures.

e. In the field of engineering, the development of novel image sensing technology. Work at Edinburgh university has made possible for the first time the combination of analogue image sensors and digital processing circuitry on a single silicon chip. This will enable the production of high resolution image sensors at a substantially lower cost, size and power consumption than previously possible. This important development offers the possibility of new products such as "micro" video cameras, with potential further applications in computer optics, videophones and robotics.

I congratulate the Science and Engineering Research Council on these and other achievements during the year. I expect the council to continue the task of reviewing its forward programme to match changing scientific priorities.

Student Grants

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science by what amount student grants will be reduced, pursuant upon the introduction of the council

tax, based on today's rate of payments made to compensate for the 20 per cent. community charge payments, assuming no increase in the cost of living.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Students' total resources from grant and loans will continue to be reviewed annually in the light of broad overall cost changes, including those in local taxation, affecting students. We have recently announced an increase in the average student support of 4½ per cent. for the academic year 1992-93, thereby at least maintaining its value in real terms. It remains our policy to freeze the basic maintenance grant rates in cash and to apply any increase in resources to the loan facility only.

WALES

Local Government Structure

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give *(a)* the consultants appointed by his Department to evaluate responses to the consultation paper on the structure of local government in Wales, *(b)* the fee agreed in each case, *(c)* the criteria used in selecting the consultants and *(d)* state whether consultants were appointed for the process of drawing up the consultation paper.

Mr. David Hunt: The consultation paper on the structure of local government was produced by my Department; consultants were not engaged. Responses to the paper are being evaluated by my Department in consultation with the Council of Welsh Districts and the Assembly of Welsh Counties and in due course will be the subject of discussion by the Welsh Consultative Council on Local Government. Touche Ross has been appointed following open competition to provide technical advice to enable officials to make an assessment of the financial implications of any reorganisation. The fee agreed is subject to commercial confidentiality.

Patients Charter

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the cost of printing and distributing the patients charter in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The cost of printing and distributing the patients charter for Wales to every household in Wales is £203,030.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many households in Wales are expected to receive the patients charter in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The patients charter for Wales will be sent to all households in Wales. Approximately 1,192,000 copies will be distributed.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the patients charter in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The patients charter for Wales was launched by my hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and myself on 28 October.

The patients charter for Wales is part of the Government's citizens charter initiative aimed at improving the standards of public services. The patients charter aims to raise the standard of the NHS in Wales. It describes the rights of patients and the standards and guarantees which we expect health authorities to achieve.

It reiterates the Government's belief that there must be no change to the fundamental principles on which the NHS was founded and on which it has continued ever since, namely that services should be available to every citizen on the basis of clinical need, regardless of ability to pay, and that the service should mainly be paid for out of general taxation.

The patients charter builds on the aim of making the NHS in Wales a people-centred service. It complements the strategic intent and direction of the NHS in Wales and the all-Wales quality strategy.

The patients charter introduces a number of new measures.

From 1 April 1992 there will be a waiting times guarantee. Patients will be guaranteed admission for treatment by a specific date no later than two years from the day when they are placed on a waiting list. The great majority of patients will be admitted before their guaranteed date. Exceptionally for some treatments it may be necessary to set a date more than two years away. Health authorities or GPs will be responsible for ensuring that the guaranteed times are met, if necessary by offering treatment in an alternative hospital.

Charter standards have been set in several key areas of health care. These are waiting times for an emergency ambulance; waiting times in accident and emergency departments; cancellation of operations; named nurses, midwives and health visitors responsible for patients' care; arrangements for discharge from hospital; waiting times for out-patients.

These standards build on existing good practice. We are asking health authorities to set their own standards in these areas in the first instance, with the aim of meeting all the charter standards as soon as possible.

Local charters will be drawn up jointly by district health authorities and family health services authorities to tell people about the services available in their locality. Health authorities will publish waiting times for out-patient, day care and in-patient treatment by hospital, speciality and individual consultant.

Health authorities will publish standards of service agreed with hospitals and others who provide care. Health authorities will publish an annual report of achievement against local standards, and what action has been taken where necessary to improve performance. The Welsh Office will monitor authorities' performance against these standards.

Hospitals and other organisations which provide health care services will display a patients charter which will explain the main aspects of the service and the standards patients should receive. Details of an information service will be made available shortly.

The Department will be monitoring the performance of all those concerned with health care in these areas.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many copies of the patients charter in Wales have been printed; and if he will give the name and address of the printer.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: A total of 1,253,000 copies of the patients charter for Wales are being printed. An initial quantity of 3,000 copies was produced by Colibri Press Ltd. of Amhurst terrace, Hackney, London. The

production of the remainder was undertaken by Flair Printers of South Portway close, Round Spinney, Northampton. Contracts for printing and distribution were arranged for the Department by the Central Office of Information, in accordance with print procurement procedures.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales to whom the patients charter in Wales has been distributed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The patients charter for Wales has been distributed to health authorities, health professional groups, consumer groups, Members of Parliament and individual members of the public who have requested a copy. The charter will shortly be distributed to all households in Wales. Copies of the charter will also be made available from hospitals, surgeries and other information points.

The charter describes the rights, standards and guarantees which patients can expect from the NHS in Wales. It is important that every household is informed about these matters.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the cost of the public launch of the patients charter in Wales.

Mr Nicholas Bennett: The cost of the launch of the patients charter for Wales was £1,352.

HMI Wales

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when Her Majesty's inspectorate Wales' last annual report was published; and what is the expected publication date of the next annual report.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The last annual report of Her Majesty's inspectorate Wales was published in March 1991. It is anticipated that the next annual report will be published in January 1992.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the future of Her Majesty's inspectorate Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The Education (Schools) Bill introduced on 6 November will establish an independent office of Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools in Wales to oversee arrangements for a new system of regular school inspections and to advise my right hon. Friend about the quality of education provided by schools and the educational standards achieved. Other aspects of the role of Her Majesty's inspectorate in Wales are being considered in the light of the review which has been undertaken and my right hon. Friend will make his proposals known as soon as possible.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the current size of Her Majesty's inspectorate Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Fifty-nine.

St. Michael's Church, Manafon

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the response of Cadw to the request for grant aid towards the maintenance and repair of the historic church of St. Michael, Manafon.

Sir Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend makes grants towards the costs of repairing churches and other buildings judged by the Historic Buildings Council for Wales—our independent adviser—to be of outstanding architectural or historic interest.

The council's assessment of St. Michael's church, Manafon, after considering further information provided by the church authorities, is that the building is not outstanding and, therefore, regrettably does not qualify for grant aid under the terms of the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953.

Wind Farms

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on his Department's policy towards proposals for the construction of wind farms in rural Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: The Government wish to exploit the development of renewable energy resources wherever they are environmentally and economically acceptable. The policy of encouraging renewables is being carried forward in two principal ways: first, through a Government-funded research, development and demonstration programme; and, secondly, by removing institutional barriers to the renewables, for example by introducing the Non-Fossil Fuel Obligation Renewables Order. We intend to issue a draft planning policy guidance note on renewable energy, including wind farms, for public consultation later this month.

Lamb Sales

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will estimate the gross value of fat lamb sales by farmers at live markets and direct to abattoirs, respectively, in Wales in each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The estimated gross values of fat lambs sold in Wales at live markets and direct to abattoirs in each year since 1979 are shown in the table:

	Sales at live sales (£,000)	*Sales to abattoirs (£,000)*
1979	62,705	13,951
1980	73,595	16,375
1981	96,890	21,557
1982	102,575	22,822
1983	105,725	27,766
1984	125,286	37,423
1985	129,143	41,455
1986	137,294	43,833
1987	145,793	48,597
1988	157,608	47,344
1989	159,630	47,951
[1]1990	163,744	49,187

[1] Forecast.

Development Board for Rural Wales

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the gross budget of the Development Board for Rural Wales in each year from 1975; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The table shows the DBRW's gross expenditure for each year since its inception in 1977.

DBRW gross expenditure[3]

Year	*£ million*
1977-78	6·5
1978-79	9·7
1979-80	12·2
1980-81	10·3
1981-82	12·6
1982-83	14·4
1983-84	14·2
1984-85	16·4
1985-86	17·9
1986-87	[4]15·4
1987-88	15·3
1988-89	18·3
1989-90	19·5
1990-91	19·6
1991-92	[1]20·9
1992-93	[2]23·6

[1] Estimated.
[2] Planned.
[3] Including National Loans Fund servicing.
[4] Loan servicing requirements reduced by Welsh Office.

The increase of £2·2 million planned for the DBRW's budget in 1992-93 will enable the board to build on its special rural action programme, introduced to stimulate enterprise in the more remote rural areas of mid-Wales, as well as allowing the board to increase its social development work and take forward several joint initiatives with local authorities.

The planned gross expenditure for the board in 1992-93 represents an increase of almost 13 per cent. over estimated gross expenditure for 1991-92.

Welsh Office Expenditure

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will indicate, following the Chancellor's autumn statement on the allocation of Welsh Office expenditure for 1992-93, how much of the block has been allocated to *(a)* health, *(b)* education, *(c)* housing, *(d)* the environment and *(e)* tourism; and what were the comparable allocations to these headings for 1991-92.

Mr. David Hunt: I have already announced that I have secured an extra £80 million per year for mandatory home renovation grants. This means that, within the £5,810 million available for Welsh Office programmes in 1992-93, total provision for these grants will be £143 million—sufficient to bring over 11,500 dwellings up to the required fitness standard.

I shall be making further announcements about the allocation of resources to the remainder of my block programmes in due course, and full details will be published in next year's departmental report. The original allocations of provision for 1991-92 were set out in this year's report, Cm 1516.

Agriculture

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to visit the President of the European Commission to discuss the situation of the Welsh farmers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: It is my intention to visit Brussels in the near future for discussions with the Agriculture Commissioner among others.

Ambulance Service

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidelines he has issued to the chairmen of the Welsh health authorities concerning the logos to be used on NHS ambulances in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: None.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the South Glamorgan health authority concerning the expenditure of £40,000 on so far unused uniforms for the South Glamorgan ambulance service.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: None. This is a matter for the health authority.

Council Tax

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the estimated cost to local authorities in Wales of preparing for the administration of the council tax and the level of Welsh Office support for this expenditure.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: A study undertaken by the management consultants CSL Group estimated the cost to local authorities in Wales at £9·2 million. The Government have accepted the report's conclusions and on 5 November my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales announced that revenue costs would be supported by a specific grant of 75 per cent. and capital costs through supplementary credit approvals.

Livestock Feed

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many tonnes of grain have been fed to Welsh livestock during the last 12 months; at what cost; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Information is not available separately on grain fed to Welsh livestock. The total cost of the feed bill as a whole over the past 12 months is estimated to be over £198 million.

ENERGY

Electricity Production

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what studies have been undertaken by his Department into the effect of increasing dependency on gas-fired electricity production; and what are the implications for gas reserves.

Mr. Moynihan: My Department is monitoring the development of the new power generation market for gas. Power generation from gas contributes towards fuel diversity in electricity production and carries environmental benefits. The current evidence suggests the United Kingdom has sufficient known reserves of gas and the potential for new discoveries to supply all the demands of the United Kingdom market, including power generation, well into the next century.

Nuclear Power Stations

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he hopes to announce his decision about the dates of closure or continued operation of the nuclear power stations at *(a)* Bradwell, Essex, *(b)* Sizewell A, Suffolk, *(c)* Dungeness A, Kent, and *(d)* Hinkley Point, Somerset.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: This is a matter for the company. The decision will be a commercial one, provided that the Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate are satisfied that continued operation of the plant is safe.

Chapel Cross Power Station

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the proposal to construct a new atomic power station at Chapel Cross.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No such proposal has been made at this stage. I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) on 15 October 1991 at columns *137-38*.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, pursuant to his statement of 5 November, *Official Report*, columns 329-31, which new projects from the first approved tranche of renewable energy contracts have so far proceeded to commencement of construction; and what arrangement he has made to recycle entitlement from projects approved but not proceeded with, to those not approved but still active.

Mr. Moynihan: Of the 42 new projects which secured contracts under the 1990 renewables non-fossil fuel obligation (NFFO), some 12 have already been commissioned. The other 30 are planned to commission by the end of 1994 at the latest. The Government are committed to make further renewables orders during the 1990s to provide up to 600 MW of capacity, in addition to that forthcoming from the 1990 NFFO. The 1991 Renewables Order which I announced on 5 November made a substantial contribution to this commitment.

Nuclear Installations Inspectorate

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will publish in full the assessment by the nuclear installations inspectorate of the safety of the gas outlet welds at Trawsfynydd reactor number one and all similar reactors at Bradwell, Sizewell and Dungeness.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The publication of such reports is a matter for the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) of which the nuclear installations inspectorate (NII) is a part. However, I understand that in due course the HSE intends to publish the NII's response to operators' assessments of a number of generic issues relating to Magnox reactors which will include that of the integrity of steel pressure vessel welds. The HSE also intend to publish the NII's response to Nuclear Electric plc's long-term safety reviews (LTSR) of Trawsfynydd, Sizewell A and Dungeness A reactors. The response to the LTSR of Bradwell was published in 1987.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Indonesia

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all aid payments made available to Indonesia between 1975 to 1991 and the projects financed by this aid.

Mrs. Chalker: The gross bilateral aid expenditure on technical co-operation, debt relief, disaster relief and project aid was as follows:

£ thousand

	Total of which Project aid	
1975	6,777	4,796
1976	4,651	2,407
1977	5,646	2,691
1978	6,541	2,718
1979	13,144	7,334
1980	11,190	4,963
1981	15,350	9,729
1982	17,219	11,442
1983	12,358	6,260
1984	28,292	22,192
1985	33,649	26,753
1986	8,898	2,482
1987	12,223	4,550
1988	17,334	6,139
1989	20,772	10,883
1990	22,714	9,464

The "project aid" column covers expenditure on the following Overseas Development Administration and Commonwealth Development Corporation capital aid projects.

Sector	*Title*	*First year of expenditure*
Overseas Development Administration		
Agricultural and water resources	East Java operation and maintenance	1980
Agricultural and water resources	Madura groundwater	1980
Agricultural and water resources	Kediri Nganjuk irrigation II	1980
Agricultural and water resources	Kediri irrigation IIIa	1980
Agricultural and water resources	Krueng Jerue and Baro irrigation	1980
Oil-fired power plants	Isolated diesel generator	1980
Oil-fired power plants	Bali/Madura power gen[illegible]rs	1980
Agricultural and water resources	Kali Progo irrigation	1980
Electrical distribution	Bali electrification I	1980
Electrical distribution	Bali electrification: Nusa Dua	1980
Harbours and docks	Marine navigational aids	1980
General Government services	Computer: statistics bureau	1980
Water supply	Palambang water supply	1980
Passenger road transport	Buses for Jakarta	1981
Hydro-electric power/dams	Mrica hydro-electric project	1982
Agricultural and water resources	Kali Progo irrigation	1983
Coal mining	Ombilin coal mine	1983
Electrical distribution	Java/Madura power programme	1984
Telecommunications	Telecommunications cable	1984
Rail infrastructure	Rail bridges	1985

Sector	Title	First year of expenditure
Oil-fired power plants	Diesel power plants	1985
Passenger road transport	Supply of steel bridges	1987
Water transport	Marine navigation aids	1987
Telecommunications	Colour television station equipment	1988
Hydro-electric power/dams	Scattered diesels	1989
Harbours and docks	Port facilities	1989
Rail infrastructure	Cigading/Serpong railway	1990
Radio links and equipment	Radio studios	1990
Commonwealth Development Corporation		
Coffee/cocoa/tea	Coklat Ransiki cocoa/chocolate	1980
Textile fibres	Tubantia Kudus spinning mills	1980
Textile fibres	Pt Sumatex Subur	1980
Cement/lime/plaster	Pt Semen Andalas; equity	1980
Textile fibres	Pt Kewalrams-spinning plant	1981
Crop production	Tatar Anyar tea and rubber	1981
Textile fibres	Tubantia Kudus spinning mills	1982
Textile fibres	Sumatex Suber textile mill	1982
Cement/lime/plaster	Pt Semen Andalas I	1982
Cement/lime/plaster	Pt Semen Andalas II	1982
Crop production	Pt Tatar Anyar	1982
Coffee/cocoa/tea	Cocoa estates development	1983
Agricultural development	Nucleus estates/smallholders	1983
Hydro-electric power/dams	Java hydro-electric scheme	1983
Crops: development-processing	Crop developing and processing	1983
Textile fibres	PTKI—fund operating deficit	1984
Fibre crops	Cloth and yarn production	1986
Rubber	Rubber plantations	1986
Coffee/cocoa/tea	Cocoa estate development II	1987
Textile fibres	Yarn spinning mill and dye house	1989
Oils and fats	PT Tasik Raja	1990

Project level information is not available prior to 1980. Projects listed under 1980 include projects started in the 1970s on which expenditure was still continuing at that date.

Figures for 1991 are not available.

Technology Transfer Fund

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what progress has been made so far with the allocation of expenditure to each of the former eastern bloc countries under the technology transfer fund; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what is the total expenditure so far allocated on individual projects out of the technology transfer fund set up to assist the development of eastern bloc countries; and in which of the categories within the fund the projects fit;

(3) if he will give details of the staffing, training and qualifications of the unit set up to administer the technology transfer fund with the former eastern bloc countries.

Mrs. Chalker: I assume that by "technology transfer fund" the hon. Gentleman means the know-how fund, Britain's programme of bilateral technical assistance to the countries of central and eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. The fund was first established for Poland in 1989 and subsequently, extended to Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, the Baltic states and the Soviet Union. We have made public commitments to spend £50 million in Poland, £25 million in Hungary and £50 million in the Soviet Union, but we have not set financial ceilings for any other country.

Know-how fund expenditure by country in the last financial year, and commitments made to date for 1991-92 are as follows:

	Spent 1990-91 £ million	Committed 1991-92 £ million
Poland	10·9	12·1
Hungary	1·6	5·9
Czechoslovakia	2·0	4·3
Ex-GDR	0·5	n/a
Bulgaria	n/a	1·3
Romania	n/a	1·3
Soviet Union	n/a	8·8

The funds have been used to finance some 390 projects, the overwhelming majority of which fall within a small number of priority sectors of key importance to the economic reform programme. These are principally: banking and financial services; management development and training; public administration, and employment and small business support. For the Soviet Union the four designated priority sectors are banking and financial services, small business creation, food distribution and energy. In addition to this, there are two schemes established to encourage British investments in the region (the pre-investment feasibility studies, and training for investment personnel schemes). To date £2·3 million has been allocated under these schemes.

The joint assistance unit, which was established to administer the know-how fund, is staffed by a total of 32 officials from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Overseas Development Administration, and the Department of Trade and Industry. Collectively they have a wide range of experience in administrative, aid and trade-related matters. A number of members of the unit have lived and worked in eastern Europe; six of them speak Russian, one Polish, one Czech and one Slovak. The unit has access to a wide range of professional advisers, both in-house, and contracted to it by the Overseas Development Administration. An advisory board has also been established which comprises senior figures from

industry, the trade unions, finance and journalism, as well as Members of Parliament and academics with a particular interest in eastern Europe.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the number of badgers culled each year since 1970 and the proportion culled each year which were found to be infected with bovine tuberculosis.

Mr. Maclean: From 1971 to 1982, a total of 6,075 badgers were culled, of which 803—13·22 per cent.—were found to be infected with bovine tuberculosis. Annual figures are not available for those years.

The annual figures for badgers culled and the percentage of those proven to be infected with bovine tuberculosis since 1983 are as follows:

	Number	*Per cent*
1983	1,239	12·43
1984	1,337	16·89
1985	1,115	13·36
1986	782	15·86
1987	711	12·94
1988	778	27·25
1989	727	16·78
1990	811	19·24

This compares with some 20,000 badgers killed each year in road accidents and a total adult badger population of approximately 250,000.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what were the estimated percentages of cattle in Great Britain infected with bovine tuberculosis in each year since 1965.

Mr. Maclean: The estimated percentage of the cattle population which reacted positively to the intradermal tuberculin test was as follows:

Year	*per cent.*
1965	0·029
1966	0·027
1967	0·025
1968	0·018
1969	0·020
1970	0·016
1971	0·014
1972	0·004
1973	0·011
1974	0·011
1975	0·011
1976	0·008
1977	0·005
1978	0·005
1979	0·005
1980	0·007
1981	0·007
1982	0·004
1983	0·005
1984	0·005
1985	0·005
1986	0·004
1987	0·007
1988	0·006
1989	0·008
1990	0·009

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether dairy and non-dairy cattle imported from Ireland are routinely tested for tuberculosis.

Mr. Maclean: Yes. Council directive 64/432/EEC established the testing requirements for cattle traded within the Community.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the cost of offering environmentally sensitive area grants to farmers in each of the national parks in England and Wales using similar take-up percentages as exist in those areas which are of a similar nature and region.

Mr. Curry: Figures are not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will make a statement on his proposals to increase expenditure on the environmentally sensitive areas scheme over the three years to 1994-95 giving estimates of the increased amount of land which will be included and the number of farms; and if he will make it his policy to ensure that farms in the Lake District national park will be eligible for inclusion.

Mr. Curry: We have plans to increase expenditure on environmentally sensitive areas in England by £75 million over the next three years. It is too soon to provide estimates of the resulting increase in coverage in terms of land and farms but announcements will be made shortly concerning improvements in existing areas and the designation of new ones. The Lake District is one of many new areas that have been suggested and full account will be taken of the information submitted on each.

Sheep Quotas

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if it is his policy to press for the introduction of sheep quotas within the common agricultural policy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Sheep quotas would create major administrative problems both on introduction and subsequently. They would inhibit improvements in the efficiency of the industry and would stifle the development of more market-oriented production. A reduction in the level of price support remains by far the best approach to reform of the CAP sheepmeat sector.

Lambs

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the gross value of fat lamb sales by farmers at live markets and direct to abattoirs, respectively, in England in each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The table is drawn from information produced from the administration of the sheep variable premium scheme and therefore includes only fat lambs certified under the scheme. This information is available only on a Great Britain basis and only for the period since 1981.

Year	Live Market £ million	Abbatoirs £ million
1981	234·32	93·62
1982	240·35	95·26
1983	242·73	99·95
1984	268·81	121·31
1985	287·71	124·37
1986	300·84	117·48
1987	333·11	129·19
1988	339·73	126·23
1989	375·57	143·93
1990	352·77	144·38
[1]1991	313·21	123·52

[1] Forecast.

Import and Export Payments

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the amounts in pounds sterling received in the United Kingdom in import levies in each of the last five years by product, giving the amounts imported in each case; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The informaton is given in the table. A breakdown of the amounts by product could be produced only at disproportionate cost. Details of products imported into the United Kingdom are contained in the annual report published by the Central Statistical Ofice entitled "Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom".

Amounts received in the United Kingdom on import levies

Amounts received (£'000)

	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Cereals	88,948	84,310	62,601	47,393	74,838
Beef	2,034	2,890	3,943	3,569	1,459
Pigmeat	2,437	3,175	2,076	1,889	346
Milk products	19,549	17,217	21,883	28,458	11,157
Rice	42,344	20,810	19,150	25,272	27,251
Other	52,590	86,550	68,896	28,901	12,111
Total	207,902	214,952	178,549	135,482	127,162

Source: Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the amounts in pounds sterling paid out in the United Kingdom on export refunds in each of the last five years by product and give the amounts exported in each case; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The information is given in the table.

Amounts Paid out in the United Kingdom on Export Refunds By Product and Quantity

Amounts Paid (£'000)

	1986(a)	1987(a)	1988(a)	1989(a)	1989-90(b)	1990-91(b)
Cereals	95,022	334,367	187,386	222,155	251,071	150,829
Sugar and Isoglucose	39,551	33,807	48,291	30,600	27,892	35,547
Processed Fruit and Veg	1,400	1,194	1,838	1,251	976	1,295
Milk and Milk Products	74,194	117,932	93,790	100,238	89,823	83,915
Beef and Veal	43,672	27,424	22,225	25,036	24,571	15,806
Pigmeat	1,253	1,145	1,038	1,746	1,988	2,494
Pigs	430	480	559	691	677	395
Poultry	1,195	2,345	3,219	2,603	2,586	2,378
Processed Goods	37,248	49,688	42,777	45,964	38,504	41,538
Other Commodities	61	67	21	102	116	102

Amounts Exported ('000t)

	1986(c)	1987(c)	1988(c)	1989(c)	1990(c)
Cereals	2,361	3,929	3,129	4,861	5,428
Sugar and Isoglucose	163	98	154	117	146
Processed Fruit and Veg	24	16	24	21	24
Milk and Milk Products	131	171	124	164	179
Beef and Veal	46	33	29	27	23
Pigmeat	7	5	4	6	10
Pigs[1]	6	2	2	2	3
Poultry[1]	10	9	12	18	18
Processed Goods	295	288	210	404	430
Other Commodities	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	2

Notes: The tables are not compatable as a mixture of *(a)* calendar, *(b)* financial and *(c)* EC budget years have been used.
[1] = Excludes hatching eggs and live chicks.
[2]— = Less than 500 tonnes.
Source: Intervention Board Annual Reports.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the amounts in pounds sterling paid in the EC for *(a)* import levies and *(b)* export refunds in each of the last five years by product; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The information is given in the table. A breakdown by product for import levies is not available.

Total import levies and export refunds by product in £ million

	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Import levies	762	1,170	1,021	840	818
Export refunds:					
Cereals	1,070	2,209	1,984	1,700	1,735
Rice	39	68	41	29	21
Sugar	802	1,090	1,062	950	657
Olive oil	19	17	43	61	96
Oilseeds	1	46	17	4	1
Fruit and vegetables	50	48	43	52	58
Wine	7	14	30	29	39
Tobacco	21	31	29	41	44
Milk and milk products	1,284	1,624	2,045	1,878	1,371
Beef	786	632	522	879	788
Pigmeat	49	81	117	130	124
Eggs and poultry	63	109	132	153	127
Non-annex II products	326	424	408	361	363
MCA's	110	163	97	37	54
Food aid	171	186	165	87	61
Total	4,799	6,744	6,735	6,393	5,538

Note: 1990 import levies figure is an estimate.
Sources: The Agricultural Situation in the Community 1989.
The European Court of Auditors' Report 1989.
EAGGF Financial Reports 1986-90.

Grant Aid

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether his Ministry pays out grant aid for the establishment of poultry businesses or slaughterhouses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: My Department administers EC grants under regulation 866/90 which, subject to Commission approval, will be available for the processing of meat, including poultry meat, but not the establishment of slaughterhouses. Grant aid is not available to assist the establishment of new poultry businesses.

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will consult interested parties on making the environmental benefits afforded by hill livestock compensatory allowances more specific.

Mr. Gummer: My right hon. Friends and I have today issued a consultation document, seeking the views of interested parties on a package of measures designed to enhance environmental aspects of support for hill farming. Copies have been placed in the Library. We will study the views put to us carefully before drawing final conclusions.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensioners

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many individuals aged between 65 and 80 years are *(a)* not in receipt of a full pension and *(b)* losing more than £5 a week because they are not on his Department's files.

Mr. Jack: In a report by the Comptroller and Auditor General on national insurance contributions—HOC 665—it was estimated that some 130,000 people between the ages of 60 to 65 and 80 years for whom the Department did not have a valid address might have an entitlement to state pension exceeding £5.

The Department's analysis of a sample of the individuals has shown that most of these people's entitlements are small and stem from contributions paid many years ago. Some 5 per cent. have subsequently claimed their pension. Of the remaining 95 per cent., very few are thought to be still alive, living in the United Kingdom, or likely to benefit from making a claim. Around 50 per cent. appear to have emigrated at least 20 years ago or to have died and another 40 per cent. were women who may well be receiving a pension on their husband's contributions of an amount equal to or higher than that payable on their own contributions.

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioners were in receipt of *(a)* pension income other than the basic retirement pension and *(b)* other income from savings in (i) 1979 and (ii) the most recent year for which figures are available; and if he will estimate the figure for 1992.

Miss Widdecombe: In 1979 a total of 3 million individuals over state pension age were receiving income from an occupational pension; the corresponding figure for 1988 was 4·5 million. For 1979 it is estimated that 4 million single pensioners and pensioner couples were receiving income from savings and investments; the corresponding figure for 1988 is 5·1 million. In no case is it possible to give an estimate for 1992.
Sources:
Government Actuary's Survey of Occupational Pensions Schemes
Family Expenditure Survey.

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average amount of the second pension received by newly retired pensioners in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* the most recent year for which figures are available and *(c)* giving an estimate of the figure for 1992.

Miss Widdecombe: In 1979, the average amount of income derived from occupational pensions by those pensioners and pensioner couples who had occupational pensions was £41·40; the corresponding figure for 1988 was £64·20. It is not possible to give an estimate for 1992.
Note: Figures given in 1988 prices.
Source: Family Expenditure Survey; newly-retired pensioners are defined as single women aged 60-64, single men aged 65-69 and couples in which the man is aged 65-69.

Departmental Consultants

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the consultants currently undertaking work in his Department, the title of each project, its cost and its estimated finishing date.

Mr. Jack: The consultants currently undertaking work in this Department and agencies, the project and the estimated finishing date are as shown. We have not supplied information on the cost of individual projects as to do so could be a breach of commercial confidentiality.

Project Title	Consultants	Estimated finishing date
Activity Recording	Price Waterhouse	March 1992
Ad Hoc Quantity Surveyors	Appleyard & Trew	March 1992
Analytical Services Division—Analytical Services Statistical Information Systems	Dame Image	December 1991
Administrative Resource Management System (Version 1)	Sema Group	December 1991
Assist	Les Probert Ass.	February 1992
Building Management & Planned Maintenance Programme	Ulec Services Limited	July 1992
Cable Design for Leeds Headquarters	Scheme Limited	March 1992
Capacity Planning	Ultracomp	December 1991
Catalysing Change Communications Project	Baddeley Associates Limited	December 1991
Central Architectural Team	Crantex Limited	May 1992
Child Support Agency	PA Consulting Group	March 1992
Combined Services Architect	Triad Special Systems	March 1992
Competancies for Headquarters	KPMG Peat Marwick McLintock	February 1992
Communications Marketing Plan for Benefits Agency Information Services	P Four Consultancy Limited	December 1991
Contributions Agency Work Measurement Exercise	TOP-IX Limited	January 1992
Contributions Agency	Andersen Consulting	January 1992
Corporate Brochure on Secondment	Redhouse Lane Communications Limited	November 1991
Current Year Monitoring System	Hollyhill	May 1992
Data Quality Convergence & Whole Person Concept	Mr. J. M. Bankier	December 1991
Debt recovery	KPMG Peat Marwick McLintock	March 1992
Development of Complementing & Monitoring Projects	Urvashi Patel	February 1992
Disablement Living Allowance	Andersen Consulting	March 1992
Earnings Related Supplement Project	Andersen Consulting	March 1992
EC-Related Work	Dianne Robbins	September 1992
Employment Services	Andersen Consulting	March 1992
Engagement of Professional Purchasing Staff	SERCO Limited	March 1992
Equal Opportunities Audit	Pearn Kandola Downs	February 1992
Equal Opportunities Training Development	INLI—Institute for a New Leadership Initiative	March 1992
Essential Services Plant Level	Buro Rappold	November 1991
Executive Information System	H.M.G. Consulting Limited	September 1992
Executive Reporting System Project	Price Waterhouse	November 1991
Executive Reporting System Project	H.M.G. Consulting Limited	March 1992
Financial Accounting	Price Waterhouse	March 1992
Financial & Management Information System	Price Waterhouse	November 1991
Financial & Management Information System Accounting Policies Project	Price Waterhouse	November 1991
Financial & Management Information System	Dun & Bradstreet	December 1991
Headquarters Information Systems Strategy (Implementation Phase)	Ernst & Young	December 1991
IT User Development	Sema Group	October 1992
ITSA Core Curriculum	Impact	March 1992
ITSA Core Curriculum Functional Training	Andersen Consulting	December 1991
ITSA Core Curriculum Functional Training	The Training Partnership	December 1991
ITSA Core Curriculum Review of Analysis & Design & Small Audience Group	Andersen Consulting	March 1992
ITSA Management Services	Andersen Consulting	March 1992
ITSA Security	Computer Sciences Company	December 1991
ITSA Security	Pathfinder	March 1992
ITSA Security	PA Consulting Group	March 1992
ITSA Security Training	Computer Sciences Company	March 1992
Local Office Project—Income Support	Andersen Consulting	March 1992
Local Office Project—Social Fund	Sema Group	March 1992
Management Accounting	Price Waterhouse	March 1992
Management Customer Service Seminars and Workshops	Diane Bailey Associates	March 1992

Project Title	Consultants	Estimated finishing date
Management Development Programme Assessment Centre	Recruitment & Assessment Agency	February 1992
Manpower Planning Workshops	Institute of Manpower Studies	March 1992
Marketing Strategy for Paying Social Benefits	Touche Ross	December 1992
Monitoring Change Project	Kinsley Lord	December 1991
Motability	Easams Limited	May 1992
National Insurance Recording System—Social Fund	Sema Group	March 1994
National Unemployment Benefit System 1	Andersen Consulting	March 1992
National Unemployment Benefit System 1	Williamson G K	December 1991
National Unemployment Benefit System 2	Andersen Consulting	March 1992
Network Administration Centre	Insight Logistics	November 1991
Network/Comms	Level—7 Limited	March 1992
OPSTRAT Review	Hartley McMaster	March 1992
Office Small Systems Group	Easams Limited	April 1992
Office Small System Group	Telecommuting Management Consultants	April 1992
Outplacement Scheme for Senior Staff	KPMG Peat Marwick McLintock	March 1992
Pension Age Discussion Document	Redhouse Lane Communications Limited	Continuing
Pensions Strategy Project	Andersen Consulting	March 1992
Pensions Strategy Project (Overseas Branch)	Andersen Consulting	March 1992
Policy and Planning Unit	Andersen Consulting	March 1992
Product Assurance	Dameimage	March 1992
Production Service Support Group	PSA Services	March 1992
Project Control	Astrac Limited	March 1992
Quality Management Group	W. S. Atkins	April 1992
Quality Management Services	Admiral Management Systems	December 1991
Retirement Counselling Courses for Senior Staff	DPS Consultants Limited	March 1992
Review of Benefits Agency Central Office Management	PA Consulting Group	March 1992
Reviews of the Benefits Agency Appraisal System and Career Development	Peter Byde Management and Training Consultant	November 1991
Review of Project Management in Social Security Policy Group	Mrs. K. Limm	December 1991
Route 400 Training	Level-7 Limited	November 1991
Secondment of a Consultant to DSS for Various Projects	British Coal Corporation	Continuing
Service Agreement Methodology	PA Consulting Group	February 1992
Service Delivery Security	S Computer Sciences Company	March 1992
Services Management	Andersen Consulting	March 1992
Services Management—Service Delivery	Andersen Consulting	March 1992
Single Terminal Access Project	Andersen Consulting	March 1992
Single Terminal Access Project	Computer Sciences Company	March 1992
Single Terminal Access Project	Discrealm Limited	November 1991
Single Terminal Access Project	Facilita Software	May 1992
Single Terminal Access Project—Integrated Terminal Test System	Facilita Software	March 1992
Single Terminal Access Project X	ASE Consulting	March 1992
Software Systems	Ace Data Systems	March 1992
Space Standards Consultancy (Central Office Guidelines)	DEGW Limited	November 1991
Strategy Help Desk	Price Waterhouse	February 1992
Strategy Operations Architecture Project	Easams Limited	March 1992
Support to ITSA	ASE Consulting	March 1992
The Resettlement Index	Office of Public Management	December 1991
Training of Internal Consultancy Staff	Morris Foster, Management & Training Consultant	November 1991
Training and Support Services	Andersen Consulting	March 1995
Wright Circuit	WS Atkins	November 1991
X-400	Level-7 Limited	December 1991

Child Support Agency

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if it has now been decided whether the Child Support Agency will require a mainframe computer system.

Mr. Jack: A study of the information technology requirements of the Child Support Agency is currently under way and no final decisions have been taken.

Social Fund

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications in the last year were made for assistance with the social fund; how many and what percentage were turned down; of those turned down, how many applied for review by the social fund officer; how many were accepted; how many and what percentage were rejected; of those rejected, how many were reviewed by an HEO (SF); how many were accepted; how many and what percentage were rejected; of those rejected, how many were sent for review by a social fund inspector; how many were accepted; how many and what percentage rejected; and what were the equivalent figures for the previous three years.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is provided in the tables. The information in table II has been provided by the social fund commissioner and is as published in her annual reports to the Secretary of State. Information for 1987-88 is not available since the social fund did not commence operation until April 1988.

Table I

SFO and HEO(SF) reviews	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
(a) Number of applications to Social Fund	1,749,000	2,299,000	2,317,000
(b) Number of applications refused	521,000 (30 per cent.)	779,000 (34 per cent.)	895,000 (39 per cent.)
SFO reviews			
(c) Number of applications[1] for review as percentage of refusals	61,425 (12 per cent.)	96,584 (12 per cent.)	115,636 (13 per cent.)
(d) Number of reviews—decision revised	20,260	22,230	25,837
(e) Number of reviews—decision confirmed	33,494 (55 per cent.)	60,402 (63 per cent.)	70,827 (61 per cent.)
HEO(SF) reviews			
(f) Number of applications[1 2] for review as percentage of (e)	33,494 (100 per cent.)	60,402 (100 per cent.)	70,827 (100 per cent.)
(g) Number of reviews—decision revised	4,846	12,684	18,211
(h) Number of reviews—decision confirmed	23,535 (70 per cent.)	45,726 (76 per cent.)	52,645 (74 per cent.)

Table II

SFI review	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
(a) Number of applications[3] for SFI review	2,954	7,858	9,775
(b) Number of decisions[3 4] made by SFIs	2,499	6,238	9,383
(c) Number of decisions revised[5]	1,205 48 per cent.	4,278 69 per cent.	7,689 82 per cent.
(d) Number of decisions confirmed	1,294 52 per cent.	1,960 31 per cent.	1,694 18 per cent.

[1] The difference between the sum of "decisions revised" plus "decisions confirmed" and the number of applications received, is attributable partly to applications being withdrawn by the applicant and partly to applications which have been made, but have not been decided in the statistical period.

[2] All applications for an SFO review that are not revised have been automatically counted as an application for HEO(SF) review, as it is not possible to identify whether review applications are withdrawn at this stage.

[3] The difference between the number of applications and the total number of decisions is attributable to a combination of different factors; applications which have been made but not decided in the statistical period; applications not being within the jurisdiction of the Office of the Social Fund Inspector; and applications not being within the time, form or manner laid down by regulations.

[4] The method of counting decisions changed in April 1990-91. Whilst each review application received counted as one case, the number of decisions reviewed by SFIs were analysed by type (award, refusals, etc.). It is possible therefore, that a case can result in more than one decision.

[5] Includes decisions made by the SFI to substitute his own decision or to refer the application back to the HEO(SF) for redetermination.

"Diminishing Options"

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has received a copy of the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux report "Diminishing Options".

Miss Widdecombe: Yes. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wrote to the assistant director of the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux on 21 October.

Students (Benefits)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will review arrangements for benefit payments to students on sandwich courses who are unable to obtain work experience and receive no grant.

Miss Widdecombe: Full-time students should generally look to the education maintenance system for financial support. In common with other full-time students, those attending sandwich courses are excluded from housing benefit, income support and unemployment benefit for the

duration of their course. This includes any periods designated for work experience, whether or not a placement is obtained. The social security system was never intended to finance those who are undertaking a course of full-time study, including those courses which combine practical expertise with classroom instruction.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will reinstate housing benefit for students; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: No. Financial support for full-time students is properly the responsibility of the educational maintenance system, although certain vulnerable students remain eligible for housing benefit.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will urgently review benefit payments for students who are carers and have special family responsibilities and are currently unable to claim benefits.

Miss Widdecombe: Full-time students should generally look to the education maintenance system for financial support. Students who are attending courses only part-time continue to be eligible for income support, housing benefit and invalid care allowance. We have no plans to change these arrangements.

Children

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow, of 7 November, *Official Report*, columns *243-46*, if he will ensure that copies of his consultative document, "The Proposed Contents of the Child Support Regulations to be made under the Child Support Act 1991", are sent to the Association of Directors of Social Work and the Royal Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

Mr. Jack: A copy of the consultation document has been sent to both organisations.

HEALTH

Cot Deaths

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Chief Medical Officer established the group of experts to examine evidence relating to cot deaths; and what evidence it is asking them to examine.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 21 October at column *423*.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the increase in cot deaths between 1986 and 1989 has been attributed to; and what government-funded studies there have been into the sudden increase;

(2) what assessment he has made of the reasons for the apparent reduction in cot death rates in the last two years.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: An increase in the number of deaths attributed to sudden infant death—SID—occurred between 1986 and 1988. The rate of sudden infant death per 1,000 live births came down from the 1988 level of 2·35 to 1·81 in 1990.

The reasons for fluctuations and trends in the incidence of SID nationally are not clear. SID is more common in the winter months and the rate may vary according to the severity of the winter; but the relationship is not fully understood. There is now growing evidence that changes in child rearing practice have been accompanied by changes in mortality attributed to SID. These include: a reduction in the prone sleeping position for the infants; attention to the risk of overheating; and increased support to those infants thought to be at highest risk, for example, those children suffering from respiratory disease. In addition, it is believed that there is a trend in the pattern of certification of death towards certifying as sudden infant deaths, deaths that might previously have been certified as due to respiratory disease. The rates for respiratory disease fell over this period when SID was increasing.

For information relating to government-funded studies into cot death research, I refer the hon. Member to the reply my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science gave him on 7 November at column *206*.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretaryt of State for Health how much money the Government have given to the Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths since it was set up.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Since 1983-84, the foundation has received a total of £97,500 in grants under section 64 of the National Health Service and Public Health Act, 1968. The foundation also currently receives a grant of £25,000 per annum payable over the two financial years, 1991-92 and 1992-93.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the inquiry he has set up into stillbirths and deaths in infancy to report; when it will issue a preliminary report on the recommended cot sleeping position for babies; and what steps he will take to communicate that recommendation to health service professionals.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: On 21 October, I announced the setting up of an expert group to report to the chief medical officer following its examination and assessment of available evidence on reducing the risk of cot death. After studying the group's recommendations, the chief medical officer made its advice public in a press release issued on 31 October. He also announced that he and the chief nursing officer would be writing specifically to health professionals about the expert group's advice.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the group for the speed and clarity of their advice.

The confidential inquiry into stillbirths and deaths in infancy, which I announced on 2 July, is a longer-term and more wide-ranging initiative which will organise detailed investigations into foetal losses, stillbirths and infant deaths.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding was made available to the Avon study into infant deaths.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I understand that the most recent study in Avon was funded with the assistance of the Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths. The Department was not approached directly to provide

funding for this particular study, though financial assistance is provided for the foundation's administrative costs.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Medical Research Council was commissioned to review existing cot death research; and to what end.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department commissioned the Medical Research Council in June 1989 to undertake a major review of the literature relating to sudden infant death syndrome—SIDS—and to advise on what further research was needed. This has been received and is under consideration.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much extra was spent on research into cot deaths as a result of the recommendation of the Select Committee on Social Services (HC 54 Session 1988-89) that further research into the causes of sudden infant death syndrome should be conducted as a matter of urgency.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Government expenditure on research into sudden infant death syndrome and respiratory distress syndrome in 1989-90 and 1990-91 amounted to £1,095,000, a 30 per cent. increase over the previous two-year period.

NHS

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of the national health service budget is spent on *(a)* consultants, *(b)* doctors, *(c)* nurses and *(d)* others; how much this represents in cash terms; what were the comparable figures in April 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Information derived from annual accounts of health authorities and their predecessor authorities, as submitted to the Department and related to hospital and community health services—HCHS—only, is shown in the table.

Expenditure on family health services has been excluded from the table as such expenditure consists principally of payments to general practitioners and other professionals contracted to the NHS to provide those services.

Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS) Revenue Expenditure on salaries and wages

	1989-90		1978-79	
	£ million (cash)	*As a proportion of total revenue expenditure (per cent.)*	*£ million (cash)*	*As a proportion of total revenue expenditure (per cent.)*
Medical and Dental Staff				
Consultants				
Medical	672·0	5·0	158·4	3·6
Dental	13·7	0·1	3·7	0·1
Total	685·7	5·1	162·1	3·7
Other Medical Staff	765·7	5·6	212·4	4·8
Other Dental Staff	49·1	0·4	17·1	0·4
Nurses and Midwives	4,893·2	36·0	1,353·7	30·6
All Other Staff	3,861·3	28·5	1,533·2	34·7
Total	10,255·0	75·6	3,278·5	74·7

Source:

Annual accounts of regional and district health authorities in England and those of the special health authorities for the London postgraduate teaching hospitals 1989-90 (predecessor authorities 1978-89).

Notes:

1. HCHS covers all services managed by the health authorities concerned including hospital, community health, patient transport (i.e. ambulance), blood transfusion and other services. Capital expenditure and all expenditure incurred by Family Health Services Authorities (FHSAs) and certain supporting special health authorities and other bodies is excluded; however 1978-79 figures include small elements for administrative costs of the FHSA predecessor Family Practitioner Committees which were at that time included with the annual accounts of health authorities and were not separately identified.
2. The figures are gross salaries and wages costs and include employers' national insurance and superannuation contributions.
3. "All other staff" includes professional, technical, scientific, ancillary, maintenance, ambulance and administrative and clerical staff. The correspondingly small total costs incurred by the health authorities on employing all non-NHS (agency etc) staff are also included—£297·5 million (cash) in 1989-90 and £40·6 million (cash) in 1978-89.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his advice that young babies should be laid on their back includes premature babies.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: In individual cases, such as premature babies, this must be a matter for the clinical judgment of the doctor concerned with the baby's care.

Optical Charge Vouchers

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the increase in the value of vouchers for glasses in each band from A to F since 1987, in (i) cash terms and (ii) real value, calculated using the GDP deflator.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The voucher scheme was introduced to improve patient choice in where and which spectacles they purchased, and to increase competition in the optical market. Voucher values are set with reference to nationwide average manufacturers' prices: the majority of opticians supply spectacles within voucher values. The increases in voucher values since 1987, in both cash and real terms, are given in the table.

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1987						
Cash terms (£)	14·25	22·00	33·00	27·00	42·00	66·00
Real terms (£)	14·25	22·00	33·00	27·00	42·00	66·00
1 April 1988						
Cash terms (£)	15·50	25·50	42·00	29·50	50·00	85·00
Real terms (£)	14·46	23·80	39·19	27·52	46·65	79·30
1 September 1988						
Cash terms (£)	16·25	27·00	44·00	31·00	52·50	89·00
Real terms (£)	15·16	25·19	41·05	28·92	42·98	83·04
1 April 1989						
Cash terms (£)	17·00	28·00	46·00	32·75	58·00	98·00
Real terms (£)	14·90	24·53	40·30	28·69	50·81	85·86
1 April 1990						
Cash terms (£)	18·00	28·75	47·00	34·75	59·75	100·00
Real terms (£)	14·54	23·22	37·96	28·07	48·26	80·77
1 April 1991						
Cash terms (£)	19·30	30·50	48·00	37·00	61·00	102·00
Real terms (£)	14·57	23·02	36·23	27·93	46·04	77·00
1 August 1991						
Cash terms (£)	19·70	31·15	49·00	37·80	62·30	104·20
Real terms (£)	14·87	23·51	36·99	28·53	47·03	78·65

Asthma

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital visits per year are a result of asthma; and what action Her Majesty's Government are taking to reduce this number.

Mr. Dorrell: During 1989-90, the latest year for which information is available centrally, the estimated number of in-patient cases with a principal diagnosis of asthma treated in NHS hospitals in England was 95,000. Better control of asthma may result in fewer hospital admissions. Peak flow meters, which help in improving control by monitoring the changes in the asthmatic patient's airways and giving advance warning of an impending attack, have been available on GP prescription since 1 October 1990. The introduction of self-management protocols agreed between patient and doctor should also help to reduce the number of hospital admissions.

Female Circumcision

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what specific guidelines have been issued by the Department of Health on the matter of female circumcision being practised on young girls;

(2) if he will fund a publicity campaign to warn of the dangers of female circumcision of children.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Interdepartmental guidance on new arrangements for inter-agency working to protect children from abuse under the Children Act 1989 was issued on 14 October. This document, "Working Together", a copy of which is available in the Library, reminds authorities of the effect of the Prohibition of Female Circumcision Act 1985, and gives guidance that where there is reason to believe a child is likely to suffer significant harm as a result of female circumcision local authorities should consider the exercise of investigative powers under section 47 of the Children Act 1989. In addition, the Department is currently funding the production of a training video and accompanying guidance booklet for professionals on female genital mutilation. The Department provides grant aid to the main voluntary organisation working in this area to assist it in its very valuable work of education, publicity and counselling.

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the Government's proposals to tackle ME.

Mr. Dorrell: Both the Government and the NHS recognise myalgic encephalomyelitis as a debilitating and distressing condition. Unfortunately its causes are not yet fully understood, nor is there a generally agreed method of treatment. Consensus on a case definition is under discussion and some epidemiological studies are under way. The Department of Health and the Medical Research Council remain willing to consider funding well-founded research proposals on ME, as on other medical conditions.

Psychiatric Patients (Homicide)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many psychiatric patients discharged from health service institutions have committed homicide in each of the last five years.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not available centrally.

Mentally Disordered Offenders

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the joint Department of Health and Home Office review of health and social services for mentally disordered offenders.

Mr. Dorrell: I announced the establishment of the joint review in my reply on 19 December 1990 to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt) at columns *244-45*. A steering committee was appointed under the chairmanship of Dr. John Reed, senior principal medical officer, Department of Health. It met first on 31 January 1991 and I am pleased to report that it has made substantial progress.

We are today publishing four consultation documents submitted by the steering committee. Copies are available in the Library. These are the reports of three advisory groups that have been examining services provided in the community, in hospitals and in prisons, and an overview by the steering committee itself. We are issuing them to a wide range of interested bodies with an invitation to comment by 31 January 1992.

Between them, the advisory groups have made 87 recommendations aimed at improving the delivery and co-ordination of care and treatment for mentally disordered offenders. They provide advice on the level and range of health and social services provision that may be needed, as well as the mechanisms required to identify and assess the needs of those who should be diverted from the criminal justice system to more suitable settings. A number of recommendations for the mental health care of prisoners are consistent with proposals in the White Paper on the prison service, "Custody, Care and Justice", Cm. 1647, and the current consultation paper on contracting for prison health services.

The steering committee has set up three further advisory groups which are now beginning work. These are concerned with finance, staffing and training, and research issues. They are due to report in the spring of next year. Work is also being undertaken on performance measurement and quality control, and services for patients with special needs.

The present reports reinforce the Government's policy that mentally disordered offenders who need care and treatment should receive it from the health and personal social services rather than being dealt with in the criminal justice system. They propose also a set of guiding principles for future service provision which we endorse. These are that patients should be cared for with regard to the quality of care and proper attention to the needs of individuals; as far as possible, in the community, rather than in institutional settings; under conditions of no greater security than is justified by the degree of danger they present to themselves or others; in such a way as to maximise their rehabilitation and chances of sustaining an independent life; as near as possible to their own homes or families, if they have them.

I have already indicated that we do not want necessary action to be delayed merely because the review is in progress. We are considering the present recommendations to identify those which could be implemented at an early date. The steering committee has proposed an initial action plan whose main elements are the improvement of inter-agency arrangements for joint working at both planning and operational level; local assessments of service need, including assessments in each NHS region before the end of the review of needs for local and medium secure hospital provision; the continued protection of existing NHS services for mentally disordered offenders, including those for people with certain special needs, pending consideration by the review of arrangements for purchasing services; to build on the positive response of agencies in the health, social and criminal justice services to Home Office circular 66/90 and to the review itself, and to review good practice guidance in the light of the advisory group reports.

We endorse the direction set by these proposals and will be taking action to follow them up so far as it lies within our direct responsibility. Final decisions will need to take account of the further work initiated by the steering committee and of responses to the present consultation exercise.

My right hon. and hon. Friends and I are committed to maintaining the close co-operation which has developed between our Departments through the review. We are very grateful to Dr. Reed and his colleagues, and others who have contributed to the advisory groups, for their work so far.

Existing NHS services for mentally disordered offenders are subject to NHS management executive letter (90) 190 which directs health authorities to maintain at least the present level of service until December 1991. This guidance is being extended until March 1993 in order to ensure that future planning of these services takes place against a reasonably stable background.

Health Service Staff

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each national health service region the ratio of male to female staff working in the health service.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* The number of male to female staff working in the health service is shown in the table.

NHS staff in post at 30 September 1990
England by regions[1,2]

Whole-time equivalents[3]

Regions	*Total*	*Male*	*Percentage male*	*Female*	*Percentage female*
Northern	53,000	13,300	25·1	39,700	74·9
Yorkshire	58,500	14,600	25·0	43,800	75·0
Trent	75,700	17,400	23·0	58,300	77·0
East Anglian	31,700	7,800	24·5	23,900	75·5
North West Thames	51,600	12,200	23·5	39,500	76·5
North East Thames	67,600	16,800	24·8	50,800	75·2
South East Thames	61,200	15,200	24·9	46,000	75·1
South West Thames	42,900	11,000	25·6	31,900	74·4
Wessex	44,500	9,900	22·2	34,600	77·8

Regions	Total	Male	Percentage male	Female	Percentage female
Oxford	33,800	7,800	23·0	26,000	77·0
South Western	52,000	12,600	24·1	39,500	75·9
West Midlands	85,000	19,100	22·5	65,900	77·5
Mersey	40,700	9,700	23·9	31,000	76·1
North Western	70,800	17,100	24·2	53,700	75·8
England[1 2 3 4]	794,400	193,300	24·3	601,200	75·7

Source: Department of Health (SM13) annual censuses of NHS medical and non-medical manpower.
Notes:
[1] Includes permanent paid and honorary medical and dental staff but excludes locums.
[2] Includes nursing and midwifery agency staff.
[3] All figures are individually rounded to the nearest hundred (100) whole-time equivalents.
[4] Includes staff in the London post graduate special health authorities, family health service authorities and "other statutory authorities" (eg dental estimates board, prescription pricing authority, public health laboratory service and the health education authority).

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each national health service region the ratio of male to female staff in each of the following staff groups: *(a)* dentists, *(b)* professional and technical, *(c)* works and maintenance, *(d)* administrative and clerical, *(e)* ambulance staff, *(f)* ancillary staff, *(g)* professions allied to medicine, *(h)* scientific and professional and *(i)* general and senior managers.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* The number of female to male members of staff in the following staff groups is shown in the tables.

NHS staff in post
Selected staff groups by gender at 30 September 1990
Northern region

Whole-time equivalents[1]

Staff groups	Total		Male		Female	
	Total	Percentage of total	Total	Percentage of total	Total	Percentage of total
(a) Dentists[2]	170	100·0	100	61·7	60	38·3
(b) Professional and technical	2,090	100·0	840	40·2	1,250	59·8
(c) Works and maintenance	1,630	100·0	1,610	99·2	10	0·8
(d) Administrative and clerical	6,940	100·0	1,030	14·8	5,910	85·2
(e) Ambulance (including officers)	1,320	100·0	1,120	85·1	200	14·9
(f) Ancillary	7,330	100·0	2,430	33·1	4,910	66·9
(g) Professions allied to medicine	2,170	100·0	320	14·6	1,850	85·4
(h) Scientific and professional	760	100·0	310	40·0	460	60·0
(i) General and senior managers	550	100·0	380	69·7	170	30·3

[1] All figures are independently rounded to the nearest ten (10) whole-time equivalents. Percentages calculated on unrounded figures.
[2] Includes permanent paid and honorary staff. Excludes locums.
Source: Department of Health (SM13) Annual Censuses of NHS Medical and Non-medical Manpower.

NHS staff in post
Selected staff groups by gender at 30 September 1990
Yorkshire region

Whole-time equivalents[1]

Staff groups	Total		Male		Female	
	Total	Percentage of total	Total	Percentage of total	Total	Percentage of total
(a) Dentists[2]	150	100·0	100	62·1	60	37·9
(b) Professional and technical	2,610	100·0	1,090	41·8	1,520	58·2
(c) Works and maintenance	1,550	100·0	1,550	99·4	10	0·6
(d) Administrative and clerical	7,870	100·0	1,200	15·2	6,680	84·8
(e) Ambulance (including officers)	1,560	100·0	1,180	75·7	380	24·3
(f) Ancillary	7,000	100·0	2,550	36·5	4,450	63·5
(g) Professions allied to medicine	2,910	100·0	400	13·8	2,510	86·2
(h) Scientific and professional	870	100·0	330	38·2	540	61·8
(i) General and senior managers	930	100·0	640	69·2	290	30·8

[1] All figures are independently rounded to the nearest ten (10) whole-time equivalents. Percentages calculated on unrounded figures.
[2] Includes permanent paid and honorary staff. Excludes locums.
Source: Department of Health (SM13) Annual Censuses of NHS Medical and Non-medical Manpower.

NHS staff in post
Selected staff groups by gender at 30 September 1990
Trent region

Whole-time equivalents[1]

Staff groups	*Total*		*Male*		*Female*	
	Total	*Percentage of total*	*Total*	*Percentage of total*	*Total*	*Percentage of total*
(a) Dentists[2]	180	100·0	110	62·1	70	37·9
(b) Professional and technical	3,350	100·0	1,250	37·4	2,090	62·2
(c) Works and maintenance	1,870	100·0	1,860	99·6	10	0·4
(d) Administrative and clerical	10,120	100·0	1,420	14·0	8,700	86·0
(e) Ambulance (including officers)	1,890	100·0	1,500	79·7	380	20·3
(f) Ancillary	10,760	100·0	2,990	27·8	7,770	72·2
(g) Professions allied to medicine	3,730	100·0	550	14·7	3,190	85·3
(h) Scientific and professional	1,140	100·0	430	37·3	720	62·7
(i) General and senior managers	600	100·0	420	70·4	180	29·6

[1] All figures are independently rounded to the nearest ten (10) whole-time equivalents. Percentages calculated on unrounded figures.
[2] Includes permanent paid and honorary staff. Excludes locums.

Source: Department of Health (SM13) Annual Census of NHS Medical and Non-medical Manpower.

NHS staff in post
Selected staff groups by gender at 30 September 1990
East Anglian region

Whole-time equivalents[1]

Staff groups	*Total*		*Male*		*Female*	
	Total	*Percentage of total*	*Total*	*Percentage of total*	*Total*	*Percentage of total*
(a) Dentists[2]	70	100·0	50	66·8	20	33·2
(b) Professional and technical	1,350	100·0	590	44·2	750	55·8
(c) Works and maintenance	790	100·0	790	99·6	—[3]	0·4
(d) Administrative and clerical	4,070	100·0	550	13·5	3,520	86·5
(e) Ambulance (including officers)	790	100·0	590	74·6	200	25·4
(f) Ancillary	3,920	100·0	1,520	38·6	2,410	61·4
(g) Professions allied to medicine	1,700	100·0	230	13·2	1,480	86·8
(h) Scientific and professional	440	100·0	150	33·9	290	66·1
(i) General and senior managers	480	100·0	320	66·2	160	33·8

[1] All figures are independently rounded to the nearest ten (10) whole-time equivalents. Percentages calculated on unrounded figures.
[2] Includes permanent paid and honorary staff. Excludes locums.
[3] Indicates that figure is less than 5·0 whole-time equivalents.

Source: Department of Health (SM13) Annual Censuses of NHS Medical and Non-medical Manpower.

NHS staff in post
Selected staff groups by gender at 30 September 1990
North West Thames region

Whole-time equivalents[1]

Staff groups	*Total*		*Male*		*Female*	
	Total	*Percentage of total*	*Total*	*Percentage of total*	*Total*	*Percentage of total*
(a) Dentists[2]	160	100·0	80	49·3	80	50·7
(b) Professional and technical	1,900	100·0	700	36·7	1,210	63·3
(c) Works and maintenance	1,150	100·0	1,140	99·2	10	0·8
(d) Administrative and clerical	8,160	100·0	1,400	17·1	6,760	82·9
(e) Ambulance (including officers)	540	100·0	330	61·5	210	38·5
(f) Ancillary	5,460	100·0	2,530	46·4	2,930	53·6
(g) Professions allied to medicine	2,450	100·0	290	11·8	2,160	88·2
(h) Scientific and professional	970	100·0	260	27·0	710	73·0
(i) General and senior managers	80	100·0	50	60·5	30	39·5

[1] All figures are independently rounded to the nearest ten (10) whole-time equivalents. Percentages calculated on unrounded figures.
[2] Includes permanent paid and honorary staff. Excludes locums.

Source: Department of Health (SM13) Annual Census of NHS Medical and Non-medical Manpower.

NHS staff in post
Selected staff groups by gender at 30 September 1990
North East Thames region

Whole-time equivalents[1]

Staff groups	Total		Male		Female	
	Total	Percentage of total	Total	Percentage of total	Total	Percentage of total
(a) Dentists[2]	200	100·0	110	55·6	90	44·4
(b) Professional and technical	2,910	100·0	1,100	37·8	1,810	62·2
(c) Works and maintenance	1,720	100·0	1,700	98·8	20	1·2
(d) Administrative and clerical	10,450	100·0	1,810	17·3	8,640	82·7
(e) Ambulance (including officers)	550	100·0	410	74·9	140	25·1
(f) Ancillary	8,290	100·0	3,360	40·5	4,930	59·5
(g) Professions allied to medicine	3,160	100·0	520	16·5	2,640	83·5
(h) Scientific and professional	1,350	100·0	490	36·4	860	63·6
(i) General and senior managers	1,030	100·0	580	57·0	440	43·0

[1] All figures are independently rounded to the nearest ten (10) whole-time equivalents. Percentages calculated on unrounded figures.
[2] Includes permanent paid and honorary staff. Excludes locums.

Source: Department of Health (SN13) Annual Census of NHS Medical and Non-medical Manpower.

NHS staff in post
Selected staff groups by gender at 30 September 1990
South East Thames region

Whole-time equivalents[1]

Staff groups	Total		Male		Female	
	Total	Percentage of total	Total	Percentage of total	Total	Percentage of total
(a) Dentists[2]	250	100·0	160	63·8	90	36·2
(b) Professional and technical	2,500	100·0	890	35·3	1,620	64·7
(c) Works and maintenance	1,510	100·0	1,500	99·4	10	0·6
(d) Administrative and clerical	10,030	100·0	1,640	16·4	8,390	83·6
(e) Ambulance (including officers)	860	100·0	760	88·8	100	11·2
(f) Ancillary	8,020	100·0	3,250	40·5	4,780	59·5
(g) Professions allied to medicine	2,690	100·0	390	14·3	2,310	85·7
(h) Scientific and professional	1,050	100·0	350	33·0	710	67·0
(i) General and senior managers	780	100·0	500	64·0	280	36·0

[1] All figures are independently rounded to the nearest ten (10) whole-time equivalents. Percentages calculated on unrounded figures.
[2] Includes permanent paid and honorary staff. Excludes locums.

Source: Department of Health (SM13) Annual Censuses of NHS Medical and Non-medical Manpower.

NHS staff in post
Selected staff groups by gender at 30 September 1990
South West Thames region

Whole-time equivalents[1]

Staff groups	Total		Male		Female	
	Total	Percentage of total	Total	Percentage of total	Total	Percentage of total
(a) Dentists[2]	130	100·0	70	57·5	60	42·5
(b) Professional and technical	1,420	100·0	510	36·1	910	63·9
(c) Works and maintenance	1,160	100·0	1,150	98·8	10	1·2
(d) Administrative and clerical	6,340	100·0	1,010	16·0	5,330	84·0
(e) Ambulance (including officers)	660	100·0	540	81·9	120	18·1
(f) Ancillary	4,390	100·0	2,140	48·8	2,250	51·2
(g) Professions allied to medicine	2,160	100·0	270	12·5	1,890	87·5
(h) Scientific and professional	720	100·0	190	27·2	520	72·8
(i) General and senior managers	520	100·0	330	63·1	190	36·9

[1] All figures are independently rounded to the nearest ten (10) whole-time equivalents. Percentages calculated on unrounded figures.
[2] Includes permanent paid and honorary staff. Excludes locums.

Source: Department of Health (SM13) Annual Censuses of NHS Medical and Non-medical Manpower.

NHS staff in post
Selected staff groups by gender at 30 September 1990
Wessex region

Whole-time equivalents[1]

Staff groups	Total		Male		Female	
	Total	Percentage of total	Total	Percentage of total	Total	Percentage of total
(a) Dentists[2]	150	100·0	90	56·2	70	43·8
(b) Professional and technical	1,730	100·0	660	37·9	1,080	62·1
(c) Works and maintenance	1,010	100·0	1,000	99·4	10	0·6
(d) Administrative and clerical	5,840	100·0	760	13·0	5,080	87·0
(e) Ambulance (including officers)	940	100·0	750	80·1	190	19·9

Staff groups	Total		Male		Female	
	Total	Percentage of total	Total	Percentage of total	Total	Percentage of total
(f) Ancillary	5,360	100·0	1,970	36·8	3,390	63·2
(g) Professions allied to medicine	2,220	100·0	250	11·4	1,970	88·6
(h) Scientific and professional	620	100·0	220	35·5	400	64·5
(i) General and senior managers	610	100·0	380	62·0	230	38·0

[1] All figures are independently rounded to the nearest ten (10) whole-time equivalents. Percentages calculated on unrounded figures.
[2] Includes permanent paid and honorary staff. Excludes locums.

Source: Department of Health (SM13) Annual Censuses of NHS Medical and Non-medical Manpower.

NHS staff in post
Selected staff groups by gender at 30 September 1990
Oxford region

Whole-time equivalents[1]

Staff groups	Total		Male		Female	
	Total	Percentage of total	Total	Percentage of total	Total	Percentage of total
(a) Dentists[2]	90	100·0	50	57·1	40	42·9
(b) Professional and technical	1,370	100·0	530	38·6	840	61·4
(c) Works and maintenance	860	100·0	850	99·3	10	0·7
(d) Administrative and clerical	5,150	100·0	710	13·7	4,440	86·3
(e) Ambulance (including officers)	800	100·0	620	77·7	180	22·3
(f) Ancillary	3,470	100·0	1,450	41·7	2,020	58·3
(g) Professions allied to medicine	1,760	100·0	180	10·4	1,580	89·6
(h) Scientific and professional	540	100·0	150	27·0	400	73·0
(i) General and senior managers	420	100·0	260	61·8	160	38·2

[1] All figures are independently rounded to the nearest ten (10) whole-time equivalents. Percentages calculated on unrounded figures.
[2] Includes permanent paid and honorary staff. Includes locums.

Source: Department of Health (SM13) Annual Censuses of NHS Medical and Non-medical Manpower.

NHS staff in post
Selected staff groups by gender at 30 September 1990
South Western region

Whole-time equivalents[1]

Staff groups	Total		Male		Female	
	Total	Percentage of total	Total	Percentage of total	Total	Percentage of total
(a) Dentists[2]	160	100·0	120	71·1	50	28·9
(b) Professional and technical	1,960	100·0	780	40·0	1,180	60·0
(c) Works and maintenance	1,070	100·0	1,070	99·7	..	0·3
(d) Administrative and clerical	6,980	100·0	1,120	16·0	5,870	84·0
(e) Ambulance (including officers)	1,460	100·0	1,260	86·1	200	13·9
(f) Ancillary	6,370	100·0	2,330	36·5	4,040	63·5
(g) Professions allied to medicine	2,590	100·0	320	12·4	2,270	87·6
(h) Scientific and professional	810	100·0	270	33·0	540	67·0
(i) General and senior managers	610	100·0	400	64·7	220	35·3

[1] All figures are independently rounded to the nearest ten (10) whole-time equivalents. Percentages calculated on unrounded figures.
[2] Includes permanent paid and honorary staff. Includes locums.
.. Indicates that figure is less than 5·0 whole-time equivalents.

Source: Department of Health (SM13) Annual Census of NHS Medical and Non-medical Manpower.

NHS staff in post
Selected staff groups by gender at 30 September 1990
West Midlands region

Whole-time equivalents[1]

Staff groups	Male		Female			
	Total	Percentage of total	Total	Percentage of total	Total	Percentage of total
(a) Dentists[2]	270	100·0	160	58·6	110	41·4
(b) Professional and technical	3,790	100·0	1,310	34·7	2,480	65·3
(c) Works and maintenance	2,430	100·0	2,410	99·2	20	0·8
(d) Administrative and clerical	11,950	100·0	1,590	13·3	10,360	86·7
(e) Ambulance (including officers)	1,850	100·0	1,500	80·7	360	19·3
(f) Ancillary	11,100	100·0	3,430	30·9	7,670	69·1
(g) Professions allied to medicine	3860	100·0	460	11·9	3,400	88·1

Staff groups	Male		Female			
	Total	Percentage of total	Total	Percentage of total	Total	Percentage of total
(h) Scientific and professional	1,170	100·0	430	36·9	740	63·1
(i) General and senior managers	1,060	100·0	690	64·9	370	35·1

[1] All figures are independently rounded to the nearest ten (10) whole-time equivalents. Percentages calculated on unrounded figures.
[2] Includes permanent paid and honorary staff. Includes locums.

Source: Department of Health (SM13) Annual Censuses of NHS Medical and Non-medical Manpower.

NHS staff in post
Selected staff groups by gender at 30 September 1990
Mersey region

Whole-time equivalents[1]

Staff groups	Total		Male		Female	
	Total	Percentage of total	Total	Percentage of total	Total	Percentage of total
(a) Dentists[2]	130	100·0	80	59·6	50	40·4
(b) Professional and technical	1,870	100·0	740	39·6	1,130	60·4
(c) Works and maintenance	990	100·0	990	99·8	0	0·2
(d) Administrative and clerical	5,810	100·0	870	15·0	4,950	85·0
(e) Ambulance (including officers)	880	100·0	760	87·2	110	12·8
(f) Ancillary	4,690	100·0	1,520	32·4	3,170	67·6
(g) Professions allied to medicine	1,910	100·0	200	10·2	1,720	89·8
(h) Scientific and professional	520	100·0	170	33·5	350	66·5
(i) General and senior managers	500	100·0	330	66·6	170	33·4

Source: Department of Health (SMI3) Annual Censuses of NHS Medical and Non-Medical Manpower.
Notes:
[1] All figures are independently rounded to the nearest ten (10) whole-time equivalents. Percentages calculated on unrounded figures.
[2] Includes permanent paid and honorary staff. Includes locums.

NHS staff in post
Selected staff groups by gender at 30 September 1990
North Western Region

Whole-time equivalents[1]

Staff groups	Total		Male		Female	
	Total	Percentage of total	Total	Percentage of total	Total	Percentage of total
(a) Dentists[2]	200	100·0	120	60·4	80	39·6
(b) Professional and technical	2,940	100·0	990	33·9	1,940	66·1
(c) Works and maintenance	1,770	100·0	1,760	99·4	10	0·6
(d) Administrative and clerical	10,070	100·0	1,370	13·6	8,700	86·4
(e) Ambulance (including officers)	1,580	100·0	1,320	83·4	260	16·6
(f) Ancillary	8,020	100·0	3,230	40·3	4,780	59·7
(g) Professions allied to medicine	3,440	100·0	430	12·4	3,010	87·6
(h) Scientific and professional	970	100·0	350	36·4	620	63·6
(i) General and senior managers	690	100·0	480	68·8	220	31·2

[1] All figures are independently rounded to the nearest ten (10) whole-time equivalents. Percentages calculated on unrounded figures.
[2] Includes permanent paid and honorary staff. Includes locums.

Source: Department of Health (SM13) Annual Censuses of NHS Medical and Non-medical Manpower.

NHS staff in post
Selected staff groups by gender at 30 September 1990
London post-graduate special Health Authorities

Whole-time equivalents (1)

Staff groups	Total		Male		Female	
	Total	Percentage of total	Total	Percentage of total	Total	Percentage of total
(a) Dentists (2)	70	100·0	50	64·2	30	35·8
(b) Professional and technical	690	100·0	320	46·2	370	53·8
(c) Works and maintenance	270	100·0	270	99·3	[1]—	0·7
(d) Administrative and clerical	1,840	100·0	390	21·3	1,450	78·7
(e) Ambulance (including officers)	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
(f) Ancillary	1,080	100·0	540	50·6	530	49·4
(g) Professions allied to medicine	520	100·0	40	8·3	480	91·7
(h) Scientific and professional	350	100·0	140	38·7	220	61·3
(i) General and senior managers	130	100·0	80	61·1	50	38·9

Notes:
(1) All figures are independently rounded to the nearest ten (10) whole-time equivalents. Percentages calculated on unrounded figures.
(2) Includes permanent paid and honorary staff. Excludes locums.

[1]Indicates that figure is less than 5·0 whole-time equivalents.
[2]Indicates that figure is nil.

Source: Department of Health (SM13) Annual Censuses of NHS Medical and Non-medical Manpower.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Electricity Generation

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will seek powers to impose a non-fossil fuel obligation for electricity generation.

Mr. Hanley: Provisions to enable the promotion of the generation of electricity from renewable sources were included in the proposal for a draft Electricity (NI) Order published on 19 April. My right hon. Friend hopes to lay such an order before the House shortly.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Members' Pay and Allowances

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many individuals currently in receipt of employee payments from the office costs allowance are married or otherwise related to current hon. Members.

Mr. MacGregor: There is no requirement for hon. Members to inform the Fees Office of any family relationship with them or other hon. Members when authorising payments of salaries to their staff from the office costs allowance. I regret therefore that the information requested is not available.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many Members employ *(a)* one, *(b)* two, *(c)* three, *(d)* four and *(e)* five or more employees from their office costs allowance.

Mr. MacGregor: Excluding one-off payments, 171 Members employed one member of staff; 270 employed two; 141 employed three; 42 employed four and 13 employed five or more as at the end of October.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many employees are paid out of the office costs allowance; and how many Members have given their employees a contract of employment as requested by the Fees Office and the House.

Mr. MacGregor: Excluding one-off payments there were, at 31 October 1991, 1,332 persons employed by hon. Members and paid from the office costs allowance. This represents 1,370 separate employments. On the same date 601 hon. Members had contracts of employment with members of their staff.

Mr. Stevens: To ask the Lord President of the Council if there is to be any increase in 1991 in the maximum sum that may be claimed by an hon. Member in respect of additional expenses necessarily incurred in staying overnight away from his main home for the purpose of performing his parliamentary duties.

Mr. MacGregor: The civil service daily rate of subsistence for class 1 regular visitor (inner London) remains at £74·90 per day from 1 August 1991. Therefore, in accordance with the resolutions of the House of 20 December 1971 and 22 July 1975, the maximum sum that may be reimbursed will remain at £10,786 for the year ending 31 March 1992.

SCOTLAND

Scottish Government

20. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has for reforming the government machinery dealing with Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Reform of the government machinery in Scotland is continuous. We have transferred to the Scottish Office responsibility for nature conservation matters and for training under Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and local enterprise companies. We propose that responsibility for Scottish universities will also be transferred.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

21. **Mr. Maclennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he proposes to create environmentally sensitive areas in Caithness and Sutherland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Government believe that environmentally sensitive areas offer significant benefits to farming and conservation. My right hon. Friend intends to designate further areas in Scotland and has sought advice from his statutory advisers. He will announce the new areas in due course.

European Community

22. **Mr. Graham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has to improve representation of Scotland's interests within the European Community.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Scotland's interests are well served by existing arrangements for governmental representation within the European Community. The Scottish Office makes full use of these in its handling of Community business.

In addition, my right hon. Friend supports Scottish Enterprise's plans to establish Scotland Europa, which will serve the European interests of a range of non-governmental Scottish organisations.

Patients Charter

23. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the implications of the patients charter for patients who presently benefit from in-patient specialised units.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The patients charter provides commitments on raising the standard of service for all who make use of the NHS in Scotland. In particular, all in-patients will benefit from the guarantees to be provided as from April 1992 on waiting times for admission to hospital.

Mr. Hind: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the aims and objects of the patients charter.

Mr. Lang: The aim of our patients charter is to set out simply and clearly what everyone who uses the NHS in Scotland can expect from it; and to give a series of commitments designed to improve the standards of service.

Cardiac Patients (Lothian)

24. **Mr. Eadie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when patients who were assessed as in need of cardiac surgery in February in Lothian health board area can expect to receive notification for their operation.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: About 60 per cent. of the patients assessed in February will have been admitted immediately as emergencies. Of those placed on the waiting list about 80 per cent will already have been admitted and the remainder will be notified as soon as a firm date for admission can be given.

Salmon

25. **Mr. Macdonald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the salmon farming industry.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: On 8 November, in response to a request from the United Kingdom, the European Commission announced a minimum import price for certain presentations of Atlantic salmon, designed to prevent any further fall in the market price. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has welcomed the Commission's action as a helpful step in stabilising the market while attention is given to the industry's complaints of dumping by Norwegian companies.

Proportional Representation

26. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will introduce proportional representation for all elections in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so.

Constituencies

27. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans his Department has for ensuring the size of Scottish constituencies conform to a United Kingdom average.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has no present intention to propose changes in the rules set out in schedule 2 of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986, to which the Boundary Commission for Scotland is required to give effect by section 3(1) of that Act.

Health Visitors, Glasgow

28. **Mr. Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to discuss with the Greater Glasgow health board the proposed cuts in the number of home visits made by health visitors.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have no plans to do so. The board proposes to extend the benefits of the health visitor service to those who need it most by improving its efficiency and re-directing its efforts to the most vulnerable groups. This will result in an increase from 317,000 visits last year to an expected 540,000 contacts in 1992.

Higher Education

29. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the number of students in higher education.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The numbers of students in full-time higher education have increased by over 40 per cent. to nearly 97,000 since the Government took office.

Tourism

30. **Mr. Gregory:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many overseas visitors to Scotland are expected in 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The Scottish tourist board believes that visitor numbers in 1991 will be within the range of 1·45 to 1·5 million.

Hill Farming

31. **Sir Hector Monro:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions he has had with the National Farmers Union about hill farming; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: My noble Friend the Minister for Agriculture in Scotland and other Agriculture Ministers met the four national farming unions on 23 October to review the economic situation in the hills and uplands. We will announce the results of the review as soon as possible.

NHS Trusts

32. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on trust status for the hospital service in Edinburgh.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: NHS trust status with its emphasis on the delegation of responsibility to locally run trust boards provides considerable potential for improved patient care within the national health service and with services continuing to be free at the point of delivery as at present. All hospitals and units in Scotland have been invited to consider their potential for trust status. So far one hospital in Edinburgh, the Princess Margaret Rose, plus the Lothian college of nursing and midwives have expressed an interest. Others, I am confident, will follow.

Local Authority Services

33. **Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next plans to meet representatives of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to discuss funding of essential services.

Mr. Allan Stewart: My right hon. Friend's next scheduled meeting with the convention about local government finance matters is on 29 November.

Agriculture

34. **Mr. Andrew Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to ensure the future prosperity of the Scottish agricultural industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The output of Scottish agriculture in 1990 rose to £1·6 billion and aggregate farm income was estimated to rise to £172 million, above the average for the 1980s. We continue to monitor the situation closely, especially for hill farming. We are resisting firmly the discriminatory elements of the EC Commission's proposals to reform the common agricultural policy, and shall maintain special support to farmers and crofters in the highlands and islands under the rural enterprise programme.

Public Health (Borders)

35. **Sir David Steel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what response he will make to the second annual report of the chief administrative medical officer and director of public health concerning the health of the people of the Borders; and whether he intends to increase the resources available to enable the Borders health board to implement its recommendations.

Mr. Lang: Responsibility for the delivery of health care services in the area lies with Borders health board and it is for the board to determine its own priorities within the resources it receives. In reaching its decisions, the board will no doubt take into account, among other factors, the reports it receives annually from the chief administrative medical officer/director of public health about the health of the population in the area and the implications for services.

Fish Conservation

36. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he proposes to meet leaders of the Scottish fishing industry to discuss fisheries conservation measures.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My noble Friend the Scottish Fisheries Minister will be meeting the Scottish Fishermen's Federation on 18 November.

Highland Scottish Omnibuses

37. **Sir Russell Johnston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much the Scottish Office was paid for the sale of Highland Scottish Omnibuses.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As has previously been indicated to this House, information on the sale prices obtained for each of the bus companies sold under the Scottish Bus Group disposal programme will be made available to Parliament as soon as possible.

The legislation provides that sums received by the Secretary of State for the Scottish Transport Group by way of sale proceeds shall be paid into the Consolidated Fund.

Trunk Roads (Salting)

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will detail what guidelines are issued to regional councils concerning the salting of trunk roads; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Currently there are no formal guidelines issued. The salting of trunk roads in Scotland is carried out in accordance with the procedures laid down by individual regional councils. These give the rates of spread for varying weather conditions and locations. The decision on whether salting should be carried out is taken on the information supplied by Met Office forecasts and ice detection equipment. The Scottish Office roads directorate intends to issue shortly a code of practice on winter maintenance which will include the regularising of regional practices with regard to the level of service of salting required on trunk roads.

Education

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he received a copy of the report of the Channel Four Commission on Education; and what response he has made to the views expressed about Scottish education.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have not received a copy.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether his Department supplied the Channel Four Commission on Education with statistical information or comments on the performance of Scottish education.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: It was for education authorities to decide for themselves whether they did so. My Department was not asked for information or comments.

Courts (Amenities)

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list his powers with regard to ensuring that district courts have basic standards of amenities for accused, witnesses, solicitors and staff.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Under section 8 of the District Courts (Scotland) Act 1975 it is the responsibility of local authorities to provide suitable and sufficient premises and facilities for the purposes of the district court.

School Nurses

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many school nurses were employed in Scotland in *(a)* 1975, *(b)* 1980, *(c)* 1985 and *(d)* 1990.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is as follows:

School nurses employed by the NHS in Scotland as at 30 September

Year	*Whole time equivalent*
1975	137·0
1980	158·3
1985	227·1
1990	232·9

Sentencing Appeals

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many appeals against sentence to the High Court of Justiciary there have been following conviction on indictment in each of the last 10 years for which information is available; and of these how many have been successful;

(2) how many appeals against sentence to the High Court of Justiciary there have been following conviction on summary complaint in each of the last 10 years for which information is available; and of these how many have been successful;

(3) how many appeals against conviction to the High Court of Justiciary there have been following conviction on indictment in each of the last 10 years for which information is available; and of these how many have been successful;

(4) how many appeals against conviction to the High Court of Justiciary there have been following conviction on summary complaint in each of the last 10 years for which information is available; and of these how many have been successful.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is given in the table.

Appeals against conviction, sentence and both conviction and sentence, 1981 to 1990

Year in which appeal determined	Conviction		Sentence		Conviction and Sentence		
	Appeals proceeding to determination[1]	Appeals upheld	Appeals proceeding to determination[1]	Appeals upheld	Appeals proceeding to determination[1]	Appeals upheld	All appeals lodged[2]
(a) Solemn Procedure							
1981	93	25	102	22	66	22	398
1982	45	3	89	13	20	5	609
1983	84	6	130	31	49	16	576
1984	54	3	100	22	35	15	633
1985	43	6	163	37	15	2	715
1986	38	2	132	48	64	19	621
1987	54	7	182	61	30	10	624
1988	62	9	222	57	68	18	759
1989	69	15	250	72	77	23	767
1990[3]	72	18	299	83	52	20	704
(b) Summary Procedure							
1981	110	30	232	75	116	67	717
1982	129	31	307	67	80	26	940
1983	150	42	356	53	97	42	1,067
1984	63	22	445	103	35	10	1,180
1985	56	22	494	126	48	31	1,338
1986	100	23	518	177	80	43	1,461
1987	112	26	573	199	70	39	1,502
1988	140	46	820	268	97	51	1,799
1989	164	61	1,011	282	145	70	2,039
1990[3]	172	71	1,104	325	181	101	2,091

[1] Excludes abandoned appeals
[2] Subject of appeal not recorded. Bills of suspension are included in summary appeals in 1986 and earlier years.
[3] Provisional.

Children

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if, in relation to the justice charter for Scotland, he has any plans to introduce legislation concerning the tendering of video-recorded interviews of children as admissible evidence in court cases involving sexual abuse or physical abuse of children; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: A proposal to enable the evidence of children to be taken on commission and for the commission proceedings to be video recorded was contained in the Scottish Law Commission's report on the evidence of children and other potentially vulnerable witnesses and is at present under consideration.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement concerning the educational, training and recreational facilities made available to those children detained in relation to section 205 or section 206 of the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1975.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Children detained under section 205 or 206 of the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1975 in residential child care establishments receive the same standard of educational, training and recreational facilities as the other children in them. Such establishments have educational and recreational facilities within their premises, but they also have access to external facilities to help them meet the needs of individual children, subject to any additional safeguards which are necessary for their own safety, or the safety of others.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland at what stage of detention of a child, detained under the terms of section 205 or section 206 of the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1975, he or she is eligible for home visits; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Children who are detained without limit of time under section 205 of the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1975, following a conviction for murder, are not allowed home visits while detained in the child care system. There are regular opportunities for family and friends to visit the child in the appropriate residential establishments.

As regards home visits for children sentenced to be detained under section 206 of the 1975 Act, each case is considered on its merits, having particular regard to the nature of offence and length of sentence. In most cases, home visits become a regular part of the child's programme.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will state *(a)* the number of children detained in relation to section 205 or section 206 of the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1975 in each of the past 15 years, *(b)* the average length of detention/imprisonment undertaken by such offenders, *(c)* how many have been released under licence and *(d)* in how many cases licences were revoked; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Details of the number of children sentenced and recalled under section 206 of the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1975 during each of the 15 years to 31 December 1990 are given in the table. Records of the number of children released each year and the average period of detention are not maintained.

Corresponding records for children convicted of murder and sentenced under section 205 of the 1975 Act are not separately maintained.

Year	Number sentenced	Number recalled
1976	42	5
1977	53	5
1978	26	1

Year	Number sentenced	Number recalled
1979	33	5
1980	12	1
1981	9	—
1982	18	—
1983	16	—
1984	16	2
1985	13	1
1986	15	2
1987	12	—
1988	17	1
1989	14	—
1990	14	2
	309	25

Child Care Inquiry, Fife

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the Fife child care inquiry.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The chairman of the inquiry into child care policy in Fife has finished hearing evidence from the parties concerned and is now preparing his report, which we are keenly awaiting.

Orthopaedic Surgery

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of patients waiting for operations or procedures in respect of orthopaedic surgery as at 31 December and 30 June in each year since 1988 in respect of *(a)* Lothian health board and *(b)* Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 11 November 1991]:* The information available is set out in the table:

Number of patients waiting for orthopaedic surgery

	Lothian Health Board		Scotland	
	In-patients	*Day cases*	*In-patients*	*Day cases*
31 December 1989	1,153	123	8,269	1,150
30 June 1990	1,178	139	7,994	1,255
31 December 1990	1,178	107	8,674	1,398
30 June 1991	1,201	135	8,742	1,427

Note: This information was not collected at 30 June and 31 December in each year prior to 31 December 1989.

"The Justice Charter for Scotland"

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the cost of producing and distributing the Scottish Office publication "The justice charter for Scotland".

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 12 November 1991]:* The estimated cost of producing and distributing the justice charter for Scotland is £14,000.

EMPLOYMENT

EC Labour Statistics

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the percentage increase in unemployment in each of the EC countries over the last 12 months.

Mr. Jackson: The table gives the percentage point change over the latest 12 months in the internationally comparable unemployment rates for EC countries, as produced by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Where such rates are not available, harmonised rates produced by the Statistical Office of the European Communities are given.

Percentage point change in unemployment rates over the latest 12 months in EC countries
Standardised unemployment rates seasonally adjusted

	Percentage point change	Latest month
United Kingdom	3·2	September
Ireland	2·4	September
Denmark[1]	0·9	September
France	0·7	August
Belgium	0·5	September
Luxembourg[1]	0·4	September
Italy	0·3	April
Spain	−0·4	May
Portugal	−0·5	May
Netherlands	−0·9	July

[1] OECD standardised rates are not available for Denmark and Luxembourg. Similar harmonised rates compiled by the Statistical Office of the European Communities (SOEC) are shown for these countries.

Notes:
1. There are currently no comparable rates available for Greece.
2. There are no reliable figures available as yet for the unified Germany.

Source: OECD "Main Economic Indicators" and press releases. EUROSTAT "Unemployment" bulletins.

Heathrow Airport (Signposting)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will provide extra funds to the tourist boards to promote improved signposting in the vicinity of Heathrow airport.

Mr. Forth: No. The Department does not provide funds either directly or through the English tourist board to cover the costs of directional or tourist road signs. Directional signs are a matter for the Department of Transport or for the appropriate local highway authority. The costs of erecting white-on-brown tourist road signs must be met by the attraction or venue concerned.

Ports (Cargo Handling)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many port businesses employing workers involved in cargo-handling activities which have commenced business since July 1989 have had their operations inspected by the Health and Safety Executive.

Mr. Forth: Information on cargo handling businesses is not recorded separately from other support services to sea

transport by the Health and Safety Executive and would require a manual search of records. This could be carried out only at disproportionate cost. HSE inspectors do regularly carry out preventive inspections of port operations, including cargo handling and other transient activities. This is in addition to investigating accidents and dangerous occurrences and complaints which are reported to them.

TECs and LECs

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received from trade associations about the overhead costs incurred in administering Government funds via training and enterprise councils and local enterprise companies; if he has any plans to change the current funding arrangements; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The arrangements for administering training programmes funded by TECs is a matter for agreement between each TEC and the training provider concerned. Funding arrangements for TECs are being reviewed as part of the review of the TEC operating agreement for next year and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State hopes to be in a position to agree any changes with TECs shortly.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he has taken to reduce *(a)* the bureaucracy surrounding the operation of training and enterprise councils and *(b)* the costs borne by national training organisations through having to operate the current funding arrangements; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has reduced administrative burdens on TECs to a minimum, consistent with the need for proper control of public funds, including the oversight exercised by Parliament. The TECs and national providers unit established within the Department facilitates arrangements between national training providers and individual TECs. TECs have substantial freedom to adapt training and enterprise support to the needs of their local area.

National Vocational Qualifications

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if it remains his intention to withhold training funding from national training organisations until national vocational qualifications are awarded; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The funding of training organisations for training leading to national vocational qualifications under employment training and youth training is a matter for negotiation between training and enterprise councils and the organisations concerned.

Training Credit Schemes

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures he is taking to ensure a degree of standardisation in the administration of local training credit schemes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The training credits pilots now running in 11 areas throughout Great Britain were selected to test a range of approaches in a number of different environments. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has commissioned a rigorous evaluation of these pilot schemes. The evaluation results will be disseminated to TECs and local enterprise companies to inform the future development of training credit schemes, including any areas where the evaluation suggests that a degree of standardisation may be appropriate.

Ports (Accidents)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many serious accidents involving injury or death of employees have occurred in each major port *(a)* each year since July 1989 and *(b)* in each of the previous five years; and how many of these accidents have involved dangerous goods, as defined in the international maritime goods code.

Mr. Forth: This information is not available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The total numbers of injuries to employees in ports notified to the Health and Safety Executive during this period are given in the table. Statistics for 1990-91 are not yet available.

Injuries to employees in the sea transport and port and inland water transport industries in Great Britain 1984 to 1989-90

Date of accidents	Number of reported injuries (a)			Number of accidents involving dangerous goods		
	Fatal	Major	Over three days (b)	Total	Fatal	Injuries
1984	9	113	N/A	N/A	—	N/A
1985	12	120	N/A	N/A	—	N/A
1986-87(c)	6	144	694	844	—	7
1987-88(c)	13	136	672	821	—	9
1988-89(c)	9	123	655	787	—	2
1989-90(c)	11	94	514	619	—	1

(a) As reported to the Health and Safety Executive's factory and agricultural inspectorates under the Notification of Accidents and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1980 (NADOR) for the years 1984 and 1985, and the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985 (RIDDOR) for subsequent years.
(b) Injuries causing incapacity for work for more that three consecutive days.
(c) Year beginning 1 April.

Nuclear Installations Inspectorate

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether the arrangements for the early retirement of the chief inspector of the nuclear installations inspectorate includes a non-disclosure agreement.

Mr. Forth: The Health and Safety Executive chief inspector of nuclear installations retired on reaching the normal age of retirement. In common with all civil servants, he signed the Official Secrets Act on commencement of his employment and will continue to be bound by it after retirement. This covers the divulging of any information gained as a result of his appointment.

DEFENCE

Unused Defence Establishments

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish in tabular form a list of Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force establishments in the United Kingdom which are not at present in use but which are capable of being used at up to three months' notice; and if he will specify the number of beds available in each case.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Army Vehicles

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the categories of vehicle among the 400 Army vehicles in London district covered by the contract maintenance scheme; and to which specific units they are allocated.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information is as follows:

Categories of vehicles covered by the London district contract maintenance scheme and their distribution

Vehicle type	*Site 1*	*Site 2*	*Site 3*	*Site 4*	*Total*
Car saloon grade A	35	—	1	—	36
Car saloon grade B	51	3	11	3	68
Car saloon grade C	45	12	17	2	76
Car utility small	32	14	24	7	77
Minibus 13 seater	35	15	11	2	63
Minibus 17 seater	6	2	8	—	16
Van 3·5 tonne (diesel)	22	—	—	12	34
Van 3·5 tonne (petrol)	14	4	2	—	20
Truck 7·5 tonne (W/tail lift)	4	1	2	4	11
Truck 7·5 tonne (curtain sided)	—	2	2	—	4
Truck van 10 tonne (box body)	8	—	—	—	8
Transit ambulance	—	9	—	—	9
Total	252	62	78	30	422

The vehicles are used throughout London district and the sites from which they operate are:

1. 20 Squadron RCT, Regents Park.
2. 56 Squadron RCT, Woolwich.
3. D Troop, 20 Squadron RCT, Hounslow.
4. Postal and Courier Depot, RE, Mill Hill.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence under what circumstances officers in each of the three services are issued with cars without the services of a driver.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Officers are issued with self-drive cars when this is the most cost-effective means of providing transport to enable them to fulfil their duties.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the lowest rank in each of the three services which confers entitlement to the exclusive use of a staff car.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Entitlement to a staff car is determined by an officer's appointment rather than by his rank. Officers in command of major units are allocated cars, but other personnel whose duties justify exclusive use of a car may also be entitled.

Scottish Division

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the occasions during the last five years when personnel from Scottish Division infantry divisions have been deployed to make up the strength of battalions from other divisions serving in Northern Ireland; and whether any such deployments are planned at present.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Using soldiers from one division to reinforce another is not an unusual occurrence. Over the last five years Scottish battalions have reinforced non-Scottish battalions serving in Northern Ireland on the following occasions:

— 7 soldiers between April and October 1988.
— 30 soldiers between September 1988 and March 1989.
— 10 soldiers between November 1988 and July 1989.
— 4 soldiers between September 1989 and January 1990.

For operational reasons we do not give details of future deployments.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average length of service of trained soldiers in the Scottish Division and in the rest of the infantry, apart from the Gurkhas, respectively.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested is set out in the table.

Average Length of Service of Trained Soldiers

Financial Year	*Length of Service (in Years) Scottish Division*	*Rest of Infantry*[1]
1988-89	6·9	7·0
1989-90	7·0	7·2
1990-91	7·3	7·4

[1] Rest of Infantry includes Guards and Parachute Regiment but excludes Scottish Division.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the rate of losses of recruits during initial training over the last five years at the Scottish Division depot and in the rest of the Army, respectively.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Wastage rates for the Scottish division depot are not kept separately; the table below shows wastage rates for the whole Scottish Division, compared with those for the rest of the Army.

Wastage of adults and young soldiers within first six months of service

Financial year of intake	Scottish division	Rest of army
	Rate per cent.	Rate per cent.
1986-87	11·0	25·9
1987-88	23·6	29·7
1988-89	28·1	27·8
1989-90	29·5	30·0
[1]1990-91	26·6	31·7

[1] Provisional figures for 1990-91.

Sandhurst

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average number of warrant officer and staff sergeant instructors at Sandhurst for each infantry division for each of the last five years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested is set out in the table.

Average number of Warrant Officer and Staff Sergeant Instructors at Sandhurst for each Infantry Division for each of the last five years

Division	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Household	33	36	38	41	36
Scottish	3	6	5	8	9
Queens	9	11	9	9	5
Kings	6	6	6	6	8
Prince of Wales	10	7	9	6	6
Light	3	5	6	4	3
Parachute	2	4	3	4	4

Regimental Links

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the artillery and armoured regiments which have recognised links with geographical areas of the United Kingdom, giving the area concerned; and if he will make a statement on the effect of his plans for the Army on each of these regiments.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Current regional links and recruiting areas for Royal Armoured Corps and Royal Artillery regiments are listed in the table below, together with any effects of restructuring on those regiments. We will ensure that the new Army structure covers those regional areas currently covered by units to be disbanded or amalgamated. Timings should be broadly as shown, although there may have to be some adjustment to later dates as detailed plans take shape.

Regiment/Unit	Regional links/Recruiting areas	Changes following restructuring
1st The Queen's Dragoon Guards	Shropshire, Hereford, Wales	No change
The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards (Carabiniers and Greys)	Scotland	No change
4th/7th Royal Dragoon Guards	North and West Yorkshire	To amalgamate with the 5th Inniskilling Dragoon Guards in Mid 1992
5th Royal Inniskilling Dragoon Guards	Northern Ireland, Cumbria, Cheshire	To amalgamate with the 4th/7th Royal Dragoon Guards in Mid 1992
The Queen's Own Hussars	Warwickshire, West Midlands, Worcester	To amalgamate with The Queen's Royal Irish Hussars in 1993
The Queen's Royal Irish Hussars	Northern Ireland, Surrey, Sussex, London (part)	To amalgamate with The Queen's Own Hussars in 1993
9th/12th Royal Lancers (Prince of Wales's)	Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, Blackheath	No change
The Royal Hussars (Prince of Wales's Own)	Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire	To amalgamate with the 14th/20th King's Hussars late 1992
13th/18th Royal Hussars (Queen Mary's Own)	South Yorkshire, North Humberside	To amalgamate with 15th/19th The King's Royal Hussars late 1992
14th/20th King's Hussars	Manchester, Lancashire, Isle of Man	To amalgamate with The Royal Hussars (Prince of Wales's Own) late 1992
15th/19th The King's Royal Hussars	Cleveland, Durham, Northumberland, Tyne & Wear	To amalgamate with the 13th/18th Royal Hussars (Queen Mary's Own) in late 1992

Regiment/Unit	Regional links/Recruiting areas	Changes following restructuring
16th/5th The Queen's Royal Lancers	Staffordshire, Wolverhampton	To amalgamate with the 17th/21st Lancers in 1993
17th/21st Lancers	South Humberside, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire	To amalgamate with the 16th/5th The Queen's Royal Lancers in 1993
1st Royal Tank Regiment	Leeds, Halifax, Wakefield, Manchester, Merseyside	To amalgamate with 4th Royal Tank Regiment in 1993
2nd Royal Tank Regiment	Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Kent, London	To amalgamate with 3rd Royal Tank Regiment in mid 1992
3rd Royal Tank Regiment	Avon, Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Somerset	To amalgamate with 2nd Royal Tank Regiment in mid 1992
4th Royal Tank Regiment	Scotland	To amalgamate with 1st Royal Tank Regiment in 1993
1st Field Regiment Royal Horse Artillery	South Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire	No change
3rd Field Regiment Royal Horse Artillery	Northumberland and northern half of Tyne and Wear	No change
7th Parachute Regiment Royal Horse Artillery	Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire	No change
2nd Field Regiment Royal Artillery	Greater Manchester	To be disbanded 1994
4th Field Regiment Royal Artillery	North Yorkshire, Cleveland, Durham, southern half of Tyne and Wear	No change
19th Field Regiment Royal Artillery	Fife, Grampian, Highlands, Western Isles, Tayside	No change
26th Field Regiment Royal Artillery	Sussex, Surrey and South-West London	No change
27th Field Regiment Royal Artillery	Berkshire, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Dorset and South Wiltshire	To be disbanded early 1993
29th Commando Regiment Royal Artillery	Somerset, Devon, Cornwall	No change
40th Field Regiment Royal Artillery	Lothian, Borders, Dumfries and Galloway	No change
45th Field Regiment Royal Artillery	West Yorkshire and southern North Yorkshire	To be disbanded 1993
47th Field Regiment Royal Artillery	Leicestershire, Derbyshire	To be redesignated as 47 AD Regiment in 1993
49th Field Regiment Royal Artillery	Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Hertfordshire	To be disbanded 1992
5th Heavy Regiment Royal Artillery	Northern Wiltshire, Avon, Gloucestershire	No change
32nd Heavy Regiment Royal Artillery	Cheshire and Merseyside	No change
39th Heavy Regiment Royal Artillery	Shropshire, Staffordshire, West Midlands, Warwickshire, Hereford and Worcester	No change
12th Air Defence Regiment Royal Artillery	Cumbria, Lancashire	No change
16th Air Defence Regiment Royal Artillery	Strathclyde and Central	No change
22nd Air Defence Regiment Royal Artillery	Wales	No change

Regiment/Unit	Regional links/Recruiting areas	Changes following restructuring
50th Missile Regiment Royal Artillery	Lincolnshire, Humberside	To be disbanded early 1993
94th Locating Regiment Royal Artillery	Kent	To be disbanded 1993

Infantry Battalions

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish a table showing the tasks for infantry battalions and the units earmarked to fulfil those tasks up to 1997, indicating the number of battalions required for each task and the number of battalions available to be deployed.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Details of infantry tasks and the battalions available to undertake these tasks are provided in the Command Paper "Britain's Army for the 90s". Future arms plot and emergency tour plot details are classified and cannot therefore be provided but, in most cases, tasks are not allotted to specific units as far ahead as 1997.

Ballistic Missiles

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his assessment of the threat to NATO territory from ballistic missiles deployed by countries other than the Soviet Union and China.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Excluding the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, the following nations have a ballistic missile capability with the range to hit NATO territory: Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Libya, Poland, Saudi Arabia and Syria. The possession of such a capability does not necessarily imply that any particular country constitutes a threat to NATO.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he intends to conduct *(a)* with the United States Government and *(b)* with the Soviet Union Government about ballistic missile defences.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has no plans to discuss ballistic missile defences with the Government of the Soviet Union. We remain in close touch with the United States on this subject.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many anti-ballistic missile systems the Soviet Union currently deploys; and where these are situated;

(2) what is his assessment of the range of existing Soviet ABM systems;

(3) what is the maximum number of ABM launchers the Soviet Union is permitted to deploy under the terms of the ABM treaty;

(4) what is his assessment of the current status of the Soviet Union's modernisation programme of its ABM system;

(5) what is his assessment of the improved military capability of the Soviet Union's ABM defences since these were first deployed;

(6) what is his assessment as to the numbers and location of deployments of future Soviet ABM systems.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Under the 1972 United States-Soviet ABM treaty and subsequent protocols, the Soviet Union is limited to a maximum of 100 ABM launchers located within a radius of 150 km around either the national capital or one area containing silo fields. The current, upgraded, Soviet ABM system became operational in 1989. Components of the system, deployed around Moscow, include the short-range Gazelle interceptor and the Gorgon long-range interceptor for engagements beyond the atmosphere. The upgraded system is believed to comprise the full 100 launchers permitted compared with the 64 launchers of the original system. Future Soviet ABM deployments are similarly expected to conform to the 1972 treaty and its protocols or any future renegotiations of the agreement.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy towards the continuing adherence to the ABM treaty by the Soviet Union.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Soviet Union is party to the ABM treaty and has undertaken to abide by its international obligations, including those to arms control. We strongly support this.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy towards President Bush's proposal to conduct joint discussions about the development of ballistic missile defences with the Soviet Union.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We remain committed to the six points agreed with President Reagan in the mid-1980s which included our support for negotiated deployment of strategic defences. The latest developments are consistent with this.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy towards the development and deployment of *(a)* anti-tactical ballistic missile systems and *(b)* strategic ABM systems by NATO.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The United Kingdom's approach to ballistic missile defences remains based on the agreements reached between the then Prime Minister and President Reagan at Camp David in December 1984 and November 1986. These are set out in paragraph 208 of the Statement on the Defence Estimates 1988.

Free-fall Bombs and Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many United Kingdom free-fall bombs *(a)* are currently stockpiled or deployed, *(b)* will be withdrawn from service in accordance with the announced cuts and *(c)* will remain in service;

(2) what means he intends to make available to international inspectors in order to verify the announced reduction in the number of United Kingdom nuclear weapons;

(3) what information he intends to make available to the House to verify the announced reduction in United Kingdom nuclear weapons.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend announced to the House on 14 October at column 58 a substantial reduction in the numbers of our WE177 free-fall bombs. However, in keeping with the practice of successive Governments, we do not make public detailed information on our stockpile size. The question of verification does not arise.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to open the United Kingdom's strategic nuclear weapons to international inspection for the purpose of verifying the numbers of warheads and launchers deployed, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The United Kingdom's nuclear weapons are not subject to any international treaty and there is therefore no requirement to make them open for inspection.

Tactical Air-to-Surface Missiles

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what systems are currently being developed in the United States which could perform the role of *(a)* a NATO tactical air-to-surface missile and *(b)* a United Kingdom TASM; and if he will list them.

Mr. Alan Clark: There are two systems known to be at the development stage in the United States which might have technical characteristics suitable for either a NATO or United Kingdom TASM. These are the short-range attack missile (tactical) (SRAM-T) and the supersonic low-level air target (SLAT).

Soviet Navy

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his Department's policy towards negotiating reductions in Soviet naval power through arms control.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Her Majesty's Government are always willing to consider any proposal aimed at increasing mutual trust, openness and confidence, and enhancing security and stability. In general terms, we consider that negotiations relating specifically to maritime forces would at present be premature, but the possibility of some naval transparency measures is under consideration.

Main Battle Tanks

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his assessment of how many main battle tanks the United Kingdom will deploy by 1995.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Once the "Options for Change" reductions have been completed, it is planned to deploy eight regiments of 50 main battle tanks each within the Field Army.

Ulster Defence Regiment

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he intends to introduce legislation to give effect to the merger of the Ulster Defence Regiment and the Royal Irish Rangers.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Existing legislation will be amended as necessary in due course.

Iraq

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what revision he has made of his assessment of the likely date when Iraq was likely to be able to detonate a nuclear bomb following proof that Iraq has detonated nuclear initiators.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We are unable to comment on the sixth United Nations nuclear inspection of Iraq until the IAEA releases the full documentation for analysis in the United Kingdom.

Asbestos

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many claims for compensation because of exposure to asbestos while in the services have been received and rejected because of section 10 of the Crown Proceedings Act 1947.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Fifty-five.

Frigates and Destroyers

Mr. George: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the average age of the frigates and destroyers in the Royal Navy for 1990, 1985 and 1980.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The average age of the destroyer and frigate force on 1 April of each year was as follows: 1980, 11 years and 9 months; 1985, 13 years and three months; 1990, 12 years.

Royal Parks

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration he has given to the security aspects for barracks and other MOD property of the proposed contracting out of the management of the royal parks.

Mr. Heseltine: I have been asked to reply.

The security implications for the royal palaces, public buildings and MOD property of contracting out the garden and landscape maintenance work in the royal parks are considered in the same way as they are whenever a contractor's staff undertakes work in such buildings or their gardens.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 14 November 1991

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Mr. and Mrs. Beurton

Mr. Riddick To ask the Attorney-General what action he intends to take to stop the self-confessed spy Ursula Beurton from profiting from the sale of her book; and if he will refer the case of Mr. and Mrs. Beurton to the Director of Public Prosecutions to decide what case there is to answer in light of Mrs. Beurton's admission in the book that she and her husband were Soviet intelligence officers.

The Attorney-General: The case of Mr. and Mrs. Beurton has been drawn to the attention of the acting Director of Public Prosecutions. Taking into account all the circumstances, in particular their ages, the lapse of some 50 years since any Official Secrets Act offences may have been committed and the context in which they were then operating, the acting Director has decided that it would not be in the public interest to take any action against them in respect of these offences. There does not at present appear to be any basis for civil proceedings in respect of the publication of the book.

Legal Aid Board

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the names, salaries and former and present occupations of each member of the Legal Aid Board; and how often the board has met.

The Attorney-General: The names and occupations, or former occupations, of the present members of the Legal Aid Board are:

John Pitts *(Chairman)*—Former Chairman and Chief Executive of the Tioxide Group. Chairman of the Shildon and Sedgefield Development Agency.

Martin Acland—JP, General Commissioner of Income Tax and Former Executive Director of Mercantile Credit Co.

Diana Beale—Advice Worker and member of the National Association of Citizen Advice Bureaux.

Allan Blake—Associate Dean of Leeds Business School. Formerly Head of Department of Law at Leeds Polytechnic.

Lyn Devonald—Solicitor.

Kenneth Farrow—Barrister and Recorder.

Geoffrey Hibbert—JP, former Personnel Director, Shell International Petroleum Co.

David Sinker—JP, Chartered Accountant and Director. Formerly advisor to the National Board of Prices and Incomes.

John Smith—JP, former Personnel Director and Assistant Managing Director, Associated British Ports. Member of Industrial Tribunals.

Peter Soar—Solicitor. Former Chairman of Cambridge Duty Solicitors Scheme.

The chairman of the board is paid £22,930 per annum. All other members are paid £7,109 per annum. With effect from 1 December the salaries will increase to £23,355 and £7,785 per annum respectively. There have been 29 full meetings of the board since 1 April 1989.

Bank of Credit and Commerce International

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Attorney-General how many members of staff are at the disposal of the Serious Fraud Office in dealing with the BCCI issue.

The Attorney-General: The director of the SFO is satisfied that the staff resources available to her are sufficient for this purpose, and that there is sufficient flexibility to enable the fluctuating requirements of current cases to be satisfactorily met. It is the policy of the Serious Fraud Office not to disclose the deployment of operational staff involved in particular criminal investigations.

SOCIAL SECURITY

National Insurance

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action he is taking arising from the report on national insurance contributions which his permanent secretary agreed with the National Audit Office.

Mr. Jack: The Department's official response and indications of any action required will form part of the evidence to be given by the Permanent Secretary on 20 November 1991 to the Public Accounts Committee. The formation of the Contributions Agency in April 1991 has already enabled the Department to improve the effectiveness of its management of contributions business by, among other things:

(a) setting financial and business targets and providing an information system to monitor costs and progress

(b) reorganising its operations to centralise contribution correction work which does not involve face-to-face contact with employers or contributors, achieving substantial efficiency savings and tighter control of queries;

(c) developing a dedicated inspectorate with more, better-informed and better-trained staff able to tackle non-compliance, and provide guidance to employers, the self-employed and contributors to prevent errors; and

(d) publicising its contributions business in employer and contributor charters and through conferences and surveys monitoring the agency's performance.

The Department already has in hand a substantial programme of action, which includes the specific issues raised by the NAO report.

Retirement Ages

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards equalising the retirement ages of men and women.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to the statement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made in the House on 26 June at columns 997-1006.

Cold Weather Credits

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received from the Campaign for Cold Weather Credits; if he has costed its proposals; and what action he now proposes.

Mr. Scott: We have received a letter dated 17 October 1991 from the Campaign for Cold Weather Credits. Its proposals have not been costed in detail, but it quotes an

estimated cost of £500 million per year. We have recently introduced improvements to the cold weather payments scheme for the coming winter by introducing automatic payment based on forecasting as well as actual periods of very cold weather, and by abolishing the capital rule. We will continue to keep this scheme under review.

Social Fund

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will explain the procedure whereby he notifies changes to the social fund directions and the stage in the procedure at which the changes take effect.

Mr. Scott: Changes to the social fund directions are normally made through an amendment to the Social Fund Manual. When an amendment is made to the manual, the date from which it takes effect is indicated by the date on the amendment. This date has in the past been the month and year, but will in future be a specified day.

Five Countries Meeting

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total estimated cost of the five countries meeting on 3 to 8 November being hosted by his Department; who are the delegates and how they were appointed; and if he will publish the minutes of the meetings.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* The total estimated cost is somewhat less than £40,000. Delegates are chosen by their own countries and a full list is as follows. As discussions are informal no proceedings will be published.

Delegates

United Kingdom—Department of Social Security
Sir Michael Partridge, KCB, Permanent Secretary
Mr. Nick Montagu, Deputy Secretary, Resource Management and Planning Group
Mr. Alec Wylie, Chief Executive, Social Security Agency, Northern Ireland

Australia—Department of Social Security
Mr. Derek Volker, AO, The Secretary
Mr. Jim Humphreys, National Manager, Operations
Dr. Owen Donald, First Assistant Secretary, Social Policy Division

Canada—Department of National Health and Welfare
Mrs. Margaret Catley-Carlson, Deputy Minister
Mr. John Soar, Assistant Deputy Minister, Income Security Programs Branch
Mr. Ray Laframboise, Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Management Branch

New Zealand—Department of Social Welfare
Mr. Robin J. Wilson, Deputy Director-General
Mr. Alan Nixon, Assistant Director-General, Programmes and Services

United States of America—Social Security Administration
Mr. Louis D. Enoff, Principal Deputy Commissioner
Ms. Janice Warden, Deputy Commissioner for Operations
Mr. Renato A. DiPentima, Deputy Commissioner for Systems
[Mrs. Geraldine Novak, Director, International Activities Staff
Mrs. Gertrude Wiggins, International Activities Staff]

Mortgage Assistance

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give the comparable figures to those contained in his answer of 22 October, *Official Report*, columns *577-78*, for 1987, 1988 and 1989; and if he will give unemployed claimants receiving mortgage assistance as a proportion of unemployed claimants.

Miss Widdecombe *[pursuant to her reply, 7 November 1991, c. 87-88]:* The following information was incorrect:

Supplementary benefit 1987

	Number	*Per cent.*
Unemployed	207,000	
As proportion of all claimants receiving help with mortgages		28
As proportion of all unemployed claimants		10
Lone Parents	74,000	
As proportion of all claimants receiving help with mortgages		10

The correct information is as follows:

Supplementary benefit 1987

	Number	*Per cent.*
Unemployed claimants receiving help with mortgages	160,000	
As proportion of all claimants receiving help with mortgages		48
As proportion of all unemployed claimants		9
Lone parents receiving help with mortgages	58,000	
As proportion of all claimants receiving help with mortgages		17

ENERGY

Standing Charges

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will now introduce legislation abolishing standing charges on gas and electricity consumption; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: No. Standing charges are intended to reflect those fixed costs of supply which do not vary according to the actual consumption.

Royal Portbury Dock

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what assessment he has made of the effects on coal mining employment in each coalfield in the United Kingdom of the development of a coal-importing terminal proposed for the Royal Portbury dock;

(2) what assessment he has made of the effect of the proposed Royal Portbury dock coal importing terminal on the south Wales coalfield in respect of *(a)* deep mines and *(b)* licensed mines.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No such assessments have been made.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what consultations he has had regarding a rail link for the proposed Royal Portbury dock coal importation terminal.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: None.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Sea Bass

209. **Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what advice and powers have been given to officials who will enforce the bass conservation measures.

Mr. Curry: Bass conservation measures are currently enforced by British sea fisheries officers (BSFOs) with powers arising from the Sea Fisheries Act 1968, the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1967 and in relation to fishing boats the Bass (Specified Areas) (Prohibition of Fishing) Order 1990. Advice is given in the context of compulsory training programmes for BSFOs.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on what dates he listed the sea bass fishing nursery areas; and how many warrants have been issued since those dates to officials to patrol and enforce the conservation measures.

Mr. Curry: The Bass (Specified Area) (Prohibition of Fishing) Order 1990 came into force on 27 June 1990. No new warrants have been issued in respect of this legislation because existing warrants held by officers of the sea fisheries inspectorate acting as British sea fisheries officers (BSFOs) cover all fisheries legislation. Instruments of appointment held by sea fisheries committees' officers trained and appointed as BSFOs include the enforcement of the bass legislation.

Compensatory Allowances

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will give details of how he intends to allot the extra £16·5 million in compensatory allowances payable on hill sheep and cattle in the 1992-93 scheme year.

Mr. Curry: The additional £16·5 million expenditure on hill livestock compensatory allowances for 1992-93 shown in the autumn statement represents the extra money necessary to meet the average 14 per cent. increase in headage rates announced on 11 February 1991. The terms of the 1992 scheme will be announced as soon as decisions have been reached in the light of the autumn review.

Sheep Scab

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cases of sheep scab there were in the United Kingdom during the last 12 months; what were the corresponding figures for 1971 and 1981; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: In the last 12 months 160 cases of sheep scab were reported in the United Kingdom, compared with 69 in 1981 and none in 1971.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Occupational Pensions

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many applications for approval of occupational pension schemes were received by the Inland Revenue; and how many were approved in each year since 1988-89; and what was the cost per scheme of approving *(a)* insured schemes, *(b)* large self-administered schemes and *(c)* small self-administered schemes in 1990-91.

Mr. Maude: The number of applications received and approvals given since 1988-89 are as follows:

	1988-89	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	[1]*1991-92*
Number of applications	57,328	50,251	32,347	19,281
Number of final approvals	20,780	30,082	14,178	12,144

[1]To 31 October.

The difference between the numbers of applications and approvals each year is largely a reflection of the need for schemes to amend their rules to comply with recent legislation before they can be approved.

It is not possible to provide a precise cost for approving schemes. Many pension schemes are not capable of approval in the same year that an application is received. Estimated costs for each type of scheme, based on a recent sample of approvals work, are:

	Cost per scheme £
(a) Insured schemes	19
(b) Large self-administered schemes	173
(c) Small self-administered schemes	205

EC Budget

Mr. Ridley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what he expects the United Kingdom's gross contribution to the European Community budget to be in 1991-92 and in 1992-93, respectively.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The United Kingdom's gross contribution, after abatement, (but excluding receipts) to the European Community budget is forecast to be £3,827 million in 1991-92 and £5,397 million in 1992-93. The contribution in 1991-92 is lower than it would otherwise have been as a result of a refund of earlier years' contributions and higher than usual abatement.

Economic and Finance Council

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the outcome of the meeting of the European Community's Economic and Finance Council on 11 November and of the meetings of the intergovernmental conference on economic and monetary union on 11 and 12 November.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The Economic and Finance Council of the European Community met in Brussels on 11 November and the intergovernmental conference on economic and monetary union met afterwards on 11 and 12 November. I represented the United Kingdom at both meetings.

The Council discussed the Italian Government's programme for economic convergence, the first such discussion of a member state's programme under the Council's new framework for multilateral surveillance. The Council focused on the need for improved budgetary discipline.

The Council agreed to bring forward the remaining tranches of the Community's balance of payments loans to Romania and Bulgaria subject to confirmation from the IMF that their programmes for the two countries would remain on track. The Community will also continue to encourage the members of the G24 outside the Community to increase their assistance to the two countries.

The Council also discussed two proposals for aid to the Soviet Union. It was agreed that the existing 500 million ecu food credit should be disbursed as soon as possible. I urged that the Commission's new proposals for a further 1·25 billion ecu loan should be considered swiftly. It was agreed that the Commission should send a task force to Moscow to consider the operational details of the loan and that ministers should aim for agreement on the first tranche of such a loan on 25 November. I stressed the importance of including provision for feed grains in that first tranche. It was also agreed that both loans would allow a substantial element of the food to be bought from Eastern Europe.

A Commission proposal to revise the financial perspective of the EC budget was also discussed but without agreement and the proposal was remitted to the Budget Council for further consideration.

The Council reached agreement in principle on the VAT technical system directive and the administrative co-operation regulation. These provide for the operation of the intra-Community VAT system in the single market, and enhanced administrative co-operation between the fiscal authorities of member states in support of that system. These measures are vital steps toward the abolition of fiscal frontiers in the Community and the creation of the single market. Agreement brings a welcome end to uncertainty, allowing business and others with an interest, to plan with confidence for the completion of the single market.

I again argued strongly that while tax free and duty-free shopping could not be retained indefinitely in the single market a transitional period longer than that proposed by the Presidency was needed. Member states agreed that intra-Community duty-free shopping should continue for almost eight years: until 1 July 1999. This will be reflected in the VAT technical and excise movements and control directives. Agreement on this transitional period allows businesses a reasonable period of time in which to make the necessary changes to their marketing and investment strategies.

Full legal agreement on these two texts was not possible in the absence of texts in all Community languages, and given the need for certain technical clarifications. I made clear that the United Kingdom's agreement was subject to parliamentary scrutiny, which I look forward to completing shortly through a debate on this and the earlier agreement reached at the 24 June ECOFIN. Consideration of the draft excise movements and control directive was deferred until the next Council meeting.

In the afternon of the same day and in the morning of 12 November Economics and Finance Ministers reconvened at a meeting of the intergovernmental conference on economic and monetary union. Three main issues were discussed: economic and social cohesion, the role of the European Parliament, and the institutional provisions for stage two.

I stressed that economic and social cohesion in the Community was best achieved through sound macroeconomic policies and progress on the single market. Many member states agreed that proposals for financial arrangements to promote cohesion could be discussed only in next year's review of the future financing of the Community, not in the intergovernmental conference.

There was a brief discussion of the role of the European Parliament in economic and monetary union. I expressed the view that its involvement should be limited. Economic policy would remain largely a national responsibility under EMU, and hence accountability should properly be to national Parliaments. There might, however, be a role for the European Parliament in scrutinising the activities of the Commission and European Central bank. The role of the Parliament was discussed further at an inter-institutional meeting with MEPs in the afternoon of 12 November.

On the institutional provisions for stage two, there was broad agreement on the principle of establishing a European monetary institute and for developing the ECU.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

School Examinations and Assessment Council

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will place in the Library copies of the responses from local education authorities and the School Examination and Assessment Council made in relation to standard assessment tasks taken by seven-year-olds last term.

Mr. Eggar: The School Examinations and Assessment Council will publish reports of the evaluations which it commissioned from the National Foundation for Educational Research and from Leeds university in due course. It is for LEAs themselves to decide whether to publish their own evaluations.

School Rolls

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will list the number of infant schools with *(a)* fewer than 50 pupils, *(b)* 50 to 100 pupils and *(c)* more than 100 pupils, respectively;

(2) if he will list the number of primary schools with *(a)* fewer than 50 pupils, *(b)* 50 to 100 pupils, *(c)* 100 to 150 pupils, *(d)* 150 to 200 pupils and *(e)* more than 200 pupils, respectively.

Mr. Eggar: Provisional information for January 1991 on the number of maintained infant and primary schools in England, by size of school, is given in the table. The primary school figures include infant schools and middle-deemed-primary schools.

	England
Infant schools	
Up to 50 full-time pupils	53
51 to 100	237
more than 100	2,368
Total	2,658
Primary schools	
Up to 50 full-time pupils	1,294

	England
51 to 100	2344
100 to 150	2,667
151 to 200	3,948
more than 200	8,792
Total	19,045

HMI (French Visit)

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish the report from Her Majesty's inspectors following their visit to France.

Mr. Eggar: Yes, in due course.

School Classes

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what percentage of primary school children are taught in classes which cover more than one year group.

Mr. Eggar: The primary school staffing survey carried out in 1987 showed that 28 per cent. of primary school children in England were being taught in mixed age classes. Mixed age classes were defined in the survey as those where more than 30 per cent. of pupils are in age ranges other than the largest for the class.

Primary Education

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the written material submitted to his Department which he is considering regarding primary education.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend is considering a wide range of evidence about performance and standards in primary education. Evidence is regularly available to him from HM inspectorate, and from other sources, much of which is published.

GCSE

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the consultations entered into with *(a)* parents, *(b)* teachers and *(c)* local education authorities prior to his announcement of a reduction in the percentage of coursework in GCSE.

Mr. Eggar: Decisions by my right hon. and learned Friend on the restraint and control of coursework in the GCSE examination take account of consultations with, and advice from, the School Examinations and Assessment Council established under the Education Reform Act 1988 as the Government's principal advisory body in the field of public examinations. The council includes several members with teaching or local authority experience.

Student Grants

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what percentage of applications by students for mandatory grants for the current academic year were *(a)* processed and *(b)* paid by 1 November.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) on 6 November 1991, at column *134*.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Company Administrators

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any plans to introduce regulations to require the administrators of a company to make a full disclosure of their relationship with the company they are administering.

Mr. Redwood: I have no such plans.

Accounting Standards Board

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any plans to introduce legislation to exclude partners from the auditing firms criticised by his Department's inspectors from the working of the Accounting Standards Board.

Mr. Redwood: No.

Departmental Accommodation

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether his Department intends to reoccupy 1 Victoria street following refurbishment; and whether his Department will give up any of its other central London accommodation.

Mr. Leigh: My Department intends to move back into 1 Victoria street, following refurbishment, and the intention is to relinquish at least two other central London offices.

Auditing Practices Board

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether his representative on the Auditing Practices Board has received any documents prepared by a working party headed by any partner from the auditing firms criticised by his Department's inspectors.

Mr. Redwood: Yes.

Enterprise Initiative

Mr. Dover: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for each year in which the quality initiative section of the enterprise initiative has been operational *(a)* what sum of Government money has been spent, *(b)* how many separate grants have been provided, *(c)* what is the average amount provided by the Government for each grant, *(d)* how many enterprises have applied for and received certification by third party certification authorities confirming compliance with the requirements of BS 5750 and *(e)* how many grants have been provided to trade associations for the purpose of preparing guidelines and model quality manuals for the use of their members in developing their own manuals.

Mr. Lilley: The information requested is provided by financial year and covers the quality element of the enterprise initiative consultancy scheme.

	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91
Project spend (£ million)	2·8	10·0	13·3
Completed projects	903	3,263	3,782
Average project spend (£)	3,101	3,065	3,517

A recent survey carried out by scheme contractors has indicated that 95 per cent. of firms taking the quality consultancy scheme have applied for, intend to apply for, or have achieved certification under BS5750. To date, under the quality consultancy scheme, one trade association has applied for strategic advice on the preparation of quality procedures common to member businesses.

China

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what checks are made on the importation of products manufactured in the People's Republic of China in order to ensure that they have not been produced in prison labour camps; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Such trade is governed by the Foreign Prison Made Goods Act 1897, as amended in 1988. For enforcement of the Act, the Government have to rely in the main on the private sector or others to supply sufficient information to Customs and Excise.

Enterprise Initiative

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the regional takeup of each of the enterprise initiative schemes; and if he will place copies of such tables of regional takeup in the Library.

Mr. Lilley: Information on regional takeup of the consultancy help available under the enterprise initiative is published in the Industrial Development Act annual report. A copy of the report for the year ending 31 March has been placed in the Library of the house—House of Commons paper number 593. The relevant information is contained in tables 1 to 4 of appendix 25.

Electronics Industry

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the effect of the recession upon production and employment in the United Kingdom electronics industry.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 13 November 1991]:* There is no official assessment of the effect of the recession on particular industries. However, the electronics industry has made great strides during the last decade in terms of improved growth and productivity and is now very much better placed to take advantage of the upturn in the economy as it occurs.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Lancashire Constabulary

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of police officers in the Lancashire constabulary in 1979 and at the last date available.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: In December 1979 there were 3,089 police officers on the strength of the Lancashire constabulary. By the end of August 1991 this had increased by 121 to 3,210 police officers.

Television Franchises

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations he has received from members of the public concerning the process for awarding of the television franchises.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Since the Broadcasting Act 1990 came into force on 1 January 1991, the Home Office has received 25 representations from members of the public; 20 of them have been received since September and were prompted by the Independent Television Commission's announcement of the channel 3 licence awards on 16 October.

Absent Voting

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to ensure that form RPF 7B concerning applications for absent voting on grounds of blindness or physical disability are available in large print, in Braille and on tape.

Mrs. Rumbold We are not aware of any demand for form RPF 7B to be made available in Braille or tape format. If there is such a demand, then we would be prepared to consider meeting it where practicable. We are currently considering the possibility of producing the form in a large print version.

Remand Prisoners

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of police stations that are holding prisoners on remand; and how many are being held at each station.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: On Tuesdaty 12 November, prisoners were held in police cells in the following force areas:

	Number
Avon and Somerset	46
Bedfordshire	32
Cambridgeshire	21
Cheshire	44
Cleveland	22
Cumbria	12
Derbyshire	50
Devon and Cornwall	23
Dorset	3
Durham	21
Dyfed	15
Essex	11
Gloucestershire	8
Greater Manchester	227
Gwent	23
Hampshire	17
Hertfordshire	18
Humberside	67
Kent	37
Lancashire	97
Leicestershire	36
Lincolnshire	17
Merseyside	89
Metropolitan	122
Norfolk	28
North Wales	15
North Yorkshire	35
Northamptonshire	26
Northumbria	34
Nottinghamshire	42
South Wales	63

	Number
South Yorkshire	95
Staffordshire	10
Suffolk	12
Surrey	9
Sussex	45
Thames Valley	31
Warwickshire	8
West Mercia	35
West Midlands	43
West Yorkshire	99
Wiltshire	31
Total	1,719

Details of the individual police stations in which these prisoners are detained are not collected centrally.

Policing, Docklands

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for increasing the number of police officers based and working in the London docklands.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: This is a matter for the commissioner. But we are satisfied that the Metropolitan police will have adequate manpower, and that the commissioner's plans for their deployment take adequate account of the docklands development.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what consultations he had regarding his Minister of State's visit to Glanely high school, Michaelston road, Ely, Cardiff, on Wednesday 6 November;

(2) what discussions he had with the chairman of the education committee of the South Glamorgan county council and his director of education concerning his Minister of State's visit to Glanely high school, Michaelston road, Ely, Cardiff, on 6 November either *(a)* before his visit and *(b)* after the visit;

(3) what was the purpose of the visit by his Minister of State to a school and parish priest's office in Ely, Cardiff, on Wednesday 6 November; how many officials accompanied him and from which sections of his Department; at what total cost; and if he will make a statement;

(4) what consultations he undertook regarding the constituency boundaries of the Cardiff West constituency, prior to his Minister of State's visit to the Glanely high school and other locations in Ely, Cardiff, on 6 November.

Mr. John Patten I will write to the hon. Member.

Dangerous Dogs Act

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will extend the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 to cover rottweiler and doberman pinscher breeds; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Section 3 of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, which creates criminal offences relating to dogs that are dangerously out of control in a public place, already applies to all breeds of dog including the doberman pinscher and the rottweiler.

Section 1 of the Act, which imposes stringent requirements relating to certain breeds of dog and their owners, applies to types of dog bred for fighting or having the characteristics of a type bred for that purpose. As neither the rottweiler nor the doberman pinscher is a type of dog bred for fighting, section 1 cannot be applied to them.

I have no plans at present to use the reserve powers of section 2 of the Act which enables me to impose restrictions on any breed of dog which I consider presents a serious danger to the public. I shall continue to keep under review the need to use these powers in the light of experience of the operation of existing measures to deal with dangerous dogs.

Homelessness

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been prosecuted for *(a)* begging and *(b)* sleeping rought and how many people have been convicted of (i) begging and (ii) sleeping rough in the Metropolitan police areaa during the period from January to October 1991.

Mr. John Patten: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) on 13 November at columns *536-38*.

Youth Remand Centre (Reconstruction)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposal he has for the reconstruction of Her Majesty's youth remand centre at Pucklechurch or in another convenient location.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I announced on 24 July at columns *598-600* the outcome of a review of the prison estate. This included proposals to close Pucklechurch remand centre in 1993-94, to convert part of Gloucester prison to a remand centre for male young offenders in 1992-93 and to reopen in 1993-94 Eastwood Park, following its closure as a young offender institution in 1992-93, as a female establishment.

We are considering representations on these and other review proposals. I hope to make a further announcement soon.

Hotels (Fire Safety)

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he proposes to publish new guidance on fire safety in hotels.

Mr. John Patten: Two guides on fire safety in hotels have been published today. The first, a new guide, is entitled "Fire Safety Management in Hotels and Boarding Houses". It is a simple, commonsense and practical guide comprising good housekeeping measures with a check list which managers can use to make sure that their hotels are as safe as possible from fire. The guide has been produced jointly with the Fire Protection Association and the Scottish Office. It is a blueprint for the 1990s and will help to make British hotels and boarding houses the safest in Europe.

The second guide is a technical document entitled "Guide to Fire Precautions in Premises Used as Hotels and Boarding Houses which require a Fire Certificate". It has been produced by the Home Office and the Scottish Office and is mainly aimed at fire authorities although it will also

be relevant to all professionals in the field of fire precautions. The guide updates guidance produced in 1972 and incorporates the EC recommendation on fire safety in existing hotels.

Copies of both guides have been placed in the Library.

ENVIRONMENT

Royal Parks

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 applies to apprentices currently employed in the royal parks; and how many apprentices working in the royal parks received redundancy notices.

Mr. Heseltine: I am advised that the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 does not apply to the apprentices currently employed in the royal parks. Redundancy notices have been issued to the 27 apprentices, but before contracts are signed I shall require contractors to enter into a deed to maintain apprentice training in the royal parks.

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the cost and purpose of the work commissioned from land use consultants into the management of the royal parks; and if he will place a copy of their report in the Library.

Mr. Heseltine: Land use consultants have been commissioned by my Department to prepare various reports over the last 10 years on several of the royal parks covering their historical significance, strategy plans for their long term conservation and management, and assessments of staffing needs at the time. Records of the cost of the original historical surveys are no longer available. The cost of the other studies has been £154,000. The reports will form an important framework for the future management of the royal parks by the ground maintenance contractors. I am arranging for copies of the strategy and manpower reports for Regent's park, Hyde park and Kensington gardens, and for the staffing report for St. James's and Green park, to be placed in the Library.

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many registered disabled workers are currently under redundancy notice in the royal parks; and what plans he has to ensure their continued employment by future contractors.

Mr. Heseltine: There are nine staff in the royal parks who are registered disabled and who have received notice of redundancy. All staff who have been made redundant, including those who are disabled, will be granted a job interview with the preferred tenderers, and must be informed of the tenderers' decisions before the contracts are signed. Tenderers will also be required to submit details of their company policy and practice regarding the employment of disabled persons. The Department will therefore be able to take these decisions into account in awarding contracts.

Rifle Club

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the Property Services Agency will complete their work in the Palace of Westminster Rifle Club.

Mr. Yeo: The major part of the electrical work affecting the rifle range has been completed. There will be further minor work next year but disruption will be kept to a minimum and the work is expected to be complete by the summer.

North Sea

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he will take to encourage North sea states to produce a directory of the North sea coastal margin in order to protect North sea ecosystems; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The United Kingdom delegation to the North sea task force will be presenting a draft of our North Sea Coastal directory to the seventh meeting of the task force to be held in Antwerp from 19 to 22 November. This directory has been compiled for my Department by the Nature Conservancy Council, and subsequently the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, in order to bring together informaton on the conservation interest of the coastal zone. It will be a valauble contribution to the next quality status report on the North sea. We very much hope that other North sea states will support similar studies for their areas. Copies of the draft are being sent to interested organisations in the United Kingdom.

Planning Applications

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations he has received during 1991 over the use by planning applicants of untruthful or misleading statements in their applications; what remedies he proposes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: The number of such representations could be established only at disproportionate cost. It is for local planning authorities to satisfy themselves that information given in planning applications is accurate. Under the Town and Country Planning (Applications) Regulations 1988, applicants can be required to furnish evidence to verify any statement made in a planning application.

Boundary Commission

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce his decision on the Local Government Boundary Commission's report No. 608 and recommendations regarding the boundary between Suffolk and Cambridgeshire.

Mr. Portillo: The Commission's final report was sent to my right hon. Friend on 9 September 1991. I regret that its notices informing the public that no decision could be taken for at least six weeks, and it was now open to them to make any representations directly to him, were defective. They have now been re-published, thus extending that period to the end of the year. There will be no avoidable delay in reaching a decision as soon as possible.

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will indicate how many regulations he intends to issue after 31 January 1992, with regard to extending compulsory competitive tendering to more local authority services; what individual services such regulations will apply to; and when he intends to issue the regulations.

Mr. Portillo: The number, content and timing of the necessary orders will depend on the outcome of our consideration of responses to the consultation paper "Competing for Quality—Competition in the Provision of Local Services", published on 5 November 1991, and on parliamentary approval of the provisions in the Local Government Bill.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations and comments he has received, either direct to his Department or through the PA Consulting Group *(a)* in favour of and *(b)* against extending compulsory competitive tendering to professional and technical services and if he will publish them.

Mr. Portillo: The publication of "Competing for Quality—Competition in the Provision of Local Services" has launched the process of consultation on our proposals to extend compulsory competitive tendering to professional and other services provided by local authorities. Comments have been invited by 31 January 1992. We shall place copies of non-confidential responses in the Libraries of the House of Commons and of the Department of the Environment.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the cost to his Department of awarding the contract to investigate the viability of extending compulsory competitive tendering to local authority professional and technical services, to PA Consulting Group; at what price other companies submitted bids; and if he will publish the evaluation procedure his Department used in awarding the contract and a summary of the specification.

Mr. Portillo: The cost to the Department was £55,000. The consultants were asked to examine the technical feasibility of extending the legislative requirements for competitive tendering to professional services. It is not our policy to comment on bids or evaluation procedure for individual consultancy contracts.

Local Authorities (Trading Accounts)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he plans to introduce primary legislation to establish internal trading accounts within local authorities.

Mr. Portillo: At the earliest opportunity after the election.

Business Rate

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give, for each London borough, the total uniform business rate collected and the net amount of uniform business rate which is redistributed outside London under the pooling arrangements.

Mr. Portillo: The following is the most useful, information that I can give. In 1991-92 authorities in London, including the City of London, will receive £1,780 million from the non-domestic rates pool and contribute, provisionally, £3,121 million. The table gives the estimated receipts of the 1991-92 non-domestic rates up to 30 September for those London authorities who have made a return to the Department.

Estimated receipts of 1991-92 non-domestic rates 1 April to 30 September 1991

	£000
City of London	361,286
Greenwich	16,316
Hackney	36,901
Hammersmith and Fulham	28,628
Islington	46,812
Lewisham	12,030
Tower Hamlets	36,687
Wandsworth	19,263
Barking and Dagenham	17,932
Bexley	14,006
Bromley	21,538
Ealing	37,921
Enfield	25,546
Harrow	14,454
Havering	18,069
Hillingdon	53,478
Hounslow	50,406
Merton	17,248
Newham	23,276
Richmond-upon-Thames	15,140
Waltham Forest	12,268

Red Squirrels

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research his Department has carried out in the last 10 years into the presence of red squirrels in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The most important national work on red squirrel populations is carried out by the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) and the Forestry Commission. The Institute of Terrestrial Ecology of NERC collects records of the presence of red squirrels and intends to publish the results in an atlas of mammal distribution in the United Kingdom. The Forestry Commission carries out surveys and maps the presence of red and grey squirrels on its land at regular intervals.

Protected Species

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each of the last 10 years the number of licences issued to take species protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, indicating the species involved in each case.

Mr. Baldry: Details of licences issued to take protected bird species are given in the United Kingdom's annual derogation reports to the European Commission under the terms of the EC directive (79/409) on the conservation of wild birds. Copies of each report for the years 1981 to 1990 are placed in the Library of the House.

In the case of non-bird species, 14 licences have been issued in this period to take unlimited numbers of the edible dormouse.

Thamesmead Town Centre

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce his decision on the planning application for the development of the Thamesmead town centre.

Mr. Yeo: The inspector's report is under active consideration and it is hoped to issue a decision shortly.

Wind Energy

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish planning guidelines for local authorities dealing with wind energy planning applications; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: Preliminary guidance about this was given in a written answer by my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning on 28 March at col. *543*. It advised local planning authorities to pay attention to the desirability of energy sources which do not emit harmful gases and to the need to protect the local environment from damage and loss of amenity.

Officials in my Department, the Department of Energy and the Welsh Office are preparing a draft planning policy guidance note about renewable energy which we hope to issue for public consultation later this month.

Council House Sales

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation to amend part VI of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 to release capital receipts from the sale of council houses for investment in the provision of new housing.

Mr. Yeo: The Local Government and Housing Act 1989 (part IV, not VI) requires local authorities to set aside part of their capital receipts to meet outstanding loan debt and other liabilities, and this remains a sensible and prudent requirement. It has also enabled a greater proportion of capital receipts to be recycled in the form of new credit approvals to those local authorities where housing needs are greatest. Local authorities are free to spend the remainder of receipts on new capital investment. The balance between debt redemption and new investment is set in regulations and is kept under review.

Wildlife Sanctuaries

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will make it his policy to establish a register of wildlife sanctuaries, hospitals and rescue services, with a requirement that before registration such bodies have suitably qualified members of staff or qualified veterinary consultants who must visit the sanctuaries at least fortnightly;

(2) if he will introduce legislation to ensure that wildlife sanctuaries, hospitals and rescue services are subject to regular spot checks by local authority environmental health inspectors or other appropriately qualified inspectors.

Mr. Baldry: The Government recognise the excellent practical work already undertaken on a voluntary basis by the growing number of wildlife sanctuaries, hospitals and rescue centres. Existing legislation already protects captive animals against ill-treatment. The Government are not persuaded of the case for further statutory measures either for registration or inspection. In this field, it would be preferable for the bodies themselves to develop and agree voluntary codes of practice and thereby avoid incurring unnecessary costs and bureaucracy.

Homelessness

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what grants his Department proposes to give to those organisations in the United Kingdom which will provide shelter and comfort to homeless people over the Christmas period; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: My Department has made £96 million available over three years under the rough sleepers initiative in central London. This has provided 500 places in hostels, with another 400 to come; 500 bedspaces in flats and houses leased from private owners and 250 places—out of an anticipated 1,850—in permanent housing.

We are also providing grants under section 73 of the Housing Act 1985 to over 80 voluntary organisations in England for practical projects to prevent and relieve homelessness.

My officials are also in discussion with Single Homelessness in London about the provision of shelters for homeless people in central London this winter.

Responsibility for housing in Scotland and Wales lies with my right hon. Friends, the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales respectively.

Housing Renovation Grants

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will amend publicity issued by his Department in respect of housing renovation grants to make it clear that the mandatory rights of owners to receive grants are subject to the availability of resources in the local authority; and if he will make statement.

Sir George Young: No. Under part VIII of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 a local authority must approve a grant application for works to make a property fit for human habitation or for works to comply with a statutory notice. There is no provision under the Act to make such grants subject to resource availability.

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what decision he has made in respect of the application by Blackburn borough council for supplementary credit approval for mandatory renovation grants.

Sir George Young: Blackburn's application is currently being considered along with the bids received from other local housing authorities. Decisions on these will be announced shortly.

Defective Housing

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action his Department proposes to take under the Housing Defects Act 1984 to assist in the resolution of problems arising from the collapse of balconies at blocks of flats and maisonettes at Rowner, Gosport, originally owned by the Ministry of Defence but now leased to the borough of Gosport or owned by private purchasers.

Mr. Yeo: I am considering whether the housing defects legislation is relevant to this case in the light of the report to the borough of Gosport by the Building Research Establishment. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Bathing Water

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many designated bathing waters there are in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* France and *(c)* Italy, respectively.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the EC Commission report "Quality of Bathing Water 1989-1990", copies of which are available in the Library.

Tecnazene

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultation he has had with the National Rivers Authority to take steps to prevent the contamination of water courses by the fungicide Tecnazene.

Mr. Baldry: *[holding answer 11 November 1991]:* With the cooperation of the National Rivers Authority my Department has carried out a survey of Tecnazene and its metabolites in rivers and effluents from potato washing and processing. The Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food has suggested a provisional water quality standard of 1 microgram per litre for tecnazene. The results of the survey, and the NRA's data, have been submitted to the Advisory Committee on Pesticides which is currently reviewing the registration of this fungicide.

RNIB Needs Survey

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration he has given to the report "Blind and Partially Sighted Adults in Britain—The RNIB Needs Survey"; what action he will be taking in relation to its findings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 12 November 1991]:* I welcome the publication of this report, which gives us for the first time comprehensive and authoritative information about visually handicapped people in Britain. It will be of value to my Department when advice is given on the planning of programmes and the delivery of services in which attention is given to the special needs of visually handicapped people.

Local Authority Investments

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each month from January 1991 and subsequently outstanding local authority investments by amount outstanding and the net change between periods using the categorisation that appears in the CSO's financial statistics, and differentiating between those banks which have eligible status and those which do not.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 12 November 1991]:* The most recent quarterly figures for local authority investments were published in table 4.8 of "Financial Statistics", October 1991 edition. Figures for the third quarter will be available in the November edition.

Whereas the quarterly information on investments is collected from all authorities, the monthly information is collected only from a sample of authorities. The sample is not large enough to provide reliable figures in the detail requested.

Information on local authority bank deposits used in table 4.8 is collected from banks by the Bank of England on a quarterly basis. Monthly figures, used for the provisional calculation of the local authority borrowing requirement, are estimated from information on all public sector bank deposits.

No separate statistics are available for local authority deposits with eligible banks, which are banks whose sterling acceptances are eligible for discount at the Bank of England. The list of eligible banks, which is entirely a matter for the Bank of England, is determined on a functional basis, reflecting levels of activity and commitment to the sterling acceptance market. Whether or not a bank is on this functional list carries no implications for its competence or credit-worthiness.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each month from January 1991 and subsequently outstanding inter-local authority investments by amount outstanding and the net change between periods.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 12 November 1991]:* Information from the Department's quarterly survey of local authorities is as follows. I regret that no reliable monthly information is available.

Local authority investments with other local authorities

	Amount outstanding £ million	*Change from previous quarter* £ million
1991 Q1	960	−159
Q2	1,335	+375
Q3	1,231	[1]−104

[1] Q3 provisional.

Council Tax

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish an update of his tables showing illustrative council tax bills for 1991-92 with the inclusion of an eighth property band.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 12 November 1991]:* I do not propose to do so since the inclusion of an eighth property band makes no significant difference to the council tax figures for bands A to G published on 23 April.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Iraq

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the proportion of Government aid moneys given to the Simple Truth Campaign which was spent on Kurds living in Iraq; and if he will provide a breakdown of how the public moneys provided by the Government were spent.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave on 11 November to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes).

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for 14 November.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Tibet

Dr. Godman: To ask the Prime Minister what factors he regards as part of the fundamental human rights of the Tibetan people; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: We believe that human rights, as set out in the universal declaration of human rights adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, should apply to all people.

Redistribution of Wealth

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards reducing the gap between the richest and the poorest 10 per cent. of the British population.

The Prime Minister: The Government's policy is to improve incentives to work and to save. Over the period 1979 to 1988—the latest available information—real incomes in all parts of the income distribution have risen.

EC Regional Body

Ms. Quin: To ask the Prime Minister what consideration he has given to the proposals to establish an EC institution representing the regions of the EC; what are his proposals regarding United Kingdom regional representation on the body; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: We support proposals in the intergovernmental conference on political union for a new consultative body to represent the regions at Community level. Negotiations continue on the detailed arrangements. United Kingdom representation will be considered after the IGC.

Minister for Youth

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister if he will expressly designate a Minister with specific responsibility for youth.

The Prime Minister: No. The opportunities and problems facing young people are often not specific to that age group, and young people are themselves not a homogeneous group. They can best be served through specific actions spanning a range of Departments.

WALES

Labour Statistics

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many companies in *(a)* Merthr Tydfil and Rhymney, *(b)* Mid-Glamorgan and *(c)* Wales employ more than 200 people; and what percentage these are of the total number of companies in each case.

Mr. David Hunt: Available information is given in the table. The analysis excludes agriculture and horticulture, activity heading 0100, of Standard Industrial Classification (revised) 1980.

	Units employing 200 or more persons	*Percentage of all units*
Merthyr and Rhymney travel-to-work[1]	40	1·8
Mid Glamorgan	128	1·5
Wales	647	1·1

Source Census of Employment, 1989.
[1] Data for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney parliamentary constituency are not available.

Investors in People Awards

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many companies in Wales have to date qualified for Investors in People awards; and whether he will list them, indicating the number of employees in each company.

Mr. David Hunt: Four companies in Wales have so far met the Investors in People standard. They are:

	Employees
Monsanto PLC (Newport)	480
Tulsa Holdings Ltd (Newport)	176
Pirelli Cables (Aberdare)	152
Quattech Services Ltd (Treforest)	3

Low Pay

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many employees in the constituency of Clwyd, South-West are paid less than £3·40 an hour; how many of these employees are *(a)* women, *(b)* part time and *(c)* in manual occupations.

Mr. David Hunt: Information on the numbers of employees earning less than £3·40 per hour is not available for sub-areas of Wales.

Conwy Tunnel

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the causes of the recent flooding in the Conwy tunnel; and what remedies he proposes to prevent further flooding.

Sir Wyn Roberts: There has been no flooding of the Conwy tunnel. The westbound carriageway was closed for two hours on 1 November to deal with a faulty heat/gas detection sensor.

169. **Mr. Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if detergents used for cleaning of the Conwy crossing tunnel will be discharged into the Conwy estuary; and how the discharge will be treated.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Detergents are discharged into the public foul sewer. The type used in the tunnel are of a fully biodegradable kind.

Penmaenbach Tunnel

163. **Mr. Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the anticipated annual cost of the maintenance of the Penmaenbach tunnel arising from the cracks in the lining of the tunnel.

Sir Wyn Roberts: To date, the only maintenance cost associated with the cracking since the tunnel was opened to traffic in June 1989 is about £2,000 for minor remedial works. Future costs cannot be predicted, but are not expected to be significant.

168. **Mr. Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consideration was given in the plans for Penmaenbach tunnel of the possibility of cracking of the lining of the tunnel.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The probability of shrinkage cracking in the tunnel lining was always recognised. The lining's main purpose is to provide a smooth surface to aid illumination and assist ventilation.

Conwy Estuary

167. **Mr. Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the annual quantity from all sources of raw, untreated sewage, presently discharged into the Conwy estuary.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: This information is not available. The consented volumes of discharges are entered onto public registers maintained by the National Rivers Authority.

Housing Starts

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many council houses, private houses and housing association houses have been started in each of the months in 1991.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The number of dwellings started by district councils, private sector and housing associations for each of the months between January and August 1991 is given in the table:

	Local authority	*Private sector*	*Housing association*
January	42	576	157
February	0	435	196
March	3	589	222
April	20	615	236
May	0	562	172
June	9	786	274
July	0	658	213
August	4	690	155

Roads, Mid Wales

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to build a dual carriageway in mid Wales during the next five years; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: No. Our policy is to undertake selective improvements to the A470 which is the main north-south link through mid Wales. That policy is set out in "Roads in Wales: Progress and Plans for the 1990s". The 1991 supplement to that, published in February, details the substantial programme of major improvements.

Burns and Plastic Surgery

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will now direct health authorities within Wales not to place contracts for specialist burns and plastic surgery outside Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The placement of contracts for specialist burns and plastic surgery is a matter for individual district health authorities. However, it is expected that contracts at the historic level for these services for patients in south Wales will continue to be placed with St. Lawrence hospital, Chepstow. I understand that patients in north Wales are continuing to be referred to specialist centres in England.

Inward Investment

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the percentage of inward investment into Wales which is located in *(a)* Powys, *(b)* Dyfed excluding Llanelli and *(c)* Gwynedd, during the financial year 1990-91; and if he has any plans for increasing this amount.

Mr. David Hunt: Statistics held by Welsh Development International show the following percentage shares of inward investment projects secured in Wales:

	Projects Per cent.	*Forecast jobs Per cent.*
Dyfed (excluding Llanelli)	2·0	1·5
Gwynedd	3·4	2·5
Powys	2·0	0·4
Total	7·4	4·4

Health Authorities (Capital Spending)

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will indicate the funds he has made available to each of the local health authorities for capital expenditure over *(a)* the past 10 years and *(b)* the sum proposed in the present year 1991-92.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information requested is shown in the table.

Health authority capital allocations 1981-82 to 1990-91

£ million

	Clwyd	*East Dyfed*	*Gwent*	*Gwynedd*	*Mid Glamorgan*	*Pembrokeshire*	*Powys*	*South Glamorgan*	*West Glamorgan*	*Annual total*
1981-82										
Discretionary allocation	0·888	0·731	1·115	0·504	1·264	—	0·256	1·484	0·859	7·101
Centrally funded developments	0·830	0·140	0·656	0·522	0·452	—	0·193	1·761	0·884	5·438
1982-83										
Discretionary allocation	0·992	0·624	1·256	0·568	1·416	0·200	0·296	1·680	0·968	8·000
Centrally funded developments	0·381	0·168	0·567	0·668	0·129	0·010	0·024	2·608	0·894	5·449
1983-84										

	Clwyd	East Dyfed	Gwent	Gwynedd	Mid Glamorgan	Pembrokeshire	Powys	South Glamorgan	West Glamorgan	Annual total
Discretionary allocation	1·000	0·624	1·272	0·568	1·408	0·208	0·288	1·664	0·968	8·000
Centrally funded developments	0·245	0·318	0·140	0·499	0·234	0·003	0·020	0·455	0·456	2·370
1984-85										
Discretionary allocation	1·437	0·644	1·504	0·528	1·646	0·305	0·311	0·789	1·434	8·598
Centrally funded developments	0·676	0·195	0·055	1·961	1·315	0·010	0·047	1·297	1·902	7·458
1985-86										
Discretionary allocation	2·697	1·209	2·823	0·991	3·089	0·573	0·584	1·482	2·692	16·140
Centrally funded developments	2·658	0·077	0·055	0·014	5·488	—	0·411	1·082	1·504	11·289
1986-87										
Discretionary allocation	3·576	1·603	3·743	1·314	4·096	0·760	0·775	1·965	3·570	21·402
Centrally funded developments	1·291	0·358	0·337	0·103	1·498	0·320	0·077	1·912	1·719	7·615
1987-88										
Discretionary allocation	4·086	1·831	4·277	1·501	4·680	0·868	0·885	2·245	4·079	24·452
Centrally funded developments	0·155	0·066	0·036	0·628	0·817	—	0·153	1·315	0·912	4·082
1988-89										
Discretionary allocation	4·935	2·212	5·166	1·814	5·653	1·049	1·069	2·711	4·927	29·536
Centrally funded developments	0·399	0·380	0·259	0·023	0·798	—	—	3·847	0·608	6·314
1989-90										
Discretionary allocation	6·915	1·967	7·308	1·741	7·168	1·963	1·589	3·572	6·732	38·955
Centrally funded developments	0·466	4·536	3·036	0·259	2·570	0·202	0·040	5·308	0·345	16·762
1990-91										
Discretionary allocation	6·277	3·205	6·184	1·710	8·054	1·968	1·113	7·938	8·072	44·521
Centrally funded developments	0·070	3·716	1·400	0·061	4·095	0·948	0·095	4·082	2·242	16·709
1991-92										
Discretionary allocation	8·582	4·382	8·454	2·337	11·010	2·690	1·522	10·852	11·034	60·863

Notes:

(1) The discretionary allocation figures given above represent "start of year" allocations. They do not reflect any additional capital resources made available in-year as a result of land receipts or brokerage loans; nor do they take account of any funds which health authorities may have vired during the course of any of the years in question from revenue capital.

(2) The figures also exclude further capital expenditure which has been incurred on behalf of health authorities concerned in respect of major building schemes and the purchase of IT equipment or other major items of equipment by the Welsh Health Common Services Authority.

(3) All figures are at cash prices.

(4) During the course of 1991-92 health authorities will also receive specific allocations for centrally funded developments.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what checks he made before the appointment of Touche Ross as his consultants on the reform of local government in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Selection followed the guidance set out in "Seeking help from Management Consultants" produced by the Treasury and published by HMSO.

Youth Training

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the South Glamorgan TEC concerning the numbers of 16 and 17-year-olds leaving school in 1991 not so far in a job or training place under the youth training guarantee.

Sir Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State holds regular meetings with the chairman of TECs in Wales. He is satisfied that sufficient financial resources have been made available to the South Glamorgan TEC for youth training provision. The TEC and the careers service are working closely with employers and training providers to ensure that the Government's guarantee is met.

Cardiff Bay Development Corporation

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidelines were given for his departmental civil servants and Cardifff Bay development corporation consultants attending meetings with individual political parties on Saturday 9 November.

Mr. David Hunt: If the hon. Gentleman is referring to the Labour party meeting held on 9 November to discuss the predicted effects on groundwater levels of the Cardiff Bay barrage, I can confirm that my Department did not give any guidelines on conduct, and was not represented at that meeting.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Baltic States

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further steps are proposed by the European Community to assist the Baltic states in their efforts to create genuine independent economic conditions and policies.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The Foreign Affairs Council on 4 November agreed negotiating directives for the European Commission to negotiate trade and co-operation agreements with the three Baltic states. These would

provide a framework for the liberalisation of trading relations between the European Community and the Baltic states, and encourage the process of economic reform. The Community has also extended its PHARE programme of technical assistance to include the Baltic states.

Sovereign Republics

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements he is making for British representation in the sovereign republics of Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Tadjikistan, Turkenistan and Kirghizia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: British interests in these republics are represented by the embassy in Moscow. We are discussing the question of resident representation in Kiev and St. Petersburg with the appropriate authorities. We are keeping the question of resident representation elsewhere in the republics under constant review.

Tibet

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received concerning the policy of the Government of the People's Republic of China to transfer Chinese citizens to Tibet; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A number of individuals and organisations have drawn reports of such transfers to our attention. There is however little or no reliable independent confirmation that such a policy exists. According to the most recent Chinese census figures, over 95 per cent. of the population of the Tibet autonomous region is Tibetan while 3·7 per cent. is Han Chinese.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to propose a United Nations or non-governmental organisation sponsored fact-finding delegation to Tibet in the near future to examine allegations concerning the violation of human rights and the destruction of the environment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has no plans to do so. A number of delegations concerned particularly with human rights have recently visited Tibet, including a delegation from the European Parliament. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister specifically raised Tibet when discussing human rights with Chinese Premier Li Peng in Peking in September.

Departmental Papers

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which of his Department's papers have been made available to the public since 1 October 1990.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Between 1 October 1990 and 31 October 1991, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office—excluding the Overseas Development Administration—made the following papers available to the public on request:

Africa
Decline of the One-Party State in Sub-Saharan Africa
Famine in Africa
South Africa: Chronology March-December 1990
South Africa: Chronology

Asia: Far East
Burma: A Missed Opportunity
Heroin in South-East and South-West Asia
New Hong Kong Airport
Vietnamese Migrants in Hong Kong
Reform in Mongolia

Asia: Near and Middle East
Oil Pollution in the Gulf
Lebanon after the Taif Agreement
Jerusalem: A Background

Asia: Gulf Crisis
An Offence against International Law
Dismantling of Kuwait
Effects of the UN Sanctions on the Iraqi Economy
Foreign Hostages in Iraq and Kuwait
International Community rejects Compromise
Iraqi Claims to Kuwait
Iraq: the Wasted Potential
Life in Iraq-occupied Kuwait
Multinational Force
Oil Pollution in the Gulf: Iraq's New Dirty Weapon
Rape of Kuwait
Saddam Hussein's Legacy
Suffering in Iraq
Why Sanctions could not be given more Time
Wider Repercussions of the Invasion of Kuwait
Saddam Hussein: A continuing menace
UN Security Council Resolution 687: Iraq: Weapons of Mass Destruction

Europe
Assistance to Eastern and Central Europe
Britain and NATO
Britain in the Community: Europe in the 1990s
Changes in Soviet Aid Policy
Energy problems in Eastern Europe
Know How Fund: Czechoslovakia
Know How Fund: Hungary
Know How Fund: Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Soviet Union
USSR and Eastern Europe: Problems in Trade Relations
Britain and the Baltic States

Disarmament
Arms Control and Disarmament Quarterly Review No. 19
Arms Control and Disarmament Quarterly Review No. 20
Arms Control and Disarmament Quarterly Review No. 21
Arms Control and Disarmament Quarterly Review No. 22
Arms Control Agreements (Revised)
Arms Control at the United Nations
British Non-Proliferation Policy (Revised)
Chemical and Biological Weapons: Negotiating an International Ban
Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty

Economic
Aid to the Developing World
Directory of Overseas Export Services
International Debt
Talking Points on Britain's Economy
World Food Supplies

Consular
Annual Review of Consular Work 1990
Checklist for Travellers
Consular Assistance Abroad

General
Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Diplomatic Wing): Basic Facts and Figures

Miscellaneous
Children in the 1990s
Combating Drug Abuse in the 1990s

Human Rights in Foreign Policy
International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW)
Tropical Forests
Twelfth World Trade Union Congress, November 1990
WFTU: New Wine in Old Bottles
UNCED 1992: The United Kingdom Approach

TRANSPORT

Harbour Revision Orders

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his reply of 7 November, *Official Report*, columns *189-90*, if he will name the further two applications for harbour revision orders for which the authorisation of specific works projects fell within annex 11 to Council directive 85/337/EEC, indicating in respect of each with whom he consulted and what procedure he adopted before deciding that an environmental impact assessment was not necessary.

Mr. McLoughlin: The two other applications for harbour revision orders which fell to be considered within annex II to Council directive 85/337/EEC were in respect of Portsmouth Flathouse quay and Portsmouth Mile End quay. In both cases this Department consulted the Department of the Environment about the need for an environmental assessment and they in turn consulted the former Nature Conservancy Council to establish whether the project was likely to have any impact on the SSSI at Portsmouth. In neither case was any significant environmental implication identified, and, having regard to the scale and location of the proposed works, no environmental assessment was called for by the Secretary of State.

Trust Ports

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which trust ports have included environmental objectives in their objectives of sale under the privatisation process.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Medway ports authority has included in their objectives for sale the following objectives:

"consultation procedures with local authorities and environmental bodies will be maintained.

"The Authority would wish to see . . . the continuance of existing environmental and conservation protection."

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many of the trust ports which have submitted schemes for privatisation contain sites of special scientific interest or other recognised designation within their harbour limits.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Tees and Hartlepool port authority, the Medway ports authority, and the Clyde ports authority have sites of special scientific interest within their harbour limits.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport further to his answer of 7 November, *Official Report*, columns *189-90*, which of the 35 applications for harbour revision orders since 1988 contain SSSIs or other similar designation within their harbour limits.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information cannot be provided in the form requested except at disproportionate cost. However, there are SSSIs and areas with similar designations in the vicinity of the following harbours which have applied for harbour revision orders since 3 August 1988:

Bristol
Colliestone
Great Yarmouth
Harwich (Parkestone Quay)
Heysham
Langstone
Manchester Ship Canal
Medway
Newport (Gwent)
Portsmouth

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library in respect of each trust port seeking privatisation a copy of the objectives on the sale as agreed between him and the authority.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 12 November 1991]*: Yes.

South Circular Road

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what investigations there have been into the safety of the South Circular road at its junction with Lancaster avenue and Rosendale road, London SE21.

Mr. Chope: As part of a backlog inherited from Lambeth council, the previous trunk road agents, our consultant agents for the A205 south circular road are currently undertaking safety studies at both the Lancaster avenue and the Rosendale road junctions. We expect a report with recommendations for appropriate action to be received early in the new year.

Oxleas Wood

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the EC first suggested that the road proposed for Oxleas wood did not meet the environmental requirements of EC directives.

Mr. Chope: The Commission wrote to the Government in October 1989 about a complaint that it had received alleging that the United Kingdom had not complied with the European directive 85/337/EEC on environmental assessment in respect of the east London river crossing. A response was made to the Commission in December 1989.

This directive is concerned with procedures that member states are required to follow to ensure that the environmental effects of certain projects are assessed. The environmental merits of the east London river crossing are not at issue. That, as the Commission fully recognises, is for the United Kingdom Government to determine.

Association of County Councils Report

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultations his Department has had with the Association of County Councils over the contents of their report, "Towards a Sustainable Transport Policy", launched on 7 November.

Mr. McLoughlin: My right hon. and learned Friend has written to the Association of County Councils welcoming the report as a contribution to the increasingly important debate on how we should respond to the continuing

growth in demand for travel, both in urban areas and between them. We look forward to working together with the Association of County Councils and the other local authority associations in improving the measures available to deal with the country's transport needs.

Hot Air Balloons

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what restrictions are imposed on the flight of hot air balloons over built-up areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Rule 5, paragraph (1)(a) of the Rules of the Air Regulations 1991 provides that an aircraft—a term which includes a hot air balloon—

"shall not fly over any congested area of a city, town or settlement below (i) such height as would enable the aircraft to alight clear of the area and without danger to persons or property on the surface, in the event of failure of a power unit. . .; or (ii) a height of 1,500 feet above the highest fixed object within 2,000 feet of the aircraft: whichever is the higher".

The term "congested area" is defined in article 106 of the Air Navigation Order 1989

"in relation to a city, town or settlement"

as being

"any area which is substantially used for residential, industrial, commercial or recreational purposes".

Traffic Calming

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to clarify the law on the application of traffic calming measures.

Mr. Chope: If road humps conform to the Road Hump Regulations 1990, then they are legal. A clarifying power in the Road Traffic Act 1991 places it beyond doubt that, additionally, the Secretary of State has the power to authorise humps on roads including those subject to 30 mph speed limits or less.

We have been considering the extent to which changes in the law are needed to clarify the powers to provide other traffic calming measures. Amending legislation will be sought at the earliest convenient opportunity.

Trunk Roads

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list the trunk road schemes in the United Kingdom for which environmental impact assessments have been prepared under EC directive 85/337/EEC since it came into force on 21 July 1988;

(2) if he will list the trunk road schemes for which draft line orders have been published since 21 July 1988, but which he deemed did not require environmental impact assessment under EC directive 85/337/88.

Mr. Chope: All schemes in the national programme have for many years been subject to a very full environmental appraisal. An environmental statement has been published in respect of the following schemes:

A1 Alconbury to Peterborough
A5 Little Brickhill Bypass
A6 Clapham Bypass
A10 Wadesmill High Cross and Colliers End Bypass
A11 Roudham Heath to Attleborough
A11 Besthorpe to Wymondham
A11 Four Wentways to Newmarket
A41 Aston Clinton Bypass
A47 Walpole Highway to Tilney High End
A47 East Dereham to North Tuddenham
A47 Norwich Southern Bypass (Keswick Section and Trowse Newton)
A140 Scole Bypass
A428 Bedford Southern Bypass
M1-A1 Link (Re-alignment of Naseby—Sibertoft Supplementary Order)
M25 Junctions 15-16 Widening from Dual 2-4 Lanes
M40 Widening: junctions 4-5 Buckinghamshire
A6 Great Glen Bypass
A6 Rushden and Higham Ferrers Bypass
A16 Spalding to Sutterton Improvement
A17 Leadenham Bypass
A43 Silverstone Bypass
A46 Leicester Western Bypass
A564 Stoke-Derby Link Derby Southern Bypass
A564 Foston Hatton Hilton
A13/A117 Junction Improvement
A13 West of Heathway-Wennington—Mar Dyke
A406 ELRC Proposed Design changes (A13-A2016)
A406 Gunnersbury Avenue Improvement
A406 Golders Green Road/Brent Street Junction Improvement
A406 Bounds Green to Green Lanes Improvement
M1 Junction 1 Improvement
M1 Widening: Junction 9 Northbound
M5 Widening Warndon-Strensham Junctions 6-8
A167 Durham Western Bypass
A590 Dalton-in-Furness Bypass
A66 Stainmore to Banksgate
A500 Basford/Hough/Shavington
M56 Widening Junctions 4-6
M6 Widening Between Junctions 20 and 21A
M6 Widening and Improvements Junctions 30 to 32
M62 Widening Junctions 14-17
M62 Widening Junctions 17-18
M65 Bamber Bridge-Whitebirk Section (Blackburn Southern Bypass)
M66 Manchester Outer Ring Road Denton—Middleton (A576-M62)
M66 Manchester Outer Ring Road Denton—Middleton (M67-A576)
A3 Milford Bypass
A23 Pease Pottage-Handcross
A27 Crossbush Bypass
A27 Patching Junction Improvement
A27 Westhampnett Bypass
A34 Newbury Bypass—Andover Road Junction
A249 Iwade Bypass
A249—M2 Bobbing Improvement
A249 Brielle Way
A249 Stockbury—Sheerness
A259 Brookland Diversion
M20 Improvement Junctions 5-8 (Maidstone Bypass)
A30 Okehampton—Launceston Improvement
A30 Shallowater Hill Improvement
A30/A39 Indian Queens, Fraddon and St. Columb Road Bypasses
A31 Ashley Heath Grade Separated Junction
A35 Tolpuddle Puddletown
A39 Wadebridge Bypass
A417 Brockworth Bypass
A419 Latton Bypass
Batheaston/Swainswick Bypass and A36 Link
M5 Junction 18 Improvement and Avonmouth Relief Road
Second Severn Crossing and Approach Roads
A5 Fazeley/Two Gates/Wilnecote Bypass
A49 Onibury—Stokesay Improvement
A49/A465 Hereford Bypass
A50 Blythe Bridge—Queensway Stoke on Trent
A435 Norton Lenchwick Bypass
A435 Studley Bypass
A1(M) Walshford to Dishforth
A63 Selby Bypass
A65 Manor Park Improvement
A65 Gargrave Bypass
A65 Hellifield and Long Preston Bypass
A65/A660 Burley-in-Wharfedale Bypass
A650 Airedale Route Section 3 Crossflats—Cottingley Bar

The schemes for which no environmental statement has been published are:

A1 Gatenby Lane Junction
A1 Tempsford Overbridge Scheme
A6 Burton Latimer Bypass and Black Lodge
A11 Stumps Cross to Fourwentways
A11 Four Went Ways Junction Improvement
A11 Newmarket to Red Lodge
A13 West India Dock Road (Final) Scheme
A16 Ludborough Bypass
A16 Stickford Bypass
A17 Wigtoft Sutterton Bypass
A19 Easingwold Bypass
A35 Yellowham Hill to Troytown
A38 Bell Bridge to Alrewas
A46 East Norton Bypass
A49 Weaverham Diversion
A52 Ashbourne Relief Road
A59 Mellor Brook Bypass
A66 Bowes Bypass—County Boundary
A516 Etwall Bypass
A568 Widnes Eastern Bypass (Northern Section)
A568 Widnes Eastern Bypass (Southern Section)
A585 Dock Street Fleetwood
A638 Doncaster North Bridge Relief Road
M1—A1 Link Road Rothwell Interchange.

Trunk Roads (Fencing)

Mr. Ground: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the London regional office of the Department of Transport has previously erected wire fencing of the type recently erected along the central reservation of the A4 at Cranford along any other trunk road in London; and what information the London regional office of the Department of Transport or the Secretary of State has on similar use of such fencing on trunk roads in England.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 11 November 1991]:* This combination of fencing has been installed along some 24 miles of trunk road in north, west and east London. There is no central record of how much wire fencing of a similar design to that on the A4 has been used on other trunk roads in England.

Mr. Ground: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the cost of supplying and erecting the wire fence recently erected along the central reservation of the A4 at Cranford.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 11 November 1991]:* About £125,000.

Mr. Ground: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether any consultation took place with the local authority, the local community, the Metropolitan Police or any motoring organisations prior to the erection of the type of fencing recently erected at Cranford.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 11 November 1991]:* The Metropolitan police were consulted in the course of regular liaison meetings and are in agreement with the measures taken. The London borough of Hillingdon, which is the Department's agent for these works informed local residents by letter that the works are being carried out.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Light Rapid Transit Systems

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council what will be the consequences of the proposed legislation on Private Bill procedure for Bills on light rapid transit systems introduced in the current Session.

Mr. McLoughlin: I have been asked to reply.

The Transport and Works Bill published this week does not affect the introduction of private Bills in the current Session. Their progress thereafter is a matter for Parliament.

EMPLOYMENT

Training and Employment

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to provide training and employment for the young unemployed aged 18 to 24 years in Stoke on Trent, North constituency.

Mr. Jackson: Provision of training in the Stoke on Trent, North constituency is a matter for the Staffordshire training and enterprise council to answer. Staffordshire TEC, which covers Stoke on Trent, North, is meeting the Government's requirement of providing an employment training place for people in the Government's guarantee and aim groups who wish to enter ET. The TEC has, in addition, been able to open recruitment to ET for all people who have been unemployed for six months or more. The guarantee group is those aged 18 to 24 who have been unemployed for six months or more but less than 12 months and the aim group is those aged 18 to 49 who have been unemployed for two years or more and those people with disabilities regardless of the length of time of the latter's unemployment.

Female Work Force

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of the work force is female.

Mr. Jackson: At June 1991, the latest date for which estimates are available, 42·6 per cent. of the work force in the United Kingdom was female.

Students (Summer Jobs)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will review the progress made by students who applied for temporary jobs during the long university summer vacation compared to non-student applicants for summer jobs;

(2) whether students applying for summer jobs in the long recess are treated by jobcentres differently from non-student applicants.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make it his policy to take steps to make it easier for university students to secure temporary work during the summer vacation.

Mr. Jackson: I appreciate that the long summer break on limited financial support can be a difficult time for many students and this year there are likely to have been fewer vacancies on offer to them.

The Employment Service, through its network of jobcentres, does all that it can to help students find temporary vacational work. All temporary jobs notified are put on display in jobcentres and many students use these facilities. This service will continue to operate.

HEALTH

Child Labour

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he proposes to take to inform businesses about the risks and penalties relating to employment of child labour.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Section 18 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 sets out general restrictions governing the employment of children under minimum school leaving age. Local authorities may make byelaws under that section to regulate further the hours and conditions of children's employment. The purpose of all the provisions is to enable children to work to the extent that their health, education and general welfare are not adversely affected.

Anyone, apart from the person employed, who is found guilty of contravening the provisions of section 18 or of any byelaw is liable to a fine not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale. Local education authorities are responsible for enforcing the provisions and ensuring that they are complied with.

Section 1(1) of the Employment of Women, Young Persons and Children Act 1920 prohibits the employment of any person under school leaving age in an industrial undertaking. This legislation is enforced by Health and Safety Executive inspectors. The maximum penalty on conviction in the magistrates court is £2,000.

Tobacco Advertising

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to introduce legislation banning the advertising of tobacco products.

Mr. Dorrell: There are no plans to introduce legislation to introduce further bans on tobacco advertising. Our system of voluntary agreements continues to provide a flexible and effective way of controlling such advertising. On 9 September my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced the conclusion of a revised voluntary agreement on advertising which introduces a range of new controls many of which are designed to protect children.

Health Authorities (Referrals)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to ensure that all health authorities will be able to fund extra-contractual referrals.

Mr. Dorrell: All health authorities have reserves set aside for extra-contractual referrals based on information about patient flows. In addition, health authorities have other uncommitted reserves which can be used to cover extra-contractual referrals. Evidence to date suggests that the reserves will prove sufficient.

Asthma

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people die each year from asthma in the United Kingdom; and what action he plans to take to help reduce this number.

Mr. Dorrell: The table gives the number of deaths in the United Kingdom with an underlying cause of asthma for the years 1986 to 1990. The greater use of self-management protocols agreed between patient and doctor, and the availability of peak flow meters, which give advance warning of an impending asthma attack, on GP prescription, should help to reduce the numbers of deaths.

Number of deaths in the United Kingdom with an underlying cause of asthma—all persons, all ages[1]

Year	*Number of deaths*
1986	2,206
1987	2,107
1988	2,213
1989	2,191
1990	2,055

[1] *Source:* OPCS ICD Code 493

Women Employees

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of the NHS's employees are women; and what percentage of trusts are chaired by women.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The latest available data for England relate to the position at 30 September 1990 and show that 76 per cent. of all directly employed staff in the hospital and community health service were female. A total of 17 per cent. of trusts are chaired by women. This represents 5 per cent. of first wave trusts and 24 per cent. of second wave trusts.

Coronary Heart Disease

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the number of deaths from coronary heart disease in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, with reference to the number in 1989.

Mr. Dorrell: The number of deaths for which coronary heart disease [1] was stated as the underlying cause of death in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland in 1989 is given in the table.

Country	*Numbers*
Wales	9,686
Northern Ireland	4,508
Scotland	18,107

[1] International Classification of Diseases (ICD) 9th revision codes 410-414.

Eye and Dental Checks

Sir Barney Hayhoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will simplify the form filling required of retirement pensioners without other significant income who seek free eye tests or dental checks.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The review of the NHS low income scheme is examining all aspects of the administration of the scheme including the potential for simplifying claim form AG1.

Cochlear Implants

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the total funding allocated to health authorities for cochlear implant operations in each of the past five years; and what funds will be made available in the next three years.

Mr. Dorrell: Funding has been agreed for the three-year period 1990-91 to 1992-93. Details of funding made available in the first two years of the scheme are given in the table. It will continue at a similar level in the third year. Decisions about arrangements beyond 1993 will be made in the light of the evaluation of the programme which is being undertaken by Professor Mark Haggard of Nottingham university.

Central funding of cochlear implant operations

Centre	*Funding*	
	1990-91 (£)	*1991-92 (£)*
University College Hospital/ Royal Ear Hospital	200,000	220,000
Manchester Royal Infirmary	160,000	190,000
Nottingham General Hospital	160,000	200,000
South Hants Hospital, Southampton	150,000	180,000
Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham	150,000	190,000
North Riding Infirmary, Middlesbrough	150,000	170,000
Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge	—	180,000

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the total number of cochlear implant operations conducted in the last three years in each health authority; and what assessment has been made of the current waiting list.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not available centrally.

Legionnaire's Disease

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how often, and when, the central heating systems at Broadgreen hospital were checked for Legionnaire's disease.

Mr. Dorrell: Closed water systems, such as central heating, which do not generate aerosols will not infect patients or staff and are therefore not tested for the presence of legionella.

In 1988 the Department issued a code of practice on "The Control of Legionellae in Health Care Premises", published by HMSO, which provides detailed advice and guidance on the design, operation and maintenance of hot and cold water systems, cooling towers and other systems which can harbour legionella. It is for hospital managers to ensure compliance with that guidance. A copy of the guidance is available in the Library.

The code of practice does not, however, recommend routine testing of water systems for legionella on the basis that the bacteria are ubiquitous in the environment. Instead the guidance recommends measures designed to minimise the risks of legionella multiplying in water systems in a way that could cause outbreaks of disease.

Abortion

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the national health service is now receiving each month in receipts from private abortion clinics for the incineration, on national health service premises, of the remains of aborted unborn children; how many hospital furnaces are being used for incineration of the remains of the aborted unborn; and if he will list them.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not collected centrally.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether private abortion clinics may offer abortions in the United Kingdom to foreign women via advertising in magazines with an international circulation.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is a condition of approval under section 1(3) of the Abortion Act that places must not advertise, outside the United Kingdom, their facilities for the treatment of abortion patients.

HIV

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total number of people who received national health service transfusions of blood contaminated with the HIV virus; how many have subsequently been diagnosed HIV positive; and how many have died.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No individual has knowingly been given HIV-contaminated blood. Measures to safeguard the blood supply against HIV infection were applied when these became known and available.

There have been 50 reports in England, Wales and Northern Ireland of HIV infections in people who received blood in the United Kingdom. All these occurred before the screening of donations was introduced in October 1985. Of those persons infected, 22 are known to have died.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioners in the United Kingdom have refused to treat people suffering from HIV and AIDS; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not held centrally.

Community Midwives

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are his plans for reviewing the terms and conditions of community midwives.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: None. These are the same as for other nursing and midwifery staff.

Alder Hey Children's Hospital

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many wards have been closed at the Alder Hey children's hospital, Liverpool, since it became a trust; and how many children are on the waiting list.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not collected centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. Ian Hill, the chairman of the Royal Liverpool children's hospital and community services NHS trust, for details.

Incontinence Pads

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 7 November, *Official Report*, column *256*, what statutory provisions exist for charging for incontinence pads by local health authorities to those who are not in-patients or in nursing homes.

Mr. Dorrell: There are no statutory provisions allowing health authorities to charge NHS patients for incontinence pads in the course of treatment. Health authorities nevertheless have discretion to provide the level and form of service they judge to be appropriate.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 7 November, *Official Report*, column *256*, whether he will now provide details of the guidance issued to health authorities on the supply of incontinence pads; and if he will make a statment.

Mr. Dorrell: The NHS management executive issued guidance on the supply of incontinence aids—EL(91)28—on 18 February, and guidance on charging—EL(91)129—on 24 October. In addition, the report of a departmental review, "An Agenda for Action on Continence Services", was issued to the health service with a ministerial letter—ML(91)1 of 31 July—and listed key features of an effective local continence service. Copies of this guidance are available in the Library.

Homelessness

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what grants his Department proposes to give to those organisations in the United Kingdom who will provide shelter and comfort to homeless people over the Christmas period; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The responsibility which the Department exercised last winter for providing emergency shelters for people sleeping rough in central London was transferred to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment with effect from 1 April 1991.

SCOTLAND

Channel Tunnel

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has to assist towards the improvement of the railway system in Scotland from Glasgow to connect with the Eurotunnel; when these proposals will be implemented; and what asssessment he has made of the proposals by ScotRail for such services in 1993.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Investment in railways in Scotland and the provision of services between Scotland and the channel tunnel and beyond are matters for British Rail. My right hon. Friend and I have, however, taken every opportunity to impress on British Rail the importance we attach to the provision of fast and efficient links to ensure that Scotland is able to take full advantage of the benefits the tunnel will bring.

Skye Ferry

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the price of a single fare ticket for a car on the Caledonian MacBrayne ferry crossing between Kyle and Kyleakin; and if he will list the prices for each of the last 15 years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is as follows:

With effect from	*Fare rates (£)* *Off-peak (Winter)*	*Standard (Summer)*
11 April 1976	1·00	n/a
6 March 1977	1·00	1·15
6 March 1978	1·10	1·30
5 March 1979	1·20	1·45
30 July 1979	1·40	1·45
16 March 1980	1·65	2·00
1 March 1981	1·75	2·10
1 March 1982	1·75	2·10
1 March 1983	1·75	2·10
4 March 1984	1·90	2·25
3 March 1985	2·10	2·50
2 March 1986	2·20	2·65
1 March 1987	2·25	2·70
6 March 1988	2·90	3·60
26 February 1989	3·10	3·80
25 February 1990	3·30	4·00
24 February 1991	3·65	4·50

Legal Aid

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the number of solicitors in Scotland; and how many of them have withdrawn from the civil legal aid service.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The number of enrolled solicitors in Scotland as at 31 October 1990 was 8,510. No reliable information is at present available on how many firms and fee earners currently provide civil legal aid or on whether this figure has changed in the past few years.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations the Legal Aid Board has received from Glasgow Bar Association about the levels of legal aid and the board's procedures for payment; and what has been the outcome of the board's consideration of points made to it.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have asked the chairman of the Scottish Legal Aid Board to write to the hon. Member on this matter.

Local Income Tax

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the level of income tax supplement which would require to be levied in each region, district and island area to raise the local revenue required for 1991-92 local authority budgets under a system of local income tax, taking into account variations in the tax base between local authority areas.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Approximate rates of local income tax required to replace the budgeted income from the community charge in 1991-92, including rebates and after receipt of community charge grant, are given in the table. The calculations assume resources equalisation—that the yield of 1p in the pound is the same per adult in all areas. It is not possible to calculate equivalent figures on the basis of an unequalised local income tax base.

Note: The local income tax rate for Scotland has been estimated for 1991-92 by dividing the total amount to be raised from the community charge (net of community charge grant) by an estimate of the yield of 1p in the £ on the basic rate of income tax for Scotland. Income from the community water charge is not included.

	Local Income Tax Rate (pence in £)
Borders	3·1
Central	4·5
Dumfries and Galloway	3·4
Fife	5·0
Grampian	3·3
Highland	3·5
Lothian	7·2
Strathclyde	4·0
Tayside	4·7
Orkney	0·1
Shetland	—
Western Isles	0·7
Berwickshire	0·2
Ettrick and Lauderdale	0·6
Roxburgh	0·5
Tweeddale	0·4
Clackmannan	2·1
Falkirk	0·5
Stirling	2·0
Annandale and Eskdale	1·0
Nithsdale	1·0
Stewartry	0·5
Wigtown	0·9
Dunfermline	1·2
Kirkcaldy	1·2
North East Fife	1·4
Aberdeen City	2·1
Banff and Buchan	1·0
Gordon	0·6
Kincardine and Deeside	0·1
Moray	0·4
Badenoch and Strathspey	0·3
Caithness	0·1
Inverness	0·1
Lochaber	0·9
Nairn	0·2
Ross and Cromarty	0·8
Skye and Lochalsh	0·4
Sutherland	0·5
East Lothian	1·5
Edinburgh City	2·5
Midlothian	1·3
West Lothian	0·8
Argyll and Bute	1·8
Bearsden and Milngavie	1·4
Clydebank	2·3
Clydesdale	1·7
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	0·9
Cumnock and Doon Valley	1·0
Cunninghame	1·9
Dumbarton	2·8
East Kilbride	2·1
Eastwood	0·5
Glasgow City	2·0
Hamilton	1·8
Inverclyde	1·4
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	1·2
Kyle and Carrick	2·2
Monklands	1·8
Motherwell	1·3
Renfrew	2·1
Strathkelvin	1·9
Angus	0·7
Dundee City	1·9
Perth and Kinross	0·9

Cochlear Implants

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list the total funding allocated to relevant Scottish health boards for cochlear implant operations; and what funds will be made available in the next three years;

(2) if he will list the total number of cochlear implant operations which were conducted in Scotland in the last three years; and what assessment has been made of the current waiting list.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Government announced their decision in 1990 to allocate £200,000 over the next three years to establish a cochlear implant programme in Scotland. £150,000 per annum has been allocated to Ayrshire and Arran health board to enable the service already initiated there through public support to be developed and consolidated. £50,000 per annum has also been allocated to Lothian health board to establish a second implant centre for Scotland.

A total of 20 cochlear implant operations have been conducted in Scotland to date. Charitable funding had allowed seven operations to take place at Crosshouse hospital, Kilmarnock prior to central funding in 1990-91. Central funding will enable eight implants per year to be undertaken at Crosshouse hospital and three implant operations per annum in Lothian. A further three operations are expected to be carried out at Crosshouse hospital per annum from charitable funds.

There are currently six people on the short-term waiting list for cochlear implant at Crosshouse hospital who are categorised as urgent cases. The board has also assessed a further 30 people who would be expected to benefit from an implant and another 64 who are considered to be low priority cases in terms of expected benefit. At present Lothian health board has identified six people as suitable for cochlear implant. The board expects to undertake three of these operations before March 1992.

Housing Improvement

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will set out the number of housing improvements and modernisations carried out by *(a)* Edinburgh, *(b)* Dundee, *(c)* Glasgow and *(d)* Aberdeen district councils in each year from 1974-75.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The available information, as supplied by the relevant housing authorities, is set out in the table.

Comparable information for 1974 to 1978 is not available.

Modernisation and improvement of dwellings

	Aberdeen	Edinburgh	Glasgow	Dundee
1979	192	—	2,745	580
1980	322	324	1,981	263
1981	131	407	1,364	232
1982	2,537	541	2,397	218
1983	1,964	620	4,817	194
1984	1,307	747	3,182	88
1985	1,298	959	23,894	297
1986	1,471	393	21,755	294
1987	1,091	1,015	27,616	254
1988	406	522	13,136	326
1989	161	541	9,939	356
1990	8,036	550	12,255	74

NORTHERN IRELAND

Chief Executives Forum

11. **Mr. John Browne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the purpose of the Chief Executives Forum; and how it is funded.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Chief Executives Forum brings together the chief executive officers of almost 100 public bodies in Northern Ireland. Its purpose is to strengthen communication links and provide a mechanism to share best management practice within the Province's public service. The forum is to be funded for a three-year period by a grant-in-aid from the Department of Finance and Personnel of approximately £100,000 per annum.

Inward Investment

13. **Mr. Dover:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on current levels of inward investment in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: During the last financial year we have secured 13 inward investment projects involving both the private and public sector. These projects are expected to create 1,294 jobs.

Constitutional Reform

14. **Mr. Andrew MacKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on his recent talks with the constitutional political parties in the Province.

19. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has for an early introduction of devolution of government in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions are currently being held between Northern Ireland's political parties and with the Irish Government.

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he intends to carry out any further talks between the interested parties on the constitutional position of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom.

Mr. Brooke: I refer my hon. Friends and the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow. (Dr. Godman).

Select Committees

15. **Mr. Stanbrook:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on how many occasions he has given oral evidence to Select Committees.

Mr. Brooke: I have not given evidence myself in my present capacity, but Northern Ireland Office Ministers including my predecessor as Secretary of State have given such evidence on four occasions in the past three years, most recently on 16 October when my hon. Friend the Member for Wiltshire, North (Mr. Needham) appeared before the Select Committee on Energy.

I am particularly pleased that seven Select Committees have visited Northern Ireland in the past 18 months to look at matters for which I have responsibility. I was able to meet two of those committees during their visit.

Security

16. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the latest terrorist killings in Northern Ireland.

20. **Sir Patrick Duffy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on security in Northern Ireland.

Rev. William McCrea: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation in the Province.

Mr. Brooke: Since I last answered a question on the security situation in Northern Ireland on 11 July, 41 people have been killed in terrorist-related incidents. Of these 36 were civilians, four were members of the Army, including one member of the Ulster Defence Regiment, and one was an RUC officer.

The response of the Government and the security forces to terrorist activity has been and will continue to be firm and resolute. It is already the case that a high proportion of attempted terrorist attacks are aborted because of pre-emptive activity by the security forces. Moreover, in the period from 1 September to 13 November, 115 people have been charged with terrorist-related offences, of whom 14 have been charged with murder and 23 with attempted murder.

NHS Spending

17. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the change in real terms of the annual spending on the national health service in Northern Ireland since 1979.

Mr. Hanley: Net public expenditure on the health service in Northern Ireland in 1991-92 will be an estimated £1,015 million, an increase of almost 42 per cent. in real terms, as measured by the GDP deflator since 1978-79.

Murder Sentences

18. **Mr. Trimble:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will make a statement on his Department's policy concerning guideline sentences for persons convicted of the murder of members of the security forces.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Government are conscious of the great debt which the community in Northern Ireland owes to members of the security forces. All life sentences are regularly reviewed. A provisional release date is set only when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is satisfied that a period appropriate to the nature of the crime, and the offender's role in it, has been served and that the risk of reoffending is minimal. The case of each terrorist convicted of murder is dealt with according to those criteria.

Patients Charter

21. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the application of the patients charter to Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: I aim to publish a charter for patients and clients of the health and personal social services in Northern Ireland towards the end of this year.

Plastic Bullets

22. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has for (i) the continued use or (ii) the replacement of plastic bullets.

Dr. Mawhinney: The security situation in Northern Ireland continues to require the protection of life and property from organised and vicious attacks. No method for dealing with such attacks is entirely free from risk. The plastic baton round provides the security forces with an option in circumstances where the only realistic alternatives are the use of live rounds or withdrawal from the scene and consequent risk to life and property.

The existing baton round launchers are no longer in production and are therefore increasingly difficult to maintain. Careful consideration is being given to a replacement baton round system, although no final decision has yet been reached.

Social Security Offices

23. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the changes he has made in social security offices in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: There have been several significant changes in social security office operations and recommendations in Northern Ireland within the past year. A new Social Security Agency has been set up and the 34 social security offices have been reorganised into 11 districts under new management structures. These districts are committed to the provision of a good quality service to the public.

Engineering

24. **Mr. Rathbone:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what encouragement is being given to encourage the study of engineering in further education institutions in the Province.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Department of Education encourages further education colleges to provide courses which meet the identified training needs of Northern Ireland industry, including the engineering sector. Engineering courses at colleges have been identified by the Department as a priority area for the allocation of additional resources for teachers, capital equipment and staff development.

Northern Ireland Electricity

25. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the proposals for interconnectors with Scotland and the Republic of Ireland following the privatisation of Northern Ireland Electricity.

Mr. Hanley: Heads of agreement for a 250 MW interconnector between Northern Ireland and Scotland were signed in September by NIE and Scottish Power. NIE hopes to have the interconnector operational by late 1995/early 1996.

The re-establishment of the interconnector with the Republic of Ireland is under review.

Health Care

27. **Mr. Temple-Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what co-operation takes place between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland on health care; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: There have been regular and useful meetings between the Health Ministers for a number of years, I have met Dr. O'Hanlon TD, Minister of Health, on two occasions during the past year. Staff from both Departments meet to review areas of existing co-operation and to examine the possibilities for further co-operation as and when the need arises. There are also exchanges between chief executives and managers and long-standing co-operation between professional staff north and south.

The arrangements for co-operation cover the whole spectrum of health care and discussions and initiatives have included health promotion; the provision of highly specialised treatments to each other's patients; joint emergency planning exercises; the export of health care services to other countries and the purchasing of equipment and supplies.

Co-operation of this nature has been of mutual benefit to both health services and the populations they serve.

Student Support

28. **Mr. McGrady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he will take to improve the financial situation of many students to enable them to continue third level education apart from the student loans regime.

Dr. Mawhinney: The total resources—grant plus loan—available to each full-time student for the 1991-92 academic year have been increased by 6 per cent. The availability of this support, together with new and more flexible access fund arrangements, should mean that no student need suffer undue financial hardship.

Electricity Privatisation

29. **Mr. Nellist:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he intends to publish his Bill to privatise the Northern Ireland electricity industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: Following an extended and thorough consultation period, I have recently authorised the draft Electricity (Northern Ireland) Order to be laid before Parliament. I anticipate that it will be printed and available to the House before the end of November. The draft order is based on the Electricity Act 1989 and I am convinced that it will bring lasting benefits to electricity consumers in Northern Ireland.

Employment

Mr. Stevens: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the levels of employment in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: At June 1991, the latest date for which figures are available, there were an estimated 525,680 employees in employment plus approximately 75,000 self-employed people. This represents an increase of almost 25,000 employees and 40,000 self-employed people over the past five years.

Traffic Flow, Limavady

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many vehicles per day use the one-way section of Catherine street, Limavady; what are

the highest and lowest hourly flows; and how many of these vehicles are in each of the categories used in road traffic surveys.

Mr. Hanley: The information is not available in the form requested. On 3 May 1991 the highest hourly flow was 1,121 vehicles.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many vehicles per day use Linen Hall street, Limavady; what are the highest and lowest hourly flows; how many of those vehicles there are in each of the categories used in road traffic surveys; and at what level of hourly traffic flow he would assess this street to be at its maximum possible number.

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that he was given by my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) on 9 January 1990, *Official Report*, column *577*. More recent information is not available in the form requested. On 3 May 1991 the highest hourly flow was 951 vehicles.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table to show for *(a)* the Roe bridge, Limavady and *(b)* the Roe bridge, Dungiven, the number of vehicles per day, the highest hourly flow and the lowest hourly flow; and how many of those vehicles are in each case in each category used in traffic surveys for each of the bridges in question.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is as follows:

Location	*Date of last survey*	*Number of vehicles per day*	*Lowest hourly traffic flow*	*Highest hourly traffic flow*	*Number of heavy goods vehicles per day*
Roe bridge, Limavady	14 August 1991	14,691	17	1,503	1,836
Roe bridge, Dungiven	20 September 1991	8,125	6	847	894

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many vehicles per day use the two way section of Irish Green street, Limavady; what are the highest and lowest hourly traffic flows; and how many of these vehicles are in each of the categories used in road traffic surveys.

Mr. Hanley: The information is not available in the form requested. On 3 May 1991 the highest hourly flow was 725 vehicles.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the last three traffic surveys were carried out on *(a)* the Roe bridge, Dungiven, *(b)* the Roe bridge, Limavady, *(c)* Linen Hall street, Limavady, *(d)* the one-way section of Catherine street, Limavady and *(e)* the two-way section of Irish Green street, Limavady; and what is his estimate of the change in traffic flows at each of those places since the last survey was carried out.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is as follows:

Location	*Date for last Three Surveys*
Roe bridge, Dungiven	February 1991, May 1991, September 1991
Roe bridge, Limavady	January 1991, April 1991, August 1991
Linenhall Street, Limavady	June 1986, September 1989, May 1991
Catherine Street, Limavady	June 1986, September 1989, May 1991
Irish Green Street, Limavady	June 1985, June 1986, May 1991

There has been no significant change in traffic volumes at these locations since the last surveys were carried out.

Local Enterprise Development Unit

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what sums have been paid in each of the last three years by the Local Enterprise Development Unit for consultancy fees in respect of clients seeking assistance from the Local Enterprise Development Unit; and what percentage of the grant aid paid to those clients in each of those years these fees represent.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested in relation to consultancy fees, expressed as a percentage of the total grants paid to clients in each of the last three years, is given in the table:

Year	*Consultancy Fees* £'000	*Fees as a percentage of Total Grant Aid* per cent.
1988-89	713	3·5
1989-90	641	2·4
1990-91	507	1·6

Remand Prisoners

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Republican remand prisoners there were in Crumlin road prison every year from 1976 until the present date.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested is not available.

Rates Collection

139. **Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what total sums were collected by the Housing Executive in respect of rates for the Department of the Environment in each of the last three years for which figures are available; what was the cost of collection; what sums were transferred to the rates after the costs of collection were deducted; and how many dwellings were involved in each of those years.

Mr. Hanley: I have been informed by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive that it is not possible to disaggregate the total value of rates collected as both rent and rates are collated and collected as one amount. This also applies to the cost of rate collection.

The Housing Executive has an agreement with the Department of the Environment (NI) under article 21(a) of the Rates (NI) Order 1977 by which it pays the rates chargeable in respect of each of its properties whether they

are occupied or not. The executive receives an allowance of 10 per cent. when payment in full is made on or before the prescribed date in the agreement.

Over the last three years the rates paid by the executive to the Department were as follows:

Net Rates Paid

Years	*£'000*
1988-89	31,321
1989-90	33,912
1990-91	35,827

The number of properties involved were:—

Rateable Properties

Year	*Number*
At 31 March 1989	180,576
At 31 March 1990	176,097
At 31 March 1991	172,032

Social Fund

Mr. Bendall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether any additional funds are to be made available for social fund payments in Northern Ireland in the current financial year.

Mr. Hanley: I am glad to be able to announce that the budgets of all district offices are being increased by a total of £1 million for loans and £0·4 million for community care grants. Details of the revised budgets are being placed in the Library. These increases are additional to any extra expenditure which may be incurred on automatic cold weather payments under the greatly improved arrangements which will apply during the approaching winter.

Royal Ulster Constabulary

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he has reached a decision on the Royal Ulster Constabulary's manpower bid.

Mr. Brooke: I have today conveyed to the Police Authority for Northern Ireland the statutory approval required under section 6 of the Police Act (Northern Ireland) 1970 for an increase in the total strength of the RUC regular force from 8,250 to 8,489 and of the full-time RUC reserve from 3,000 to 3,202. My approval of this increase in the RUC establishment of 441 extra officers endorses the decision of the Police Authority for Northern Ireland to support in full the Chief Constable's request for additional manpower. It will now be for the authority and the Chief Constable to make arrangements for the new officers to be recruited and trained; but I understand that it will be possible for that process to start immediately.

DEFENCE

Press Reports

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the remarks of Admiral Sir Julian Oswald concerning the safety of Royal Navy marine nuclear reactors, the operational condition of Polaris submarines and the dunking, naming and in service dates of the first Trident submarine, reported in *The Times* of 29 October 1991, were agreed with his Department before publication.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As is the normal practice, Ministers agreed in advance that Admiral Oswald should give an interview; and Ministers take responsibility for all interviews properly given by senior serving officers and officials.

HMS Vanguard

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the planned in service date for HMS Vanguard of December 1994 became declassified information.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: It remains our practice not to make public the exact date upon which a warship becomes operational.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give the planned dates of the first dunking and the official naming ceremony of HMS Vanguard.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: It is not our practice to make public the precise dates of submarine construction and related programmes.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who it is planned to carry out the official naming ceremony for HMS Vanguard.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: We expect to be able to make an announcement nearer the time of the event.

Polaris Submarines

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to make a decision over any further refits for Polaris submarines.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is not the usual practice to disclose details about the nuclear submarine refit programme.

Staff Cars

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current total requirement for *(a)* grade A and *(b)* grade B staff cars in each service, and for civilians employed by his Department; and how many procurement authorisations for such vehicles were given in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Alan Clark: Current total requirements for grade A and grade B staff cars are:

	Grade A	*Grade B*
Royal Navy	47	332
Army	88	1,017
Royal Air Force	30	753

Vehicles used by MOD civilians are included in service totals, but there is no fixed allocation. Procurement authorisations in the last financial year were:

	Number
Grade A staff cars	0
Grade B staff cars	451

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate how many service personnel in

each service are allocated to *(a)* driving and *(b)* maintaining staff cars; and what is the approximate annual cost.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: All service personnel in possession of a valid driving licence may be called upon to drive a service vehicle. Maintenance of staff cars is carried out with that of other service vehicles. The work is performed by MOD civilian and military staff, and contractors.

Nuclear Weapon Safety

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will identify those nuclear weapon safety arrangements in force in the United Kingdom which Dr. Sidney Drell recommended in the United States House of Representatives Armed Services Committee panel on nuclear weapons safety as a model for the United States to follow; and what assistance or information was given by his Department to the panel.

Mr. Alan Clark: Section III Of Dr. Drell's report recommends setting up an advisory committee similar in function to our own nuclear weapons safety committee. On the question of assistance or information given by my Department, I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave to the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) on 28 June, *Official Report*, column *581*.

Menwith Hill Station

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what security personnel he provides at Menwith Hill station and at Hunter's Stones post office tower; at what cost in each of the past three years, to date; and how many security staff are provided at each location.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: MOD police and civilian patrolmen are employed at Menwith Hill. Security at the Hunter's Stones site is not the responsibility of the MOD.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people, in each of the last three years, to date, have been issued with summonses for trespass and other breaches of byelaws at Menwith Hill station; in how many cases such people have been *(a)* fined, *(b)* found not guilty and *(c)* had summonses withdrawn.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to the hon. Member.

Depleted Uranium

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what health and safety guidelines have been issued to those service personnel whose duties will bring them into contact with depleted uranium;

(2) what information has been given to service personnel deployed in Kuwait about the health and safety risks involved in clearing depleted uranium munitions;

(3) what steps he has taken to minimise the health and safety risks associated with the clearance of depleted uranium munitions.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Existing service procedures and instructions cover the health and safety aspects of the handling, transport and storage of ammunition containing depleted uranium. In addition, specific advice on the detection and clearance of depleted uranium was provided to British forces involved in clearing ordnance in Kuwait.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his assessment of the health and safety risks resulting from *(a)* the chemical toxicity of depleted uranium and *(b)* the radioactivity generated by depleted uranium.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The explanatory memorandum on anti-armour ammunition with depleted uranium penetrators which was placed in the Library of the House in March 1979 makes it clear that depleted uranium has a chemical toxicity similar to that of lead and is a material of low radioactivity. The properties of depleted uranium have been taken into account in the procedures adopted for its transport, handling and storage.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what reports he has received from the Atomic Energy Authority regarding the health risks associated with the use of depleted uranium during the Gulf conflict.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Ministry of Defence has a copy of a commercially produced, theoretical appraisal by Atomic Energy Authority Technology of the possible consequences of the use during hostilities in the Gulf of ammunition containing depleted uranium. The assessment of the situation in Kuwait is a matter for the Kuwait Government. Her Majesty's Government have not received a request for assistance with the production of such an assessment.

Armoured Divisions

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 8 November, *Official Report*, column *297*, in what form information on the percentage change in capabilities of British armoured divisions is held.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Assessments of the percentage increase in 1st Armoured Division's future capability were carried out as part of the Ministry of Defence's examination of our defences for the 1990s. There is no requirement for a comparable historical analysis and, therefore, no information is held on the percentage change in capabilities of British armoured divisions.

Army Personnel

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current proportion of Army personnel who are *(a)* private soldiers, *(b)* non-commissioned officers and *(c)* officers, respectively.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A total of 36 per cent. of the Army are currently serving as private soldiers, 52 per cent. are non-commissioned officers and 12 per cent. are officers.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current proportion of Army personnel with *(a)* the Corps of Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, *(b)* the Royal Corps of Signals and *(c)* the Corps of Royal Engineers.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A total of 10 per cent. of the Army are currently serving in the REME and 10 per cent. in the Royal Engineers; 8 per cent. are serving in the Royal Corps of Signals.

Service Accommodation

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total maintenance backlog of *(a)* unavoidable and essential repairs and *(b)* urgent repairs for service accommodation as of 1 April.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Information in the form requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Post-service Training

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 8 November, *Official Report*, column 296, when work began on the production of a guide detailing services available to personnel after they have left the service; and if he will place a copy of the guide in the Library when it is completed.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Work on preparation of the guide began on 11 September 1991. I shall arrange for copies of it, and of the revised Employment Service booklets, to be placed in the Library when they are completed.

Southern Africa

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British military personnel have been killed in southern Africa during the last five years; and what were the circumstances of their deaths.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There have been four deaths since 1 January 1986; a staff sergeant was killed in a climbing accident in Botswana in February 1986; two corporals were killed in a road traffic accident in Namibia in March 1989; a sergeant died in a further road traffic accident in Zimbabwe in September 1990.

Helicopters

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make available to police forces helicopters that are surplus to the needs of the armed forces and encourage Army helicopter pilots who may be facing early redundancy to seek to transfer to the police service.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We do not, at present, have surplus helicopters, nor do we expect to have to make Army helicopter pilots redundant.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 15 November 1991

TRANSPORT

United States Cabotage Regulations

Mr. Warren: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he is taking to obtain the agreement of the United States Government to eliminate their cabotage regulations preventing United Kingdom airlines from developing feeder networks within the United States of America; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Discussions with the United States Government are taking place about possibilities for the liberalisation of transatlantic air services. Our aim is to remove unnecessary regulation and obstacles to fair competition between airlines, and United States cabotage restrictions are among those being discussed.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Clubs (Registration)

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many convictions have been obtained as a result of prosecutions brought under article 39 of the Registration of Clubs (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 since 1 February 1988;

(2) how many prosecutions have been brought under article 39 of the Registration of Clubs (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 since 1 February 1988.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested is as follows:

	Prosecutions	*Convictions*
1988	3	—
1989	1	1
1990	—	—
[1]1991	—	—

[1] Figures not yet available.

Owen and James Carragher

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what date the firm of Robins AHW Ltd., loss adjusters, was appointed to deal with compensation claim ASC 24337/45 submitted on behalf of Owen and James Carragher.

Dr. Mawhinney: The letter of appointment was issued on 13 September 1991.

RUC Constables

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the average annual wage received by a constable in the RUC; and how much overtime he or she is likely to do during 12 months.

Dr. Mawhinney: I am advised by the Police Authority for Northern Ireland that the annual average wage received by a constable in the RUC is £30,370. This figure includes allowances and average overtime of 540 hours per year.

Economy

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the current financial subvention made to Northern Ireland; and if he will break it down into the relevant parts of the economy that benefit.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 14 November 1991]:* The figures for the subvention from the United Kingdom to Northern Ireland for 1990-91 are as follows:

	1990-91 outturn £ million
Grant in aid under the Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973	1,066
Expenditure by Northern Ireland Office	699
Expenditure by Northern Ireland Court Service	28
Contribution from the Great Britain National Insurance Fund	225
Total Subvention	2,018

The grant in aid is a general contribution to revenue and is not hypothecated to any particular area of public expenditure.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Airports (Terrorism Checks)

Mr. John P. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy on counter-terrorist checks at airports.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Under schedule 5 to the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989, the police may examine and detain any person who has arrived in or is seeking to leave Great Britain or Northern Ireland by ship or aircraft for the purpose of determining whether he or she appears to be or to have been concerned in the commission, preparation or instigation of acts of terrorism. Controls unde schedule 5 to the 1989 Act are operated selectively by special branch officers at designated airports throughout the United Kingdom. The Government believe that port controls are an essential part of the national response to the threat of terrorism and they must remain in place as long as the circumstances require.

Mr. John P. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what level of Government resources were devoted to counter-terrorist checks at Cardiff Wales airport six months ago; and what is the level at the current time.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: It is not the practice to disclose the size of special branch units at ports and airports. However, the costs of such units are met by the respective police authorities, subject to the payments of specific grant by my Department at a rate in the case of provincial forces of 51 per cent.

Illegal Drugs (Wales)

Mr. John P. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the South Wales constabulary on the penetration of illegal drugs into Wales from abroad.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. Police forces throughout the United Kingdom make every effort to tackle drug trafficking.

Glanely School

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place a copy in the Library of his report and conclusions on his visit to Glanely comprehensive school on 6 November; and if he will supply a copy of the same report to the chairman of the education committee of South Glamorgan county council.

Mr. John Patten: I will write to the hon. Member.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Board

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the outstanding number of cases before the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board; and how much compensation has been paid for each year in the last 10 years.

Mr. John Patten: At the end of October 1991, 80,404 cases were outstanding of which 58,645 were awaiting decision by a member of the board or the staff, 10,020 were awaiting the applicant's response to an offer, and 11,739 were awaiting an oral hearing.

Compensation paid in each of the last 10 years was as follows:

	£
1981-82	21,976,696
1982-83	29,444,675
1983-84	38,820,772
1984-85	35,293,451
1985-86	41,559,996
1986-87	48,241,764
1987-88	52,042,581
1988-89	69,381,286
1989-90	72,721,563
1990-91	[1]109,330,303

[1] Provisional figure.

Immigration

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in how many cases since 1989 the Home Secretary has overturned a decision by immigration officers at the ports following representations by hon. Members to allow passengers into the country.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is not available centrally.

Staffordshire Police

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what immediate steps he intends to take to remedy the understaffing of the Staffordshire police force; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. Friend has approved eight additional police posts for Staffordshire as from 1 October 1991, bringing the establishment to 2,211. There were 15 vacancies at the end of October, bringing the force within 1 per cent. of its establishment.

It is for the Staffordshire police authority to determine the level of manpower required, subject to my right hon. Friend's approval. The authority has made an application for 20 additional police posts in 1992-93; my right hon. Friend will make an announcement on the allocation of additional police posts for 1992-93 shortly.

Isle of Man

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent agreements have been reached between Her Majesty's Government and the Isle of Man about adjustments of territorial waters.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: As my right hon. Friend announced on 1 August, Her Majesty's Government and the Isle of Man Government have agreed terms for the extension of the provisions of the Territorial Sea Act 1987 to the Isle of Man. An order in Council extending the territorial sea around the Isle of Man from three to 12 miles came into force on 2 September.

Police Discipline Appeals

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average time take by appeals tribunals considering police discipline measures in England and Wales; and what proportion of recommendations made by them are *(a)* accepted and *(b)* rejected by him.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: During the year ended 31 October 1991 it took an average of 14·7 weeks for an appeal tribunal to make its recommendations known to my right hon. Friend. Over the same period my right hon. Friend accepted the recommendations in 30 cases (81 per cent.) and rejected those relating to the level of punishment in 7 (19 per cent.).

Operation Burlington

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will supply the figures for the number of people *(a)* arrested, *(b)* charged and *(c)* convicted of a criminal offence under Operation Burlington conducted by the Metropolitan police in 1991;

(2) if he will list the offences under which people were charged when arrested under Operation Burlington conducted by the Metropolitan police in 1991.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that under Operation Burlington and its successor, Operation Taurus, 817 people have been arrested, of whom 702 have been charged with one or more of the following criminal offences:

Offence	*Charge*
Begging	Section 4 Vagrancy Act 1824
Possession of Offensive Weapon	Section 1 Prevention Crime Act 1953
Possession of Pointed Articles in Public	Section 39 Criminal Justice Act 1988
Drunk and Disorderly	Section 91 Criminal Justice Act 1967
Theft	Section 1 Theft Act 1968

Offence	Charge
Possession of Drugs	Section 5 Misuse of Drugs Act 1971
Possession with Intent to Supply Drugs	Section 5 Misuse of Drugs Act 1971
Obstructed during search for Drugs	Section 23 Misuse of Drugs Act 1971
Drunk and Incapable	Section 12 Licensing Act 1872
Place of Safety Orders	Section 23 Children and Young Persons Act 1963
Assault, Actual Bodily Harm	Section 47 Offences Against the Person Act 1861
Assault, Grievous Bodily Harm	Section 20 Offences Against the Person Act 1861
Grievous Bodily Harm with intent	Section 18 Offences Against the Person Act 1861
Common Assault	Section 39 Criminal Justice Act 1988
Burglary	Section 9 Theft Act 1968
Obtaining by Deception	Section 15 Theft Act 1968
Assault on Police	Section 51 Police Act 1964
Criminal Damage	Section 1 Criminal Damage Act 1971
Robbery	Section 8 Theft Act 1968
Blackmail	Section 21 Theft Act 1968
Affray	Section 3 Public Order Act 1986
Threatening Behaviour	Section 4 Public Order Act 1986
Disorderly Behaviour	Section 5 Public Order Act 1986
Wanted on Warrant	Circulated by various forces
Murder	Offence of Common Law
Conspiracy to Defraud	Section 1 Criminal Law Act 1977

Hippy Convoys

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will issue guidance to police forces on means of improving the information which is passed between police forces on the existence and movement of hippy convoys during the summer months.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. I understand that chief constables already make arrangements for the collection and dissemination of such information.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy on answering parliamentary questions in respect of bodies given agency status.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I or the responsible Minister will reply on agency policy issues and on any other matters which do not fall within the responsibility of the chief executive. The chief executives will reply on matters within their areas of responsibility, because they are best placed to do so. This policy is described in the framework documents of the United Kingdom Passport Agency and the Forensic Science Service, copies of which were placed in the Library in April. It has been recently restated in the Government's reply to the seventh report from the Treasury and Civil Service Committee (Cm 1761).

Police Establishment

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the authorised establishment figure for each police force in England and Wales; and what was the actual strength on the last day for which figures are available.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is set out in the table.

As at 31 August 1991	Authorised Establishment[1]	Strength
Avon and Somerset	3,081	3,068
Bedfordshire	1,085	1,091
Cambridgeshire	1,209	1,226
Cheshire	1,889	1,893
Cleveland	1,502	1,476
Cumbria	1,175	1,174
Derbyshire	1,812	1,716
Devon and Cornwall	2,865	2,870
Dorset	1,272	1,302
Durham	1,378	1,369
Dyfed Powys	944	946
Essex	2,875	2,881
Gloucestershire	1,164	1,169
Greater Manchester	7,028	6,963
Gwent	1,009	1,002
Hampshire	3,175	3,183
Hertfordshire	1,669	1,656
Humberside	2,007	2,021
Kent	3,020	3,021
Lancashire	3,203	3,210
Leicestershire	1,814	1,822
Lincolnshire	1,198	1,203
Merseyside	4,701	4,644
Norfolk	1,409	1,401
Northamptonshire	1,142	1,138
Northumbria	3,560	3,488
North Wales	1,352	1,340
North Yorkshire	1,408	1,380
Nottinghamshire	2,344	2,327
South Wales	3,168	3,143
South Yorkshire	2,998	3,004
Staffordshire	2,203	2,218
Suffolk	1,205	1,200
Surrey	1,659	1,676
Sussex	2,964	2,976
Thames Valley	3,685	3,718
Warwickshire	1,008	1,011
West Mercia	2,024	2,029
West Midlands	6,910	6,874
West Yorkshire	5,281	5,193
Wiltshire	1,099	1,199
City of London	798	802
Metropolitan	28,554	28,193
Totals	125,846	125,216

[1] Police establishments are those approved for 1990-91, so as to be compatible with the latest strength figures. Establishments for 1991-92 were increased from 1 October 1991.

Auto Crime

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons convicted of taking away vehicles without consent were given custodial sentences of up to three years' imprisonment in each of the five years before the penalty was reduced to six months in the Criminal Justice Act 1988.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is given in the table. Of those sentenced, about 3 per cent. in each year received a sentence of over six months in custody.

Number of persons sentenced to immediate custody at all courts for offences of unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle and unauthorised taking of conveyance other than motor vehicle or pedal cycle by sentence length 1983 to 1988[1] England and Wales

Offence	Year	Total sentenced	Total immediate custody	Sentence length: 6 months and under	Over 6 months and up to 1 year	Over 1 year and up to 18 months	Over 18 months and up to 2 years	Over 2 years and up to 3 years	Over 3 years
Unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle									
	1983	25,615	5,886	5,134	516	161	59	12	4
	1984	22,673	4,564	4,006	430	83	28	15	2
	1985	23,159	4,828	4,171	472	121	50	13	1
	1986	21,993	4,398	3,766	464	105	47	16	—
	1987	21,331	4,052	3,382	485	146	28	11	—
	[1]1988	20,496	3,658	3,022	491	103	36	6	—
Unauthorised taking of a conveyance other than a motor vehicle or pedal cycle									
	1983	172	3	2	1	—	—	—	—
	1984	167	3	3	—	—	—	—	—
	1985	90	6	5	1	—	—	—	—
	1986	92	6	3	2	1	—	—	—
	1987	62	4	1	1	1	1	—	—
	[1]1988	78	1	1	—	—	—	—	—

[1] These two triable-either-way offences were reclassified as summary offences under the Criminal Justices Act 1988 (12 October 1988).

Prisoners (Police Cells)

130. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the latest available figures showing the average number of prisoners being held in police cells per day in each police authority area.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The average number of prisoners held in police cells in each police force for the period 28 October to 8 November are as follows:

	Number
Avon and Somerset	42
Bedfordshire	26
Cambridgeshire	23
Cheshire	40
Cleveland	19
Cumbria	27
Derbyshire	38
Devon and Cornwall	31
Dorset	8
Durham	23
Dyfed	26
Essex	18
Gloucestershire	8
Greater Manchester	230
Gwent	25
Hampshire	27
Hertfordshire	18
Humberside	54
Kent	33
Lancashire	89
Leicestershire	35
Lincolnshire	16
City of London	2
Merseyside	81
Metropolitan	142
Norfolk	21
North Wales	14
North Yorkshire	34
Northamptonshire	26
Northumbria	57
Nottinghamshire	29
South Wales	61
South Yorkshire	92
Staffordshire	11
Suffolk	13
Surrey	5
Sussex	55
Thames Valley	36
Warwickshire	12
West Mercia	38
West Midlands	85
West Yorkshire	104
Wiltshire	22

132. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners are being kept in police cells as a direct result of the dispute at Her Majesty's prison, Cardiff.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The industrial action at Cardiff was temporarily suspended with effect from 5 November. On 8 November, the latest date for which figures are available, 178 prisoners in police cells were from courts in Cardiff prison's catchment area.

Joyriders

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if persons killed or injured by joyriders are covered by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 7 November 1991]:* The criminal injuries compensation scheme applies where injury or death is caused by a deliberate attempt to run the victim down. Otherwise, claims for compensation for death or injury arising from the use of a stolen vehicle are dealt with by the owner's insurers or by the Motor Insurers' Bureau.

HEALTH

District General Hospitals

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many district general hospitals there are currently in each of the health districts in Greater London; and what are the numbers of residents in each of those districts.

Mr. Dorrell: There is no agreed definition of a district general hospital. Acute hospital services may be provided to a district from single site or multiple site general hospital facilities which may or may not be supplemented by specialist or single specialty hospitals. The available relevant information is given in the table.

District Health Authority	*June 1990 Populations (in thousands)*	*March 1991 Number of hospitals with acute beds*	*more than 100 acute beds*
North West Thames RHA			
Barnet	310·0	3	2
Harrow	192·5	1	1
Hillingdon	235·5	3	3
Hounslow and Spelthorne	282·3	3	2
Ealing	293·3	1	1
Parkside	380·2	5	2
Riverside	280·7	7	3
North East Thames RHA			
Barking, Havering and Brentwood	447·8	5	3
Hampstead	112·0	2	1
Bloomsbury	127·7	19	3
Islington	173·6	2	1
City and Hackney	195·8	3	2
Newham	208·6	2	2
Tower Hamlets	166·9	2	2
Enfield	264·3	2	2
Haringey	192·8	2	1
Redbridge	234·8	3	2
Waltham Forest	213·4	3	1
South East Thames RHA			
Bexley	220·2	1	1
Greenwich	215·9	3	2
Bromley	300·1	3	3
West Lambeth	154·3	3	1
Camberwell	212·0	3	2
Lewisham and North Southwark	318·0	5	2
South West Thames RHA			
Croydon	319·4	1	1
Kingston and Esher	180·8	2	1
Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton	236·5	1	1
Wandsworth	187·0	5	1
Merton and Sutton	332·9	4	1

Pensioners

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimates he has made of the number of additional pensioners in receipt of the retirement pension who will be in receipt of income support arising from the recent uprating statement and as a consequence will be eligible for *(a)* free eye tests, *(b)* free dental check and *(c)* any other health entitlements, giving the number and projected costs by category and funding source in each case.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: A breakdown by age is not available.

Cot Deaths

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what advice is now given to parents on the avoidance of cot deaths; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what progress is being made in reducing the incidence of cot deaths.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The rate of cot death has been coming down over recent years, from 2·35 per 1,000 live births in 1988 to 1·81 in 1990. We welcome this reduction, and hope to see a further reduction following the advice contained in a press release issued by the Government's chief medical officer on 31 October. The press release was widely taken up in the national press.

The advice that is now given to parents is that the risk of cot death can be reduced if babies are not placed on their tummies when they are going to sleep. This advice is based on the recommendations of a group of experts set up by the chief medical officer to advise him on the results of several recent studies carried out in this country and abroad.

The chief medical officer took the opportunity to reiterate advice which had been offered previously: to keep babies warm, but avoid overheating; to avoid tobacco smoke; and to ensure good ventilation and to follow good hygiene.

The Health Education Authority is ensuring that this advice is incorporated in the text of its publications the "Pregnancy Book" and "Birth to Five", copies of which are distributed to first-time mothers and parents. All health professionals are being sent a letter from the chief medical officer and chief nursing officer respectively setting out the new advice in more detail. Contact between parents and health professionals is the key channel for communicating advice on reducing the risks of cot death. The Department is considering urgently whether any further action is needed.

Brompton Hospital

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the investigations made at the Brompton hospital into the use of NHS services for private patients.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I understand that no substantive evidence has been found to support such allegations.

Pharmaceutical Plants (Inspections)

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish inspection reports on pharmaceutical plants for the years 1986 to 1988 carried out by the Medicines Control Agency.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Section 118(1) restricts the disclosure of "any information with respect to any manufacturing process or trade secret" obtained on inspection. Details of inspection reports on pharmaceutical companies by the Medicines Control Agency are not, therefore, published.

Childcare

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much free childcare provision is available through the state.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information available centrally about total local authority provision of day care for the under fives is set out in the table. Information is not collected centrally about how much of the total provision is free. Following the implementation of the Children Act 1989, the Department will be collecting information about provision made for children under eight.

	Number at 31 March 1990
Children on the register of local authority day nurseries	32,413
Children placed and paid for by local authorities in non-local authority day nurseries	1,788
Children on the register of local authority playgroups	2,525
Children placed and paid for by local authorities in non-local authority playgroups	11,556
Places with childminders sponsored by the local authority	1,889
Children placed and paid for by local authority with registered childminders not provided by the local authority	5,492

Ships (Public Health Reports)

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many reports made by port health officials into matters relating to public health on ships passing between the United Kingdom and the United States of America and departing the port of Southampton were made public in the year 1990.

Mr. Dorrell: None.

Drugs

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to extend the patent life of new drugs developed in the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The United Kingdom, along with some other member states, considers the present EC proposals to be overgenerous, but is committed to working constructively towards a satisfactory outcome.

Social Work Students

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make available to local authorities the specific funding for social work student placements which is available to voluntary and private agencies;

(2) what action he is taking to ensure that local authorities provide an adequate number of social work placements for students on the course leading to the Diploma in Social Work.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is the responsibility of local authorities as employers to ensure that they have adequate numbers of suitably qualified social work staff. Authorities must, therefore, plan to make available sufficient good quality practice placements for students on social work qualifying courses and to honour agreements to do so into which they have entered as partners in Diploma in Social Work programme provider consortia.

Funding for practice placements is made available to local authorities through the revenue support grants, and we have also allowed authorities to use the training support programme to fund additional placement days. In recognition of the importance which we attach to securing practice placement provision, we have provided CCETSW with £1·85 million (rising to £2·5 million in 1993-94) for a practice placements initiative which will enable additional practice teachers to be appointed.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration has been given to using the training support programme for social work student placements in local authorities.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Practice placements for social work students are already eligible expenditure under the training support programme. In 1990-91 over 16,800 additional practice placements days were funded from TSP.

Medical Negligence (Legal Action)

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many national health service consultant obstetricians are currently facing legal action relating to possible medical negligence; and if he will also give the figure for orthopaedic consultants in the national health service.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not held centrally.

Medical Accidents

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration he has given to setting up an arbitration board to consider compensation in medical accident cases; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: A consultation document entitled "Arbitration for Medical Negligence in the National

Health Service" was issued by the Department on 29 October. Comments are requested by 31 January 1992: detailed consideration will be given to these responses. Copies of the document are available in the Library.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money has been paid out by regional health authorities as medical accident indemnity since the present scheme started; and how funding to regional health authorities reflects the carrying of indemnity on the regional health authority budget.

Mr. Dorrell: Between January 1990 and March 1991 it is estimated that English health authorities spent about £60 million on costs associated with legal claims for clinical negligence against doctors and dentists in NHS hospitals. This includes payments of damages to plaintiffs, legal and other fees, and in-house expenses. Prior to January 1990 these liabilities were borne by the medical defence organisations. Figures for the financial year 1991-92 are not yet available.

Health authorities meet these costs from within their overall resources. Most regional health authorities operate pooling or other arrangements to assist district health authorities with the costs of large settlements. In addition the NHS has access to funds set up by the medical defence organisations as part of the agreements when these liabilities were passed to the NHS. Between January 1990 and March 1991 payments of some £9 million were authorised from these funds to English health authorities to help meet the cost of settlements.

World Health Organisation

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether Her Majesty's Government has yet decided on their preferred candidate for the position of chairman of the World Health Organisation general assembly in May 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It has been the practice for a number of years for the post of President of the World Health Assembly to be rotated between the six regions of the World Health Organisation—that is, European, Eastern Mediterranean, African, South East Asian, Western Pacific and American. It is left to the region whose turn it is to hold the Presidency to decide which candidate to put forward for nomination to the World Health Assembly. Candidates are normally elected unopposed. In 1992 it will be the turn of the eastern mediterranean region to nominate a candidate for the Presidency.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on the level and type of national insurance rebates for those who contract out of the state earnings-related pension scheme for the 1993-98 quinquennium.

Miss Widdecombe: We are awaiting the Government actuary's report on his review of the contracting out rebate before determining what the rebate should be for the 1993-98 quinquennium.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, further to his reply of 7 November, *Official Report*, column *240*, how many of the parliamentary questions which were not answered due to disproportionate costs were *(a)* matters answered by the benefits agency and *(b)* matters answered by the Department both as a number and as a percentage of total questions answered.

Miss Widdecombe: All 70 questions were answered by Ministers of the Department. These questions represent approximately 3 per cent. of the 2,157 answered during the year. However, 29 answers concerned matters which are the responsibility of the Benefits Agency which represents about 1 per cent. of the questions answered.

Iraqi Students

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received from Scottish local authorities which are funding Iraqi students in Scotland in the form of section 12 payments under the Social Work (Scotland) Act who have no other income following the freezing of Iraqi Government assets in the United Kingdom; and if he intends to introduce social security reforms to provide for students from abroad in an emergency situation such as war.

Miss Widdecombe: I met representatives of Strathclyde regional council and Glasgow district council on 30 September 1991. There are no plans to change the existing provisions in the income support rules relating to students from abroad.

Benefits

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the extra costs *(a)* to local authorities and *(b)* to his Department of those additional benefits including (i) poll tax benefit and (ii) housing benefit payable to pensioners as a result of their becoming eligible for income support as a result of the recent uprating statement.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* Depending on the numbers of newly eligible pensioners who choose to claim, the total extra cost of their gains through income related benefit provision could be as much as £35 million in a full year. Any costs arising out of extra benefit provision by local authorities will be financed by central Government through the usual subsidy arrangements.

Source: Modelled using data drawn from the 1986-87-88 Family Expenditure Surveys.

ENVIRONMENT

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he intends to bring forward to compensate local authorities for the initial costs incurred as a result of extending compulsory competitive tendering.

Mr. Portillo: None. We expect that any initial costs incurred in preparing for compulsory competitive tendering for additional services will be more than offset by the savings that will result from competition.

Gloucestershire County Council

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the financial position of Gloucestershire county council.

Mr. Key: My right hon. Friend and other Environment Ministers have received a number of representations, including correspondence from county councillors and hon. Members regarding external support for the council. The most recent correspondence received was from my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Knapman) and a constituent of his on the subject of support for the fire service.

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment by how much the *(a)* central provision and *(b)* other funds available to Gloucestershire county council have changed each year since 1979.

Mr. Key: The available information is as follows:

Gloucestershire County Council

	Central Government Support[1]				
	Block grant in respect of current year £'000	*Relevant specific grants* £'000	*Non-relevant specific grants* £'000	*Transport supplementary grant* £'000	*County precept* £'000
1980-81	[2]39,170	8,835	6,544	312	88,004
1981-82	70,732	10,075	7,838	325	77,631
1982-83	71,059	11,287	7,725	418	84,809
1983-84	69,411	12,641	7,552	380	88,983
1984-85	70,413	14,018	7,887	1,670	92,691
1985-86	67,710	14,945	8,121	1,138	102,313
1986-87	71,477	17,361	9,630	861	122,068
1987-88	70,837	19,919	9,818	942	134,365
1988-89	70,422	22,001	10,185	1,077	155,288
1989-90	64,202	25,505	13,958	1,563	169,580
		Specific grants in AEF	Specific grants outside AEF		County precept
[3]1990-91	—	27,516	17,824	—	273,940
[4]1991-92	—	30,177	22,530	—	298,500

[1] In 1980-81, only the needs and resources elements of Rate Support Grant were paid directly to the County. Between 1981-82 and 1989-90 only the Block Grant element of Rate Support Grant was paid to the County. Domestic element, Domestic Rate Relief Grant and Rate Rebate Grant were paid directly to the Districts' Rate Funds. From 1990-91 only Specific Grants are paid directly to the County General Fund. All other grants are paid into the Districts' Collection Funds which is used to fund expenditure by different tiers of authority. It is therefore not possible to say what proportion of the county precept is funded by central Government support, or from other sources.
[2] Needs and Resources Elements of RSG before adjusting for National Pools.
[3] Revised estimate.
[4] Budget estimate.

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information is available to his Department on the financial position of Gloucestershire county council.

Mr. Key: The financial information available to the Department for all local authorities includes all the information necessary to calculate grant entitlement and standard spending assessments, authorities' budget estimates for previous years and statements of outturn expenditure for the years to 1989-90. These figures show that in 1989-90 Gloucestershire overspent against their budget by £6·7 million, or 3 per cent.

Social Work Students

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what level of funding for social work student placements has been assumed within the revenue support grant settlement.

Mr. Key: The local authority finance settlement provides for an appropriate level of spending by local authorities on their various functions. The resources made available are not attributed to particular activities.

Docklands Light Railway

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what powers the London Docklands development corporation has south of the River Thames; and how it is intended London Docklands development corporation will run the proposed docklands light railway extension to Lewisham.

Mr. Portillo: Section 136 of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 provides that the object of an urban development corporation shall be to secure the regeneration of its area. I consider that an extension of the Docklands light railway to Lewisham will contribute to that object.

Noisy Parties

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further measures he has under consideration to deal with noise nuisance from noisy parties.

Mr. Baldry: The working group set up to consider whether there is a need for further measures to control

noisy parties, announced by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside on 10 September met for the first time on 6 November.

The members of the group are Mr. Richard Ashworth, chief executive (environmental health and trading standards), Merton London borough council; Mr. David Horrocks, head of environmental health services, Brentwood district; Mr. Ron Hadfield, chief constable, West Midlands police; and officials from my Department and the Home Office.

The group are currently considering the extent to which existing legislation to control parties causing excessive noise might be used more effectively. The group expects to go on to consider whether amending legislation may be required.

Direct Labour

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he proposes to take against those local authorities whose direct labour organisations made significant financial losses in 1989-90.

Mr. Key: Statutory notices under the Local Government Planning and Land Act 1980 and the Local Government Act 1988 were served on 26 local authorities between July and October this year in respect of financial failure in 1989-90. The Secretary of State has now considered the responses of the 11 authorities on whom notices were served at the beginning of July. He has today given directions under section 19B and section 14 of the 1980 and 1988 Acts respectively to Barrow-in-Furness borough council in respect of major new construction, Harrogate borough council (refuse collection, building maintenace, and highways work), Shepway district council (building maintenance), and the London borough of Tower Hamlets (highways work).

He has decided to take no further action in respect of financial failure in 1989-90 against Epsom and Ewell borough council (vehicle maintenance), the London borough of Redbridge (building cleaning), West Devon borough council (refuse collection), North Tyneside metropolitan borough council. (vehicle maintenance), Shepway district council (highways work), the London borough of Camden (minor new works), and Salford city council (in respect of anti-competitive behaviour).

He is still considering the responses of the London borough of Camden, Copeland borough council and Salford city council, all in respect of building maintenance work, and expects to announce his decisions shortly. He is also considering responses from a further nine authorities on whom notices were served on 30 July.

Deer (Richmond and Bushy Park)

Mr. Jessel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he proposes to contract out the deer management in Richmond and Bushy parks.

Mr. Heseltine: Management of deer is a specialised and skilled operation. We have made it clear that we would not contract this out unless we could guarantee the welfare of the animals. Following consultation with the British Deer Society we have concluded that we should continue to undertake deer management in the Richmond and Bushy parks. We will therefore continue to employ three gamekeepers.

Nature conservation is an important element in the management of Richmond and Bushy parks and the gamekeepers will continue caring for wildlife generally. The management of the contracts and the work carried out by the contractor's staff will also take this into account.

PRIME MINISTER

Draft EC Treaties

Mr. Benn: To ask the Prime Minister under what legal authority he would sign any treaties agreed at Maastricht; and what force such treaties would then have in British law.

The Prime Minister: Signature of any treaty agreed at Maastricht would be an Executive act and as such would have no force in the United Kingdom law. Ratification of any treaty is a prerogative act, exercised by the Government on behalf of the Crown. Before the United Kingdom could ratify any treaty signed at Maastricht, its provisions would need to be incorporated into United Kingdom law by amending the European Communities Act 1972.

European Central Bank

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the potential benefits and penalties that would arise from the full operation of a European central bank as currently proposed in the Dutch draft treaty for economic and monetary union.

The Prime Minister: That judgment can be made only if and when the adoption of a single currency becomes a realistic prospect. Under the treaty now under negotiation the earliest date envisaged for the introduction of a single currency is some years away. It will be for the Government and Parliament to assess at that stage the potential benefits and penalties of a European central bank.

Special Advisers

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister on how many occasions he has declined to appoint a special adviser nominated for appointment.

The Prime Minister: The appointment of special advisers is a matter for the relevant Minister in consultation with me. It would not be appropriate to give the information requested.

Political Advisers

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answers of 5 November, *Official Report*, column *42* and 11 November, *Official Report*, column *353*, listing current political advisers, if he will list the names of the advisers alongside the Ministers and Department which they serve.

The Prime Minister: The special advisers (political) who are currently serving are:

Name	Department	Minister
Mr. K. Adams	Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	Minister
Mr. H. Harris-Hughes	Cabinet Office (including No. 10)	
Mr. J. Hill	Cabinet Office (including No. 10)	
Mrs. S. Hogg	Cabinet Office (including No. 10)	
Mr. A. Rosling	Cabinet Office (including No. 10)	
Mr. N. True	Cabinet Office (including No. 10)	
Miss B. Wallis (part-time)	Cabinet Office (including No. 10)	
Ms. S. Hole	Cabinet Office (Chief Whip's Office)	Chief Whip
Mr. P. Moman	Cabinet Office (Privy Council Office)	Minister of State, Privy Council Office
Mr. J. R. M. Gardner	Defence	Secretary of State
Mrs. T. Keswick	Education and Science	Secretary of State
Mr. D. Ruffley	Education and Science	Secretary of State
Mr. T. Collins	Employment	Secretary of State
Mr. G. Black	Energy	Secretary of State
Mr. A. Kemp (part-time)	Environment	Secretary of State
Lady Strathnaver	Environment	Secretary of State
Ms. A. Broom	Environment	Jointly to the Ministers for Local Government and the Inner Cities; Environment and Countryside; and Housing and Planning
Mr. E. Bickham	Foreign and Commonwealth	Secretary of State
Mr. M. Fraser	Foreign and Commonwealth	Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Ms. L. Campey	Health	Secretary of State
Mrs. K. Ramsay (part-time)	Health	Secretary of State
Mr. R. Marsh	Health	Secretary of State
Mr. T. Kerpel	Home Office	Secretary of State
Mr. C. M. Grantham	Home Office	Jointly to two Ministers of State (the Right Hon. John Patten and the Right Hon. Mrs Rumbold)
Mrs. E. Laing	Privy Council Office	Lord President of the Council
Ms. S. McEwen	Privy Council Office	Lord Privy Seal
Mr. A. Young	Scottish Office	Secretary of State
Mr. I. Stewart	Social Security	Secretary of State
Mr. Anisfield	Trade and Industry	Secretary of State
Mr. J. Mayhew	Trade and Industry	Secretary of State
Mr. P. Miller	Transport	Secretary of State
Dr. W. Robinson	Treasury	Chancellor of the Exchequer
Mr. A. Ross-Goobey	Treasury	Chief Secretary
Mr. W. Lightfoot	Treasury	Financial Secretary

South Africa

Mr. Richard Page: To ask the Prime Minister what steps the Government are taking to help prepare black South Africans for a rôle in public administration under a post-apartheid constitution.

The Prime Minister: Our growing aid programme for black South Africans emphasises education and training as the key to enabling black people to play their rightful role in a post-apartheid South Africa. In this context, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and Minister for Overseas Development has announced the Government's plans to help to train those who may become officials within the new political system. This help is open to black South Africans of all parties and to those without political affiliation. We have invited nominees from various political groups, including the African National Congress, the Inkatha Freedom party, the Pan-Africanist Congress and AZAPO, as well as from non-political bodies. A course for potential senior officials will start in January at the Civil Service college. My right hon. Friend is preparing plans for further help in this area.

Environmental Policy

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the priority Her Majesty's Government attache to environmental policy against the Government's other policies.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 14 November 1991]:* The Government aim to integrate environmental concern into all policies, as explained in detail in the White Paper, "This Common Inheritance" (Cm 1200) and "This Common Inheritance: The First Year Report". (Cm 1655)

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many *(a)* nursery schools, *(b)* primary schools, *(c)* universities, *(d)* polytechnics and *(e)* colleges of further education he has visited in the last 12 months.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science has visited a number of varied institutions in the past twelve months, including five primary schools, seven universities, three polytechnics and four colleges of further education.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the local education authorities to which he has sent information or advice regarding the past, current or future component of the standard spending assessment for adult education and local education authority the amounts so specified.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend has sent no information or advice on this matter to local education authorities.

Undergraduates

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many undergraduates from the United Kingdom were attending courses in *(a)* EC countries and *(b)* non-EC countries in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Estimates prepared by the United Kingdom Erasmus Student Grants Council show that, in academic year 1990-91, some 4,800 United Kingdom domiciled students were studying under ERASMUS arrangements in a higher education institution of another EC member state as part of their United Kingdom undergraduate course.

Information on other United Kingdom students studying abroad is not available centrally.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Schools

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a table showing the numbers of members of Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools in each category of job function which will be lost when Her Majesty's inspectorate is reduced to the level proposed in his statement of 27 September 1991.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Detailed decisions of this kind have not been taken and need not be taken at this stage. The figure of 175 is the best estimate that the senior chief inspector and I have made of the eventual size of HMI when they assume their full duties after a suitable transitional period.

LEAs (Employees)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information is available showing the numbers of teaching and non-teaching employees of each local education authority in 1991.

Mr. Fallon: Numbers of teaching and non-teaching staff employed by local authorities are collected regularly by the joint staffing watch, managed by representatives of local and central Government.

Figures for the education service within each authority for March 1991 are now available and have been placed in the Library.

Class Sizes

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the number of primary school pupils in class sizes of one to 15, 16 to 20, 21 to 25, 26 to 30 and 30 and over, by local education authority for each school year since 1979-80.

Mr. Eggar: It is not possible to provide all the information requested for the number of years stated because of disproportionate cost. Tables showing the number of pupils taught by one teacher in classes of sizes one to 30, 31 to 35, 36 to 40 and 41 and over in maintained primary schools in each local education authority in England for the years 1988 to 1991 (provisional) are being placed in the House of Commons Library.

SCOTLAND

Scottish Ambulance Service (Mileage Allowance)

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the effect of the decision by the Inland Revenue to tax the profit element of the motor car mileage allowances paid to the voluntary car drivers used by the Scottish Ambulance Service.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: We greatly appreciate the work undertaken by the voluntary car drivers and the contribution which they make to the community.

The Inland Revenue's decision mainly affects those volunteer drivers who exceed 4,000 miles per year who will be liable for income tax on the profit element of their mileage allowance. The new tax arrangements will be phased in gradually over a number of years. Only one quarter of the profit element for the period 6 October 1991 to 5 April 1992 and for 1992-93 will be taxed, one half for 1993-94 and three-quarters for 1994-95. Tax will therefore not be payable on the full amount of the profit element until 1995-96.

I have, however, agreed that mileage allowances for voluntary car drivers should be substantially increased. The new rates are:

27·7p per mile for motor vehicles up to 1500cc and
33·2p per mile for motor vehicles over 1500cc.

This represents an increase of nearly 10 per cent. These rates will be kept under review and are backdated to 1 October 1991.

WALES

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will make it his policy to increase the hectarage payments made under the hill livestock compensatory allowance to the level of the limit set by the European Community;

(2) if he will make it his policy to increase the level of headage payments for *(a)* cows, *(b)* hardy breeding ewes and *(c)* other ewes in both severely disadvantaged and disadvantaged areas.

Mr. David Hunt: The payment arrangements for the hill livestock compensatory allowance scheme are considered within the context of the autumn review of economic conditions and prospects for our hill and upland farmers. The HLCA payment arrangements to apply from 1 January 1992 will be announced as soon as possible.

Road Improvements

162. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the total expenditure by his Department on local road improvements, at constant prices, in each year between 1979 and 1990.

Mr. David Hunt: Expenditure on local roads in Wales is the responsibility of each county highway authority. Capital expenditure on new construction and improvement and current expenditure on highway maintenance, structural maintenance (including bridges), lighting, street cleaning, and other highways purposes, at constant prices are:

Road construction index 1st quarter 1990 prices (£ million)

	Capital	Current	Total
1979-80	53·5	72·8	126·2
1980-81	61·6	81·4	143·0
1981-82	62·9	113·7	176·6
1982-83	83·5	99·7	183·2
1983-84	73·1	109·7	182·8
1984-85	67·5	108·4	175·9
1985-86	74·7	103·1	177·8
1986-87	83·1	120·9	204·0
1987-88	79·8	111·5	191·2
1988-89	60·8	111·0	171·8
1989-90	73·3	124·6	197·9
[1]1990-91	78·3	133·9	212·2

[1] Provisional.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the outstanding applications for road bypass schemes before his Department, and the date on which each application was initially submitted.

Mr. David Hunt: Trunk road bypass schemes are added to the programme as a result of route and feasibility studies and have been listed in successive editions of "Roads in Wales". Current plans are given in the supplement to "Roads in Wales: Progress and Plans for the 1990s" published in February.

Applications from local authorities for transport grant support in 1992-93 include bypass schemes. These are under consideration and an announcement will be made shortly.

Nurses

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total number of nursing posts filled in Wales in each year from 1986 to 1990.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Information on the whole time equivalent (wte) number of nursing and midwifery staff in Wales is given in the following table:

	wte[1]
1986	27,187
1987	27,764
1988	27,920
1989	28,037
1990	28,093

[1] At 30 September.

The increase of 906 in the number of nurses in the Welsh NHS in just four years is an indication of the Government's commitment to improving the NHS.

Home Improvement Grants

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will list the specific criteria and allowances in means tesing applicants for mandatory and discretionary home improvement grants.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Details of the test of resources are contained in "The Housing Renovation etc. Grants (Reduction of Grant) Regulations 1990 (SI 1990 No. 1189)" (as amended) copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House.

Sheep Scab

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases of sheep scab there were in Wales during the last 12 months; what were the corresponding figures for 1970 and 1980; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: In the last 12 months 14 cases of sheep scab were reported in Wales. No cases were reported in 1970 and 1980.

Aberystwyth Harbour

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to develop the harbour at Aberystwyth, Cardiganshire during the next five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Ceredigion district council has submitted a bid for additional resources under the projects of regional or national importance (PRNI) scheme to enable them to provide infrastructure works prior to development of a marina. This bid, together with all others received under the PRNI scheme is presently being considered.

EMPLOYMENT

Enterprise Allowance Scheme

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many applicants have been accepted under the new enterprise allowance scheme; and if he will give the figures by regional or local authority area.

Mr. Jackson: New flexibilities in the operation of the enterprise allowance scheme were introduced on 1 April 1991 for existing TECs. TECs going live after that date were able to use the flexibilities when they became operational.

In the current financial year, to 15 September, 22,294 people in England and Wales have started a new business with the help of an enterprise allowance. A regional breakdown of these entrants is shown in the table. It is not possible to give a breakdown of entrants by local authority area.

Region	Participants
Northern	1,375
North West	3,397
Yorkshire and Humberside	2,770
West Midlands	2,238
East Midlands and Anglia	2,541
South East	2,387
South West	2,560
London	3,163
Wales	1,863

Training, Cumbria

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many persons were on ET sponsored training programmes in each travel-to-work area in Cumbria for each month since January 1990.

Mr. Jackson: The information is not available in the format requested. The following table gives the numbers of people in Employment Training (ET) in the area covered by Cumbria training and enterprise council for each month from January 1990 to September 1991.

Period ending	ET in training (actual in period)
January 1990	1,380
February 1990	1,368
March 1990	1,369
27 April 1990	[1]1,250
25 May 1990	1,088
22 June 1990	1,154
20 July 1990	1,099
17 August 1990	1,095
14 September 1990	1,169
12 October 1990	1,371
9 November 1990	1,385
7 December 1990	1,548
4 January 1991	1,470
1 February 1991	1,548
1 March 1991	1,615
29 March 1991	1,375
27 April 1991	1,145
25 May 1991	1,019
22 June 1991	960
20 July 1991	849
17 August 1991	782
14 September 1991	771

[1] Estimate.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what study he has made of the extent to which the recession in British industry is influencing the decision of employers acting as work experience providers for young people under the YT programme in the county of Cumbria.

Mr. Jackson: In Cumbria, as in other parts of the country, training opportunities are dependent on employers' participation in the training programme. With my support TECs are actively promoting the commitment of employers to investment in training. The Government are committed to ensuring the availability of suitable training for young people under the terms of its YT guarantee.

School Leavers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many school leavers for the year 1991 were awaiting places on YT schemes as of mid-September 1991.

Mr. Jackson: The information requested is not available centrally.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will publish the range of payments made by TEC's to managing agents under ET in the counties of Northumbria, Cumbria, Lancashire, Cheshire, Surrey and Kent, separately.

Mr. Jackson: It is not possible to provide this information. Details of financial arrangements between training and enterprise councils and their training managers are commercial-in-confidence.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish a table showing, for Greater London and for each TEC area in London, the number of youth training and employment training places which were available 12 months ago, and are available for and specifically targeted at *(a)* people with learning difficulties, *(b)* people whose first language is not English, *(c)* people with physical disabilities and *(d)* ex-offenders.

Mr. Jackson: The information is not available as requested.

All ET and YT places are available to the four groups of clients listed, provided that they meet the eligibility criteria for the two programmes.

The Government have guaranteed that all young people who are under 18 and not in full-time education or a job and are seeking training are offered and if necessary re-offered, a suitable youth training place. The Government remain committed to ensuring that the YT guarantee is met and has ensured that adequate funding is available to do so.

The Government require that an ET place is provided for people in the Government's guarantee and aim groups who wish to enter ET. The guarantee group is those aged 18 to 24 who have been unemployed for six months or more but less than 12 months, the aim group is those aged 18 to 49 who have been unemployed for two years or more and those people with disabilities, regardless of the length of time of the latters unemployment.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish a table showing the number of YT and ET places available now and 12 months ago in the area of each TEC in London, and the total for Greater London, and also the comparable figures for the number of places occupied.

Mr. Jackson: The information is not available in the form requested.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish estimates for each TEC area in London, and for Greater London as a whole, for the numbers of people eligible now and 12 months ago for YT and ET places.

Mr. Jackson: The information is not available in the format requested.

All young people in the 16 and 17 age group are eligible for YT if they do not stay on at school, do not go on to further education, or do not have a full time job.

The following table shows numbers in the 16 and 17 age group by training and enterprise council (TEC) area in London. Many of these young people will have other options available to them.

The Government have guaranteed that all young people who are under 18 and not in full-time education or a job and are seeking training are offered and if necessary re-offered, a suitable youth training place. The Government remain committed to ensuring that the YT guarantee is met and have ensured that adequate funding is available to do so.

The information requested relating to ET is not available. However, the Government require that an ET place is provided for people in the Government's guarantee and aim groups who wish to enter ET. The guarantee group is those aged 18 to 24 who have been unemployed for six months or more but less than 12 months, and the aim group is those aged 18 to 49 who have been unemployed for two years or more and those people with disabilities, regardless of the length of time of the latters unemployment.

Estimates of 16-17 year old population

TEC	1990	1991
Aztec	12,400	11,900
Centec	11700	11,450
Cilntec	7,600	7,200
Letec	29,400	28,400
North London	17,500	16,800
North West London	10,550	10,200
Solotec	24,700	23,500
South Thames	20,200	19,400
West London	21,500	20,900
London	155,550	149,750

Source: London Research Centre.

Tributyltin Oxide

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will place in the Library a copy of the letter from J. D. McGuinness and the Health and Safety Executive on tributyltin oxide.

Mr. Jackson: Yes. The letter from Dr. J. McGuinness to the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was sent on behalf of the Health and Safety Executive in May 1990. It is a covering letter, sent with a copy of the publicly available Tributyltin Oxide review for information purposes. A copy of the review and accompanying letter, will be made in the Library.

Earnings Statistics

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number and percentage of people, working full-time and part-time earning less than *(a)* £3·40 an hour, *(b)* £4·00 an hour, *(c)* £4·60 an hour and *(d)* £5·20 an hour respectively; and if he will give the information separately for men and women and, in each case, those aged (i) under 17 years, (ii) under 18 years, (iii) 18 years to 20 years and (iv) 21 years to 24 years, respectively.

Mr. Jackson: The information available from the 1991 "New Earnings Survey" closest to that requested is given in the following tables.

Employees whose pay was not affected by absence and whose gross hourly earnings (excluding overtime) were less than specified amounts April 1991

	Less than £3·40		Less than £4·00		Less than £4·50		Less than £4·80		Less than £5·40	
	Numbers in sample	Per cent. of total	Numbers in sample	Per cent. of total	Numbers in sample	Per cent. of total	Numbers in sample	Per cent. of total	Numbers in sample	Per cent. of total
Aged 16										
Males										
Full time	213	89·1	223	93·3	231	96·7	232	97·1	235	98·3
Part time	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Females										
Full time	144	84·7	158	92·9	163	95·9	164	96·5	170	100·0
Part time	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Aged under 18										
Males										
Full time	626	81·0	691	89·4	727	94·0	742	96·0	759	98·2
Part time	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Females										
Full time	487	73·7	581	87·9	614	92·9	631	95·5	648	98·0
Part time	314	77·9	361	89·6	376	93·3	379	94·0	387	96·0
Aged 18-20										
Males										
Full time	1,394	39·6	2,107	59·8	2,569	72·9	2,784	79·0	3,062	86·9
Part time	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Females										
Full time	1,330	38·8	2,150	62·7	2,648	77·3	2,855	83·3	3,122	91·1
Part time	307	59·7	407	79·2	456	88·7	472	91·8	484	94·2
Aged 21-24										
Males										
Full time	812	11·5	1,745	24·7	2,666	37·7	3,144	44·5	4,098	57·9
Part time	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Females										
Full time	1,080	16·0	2,085	31·0	3,007	44·6	3,592	53·3	4,491	66·7
Part time	345	46·4	487	65·5	581	78·1	619	83·2	667	89·7

Source: New Earnings Survey.
Note: "—" denotes information not available.

Invoice Payments

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on his Department's survey of the Government's performance in paying invoices, particularly to small and medium-sized companies.

Mr. Jackson: The Government believe that it is important that all organisations recognise their responsibilities to their suppliers by settling accounts on time. I recognise that Government should itself set an example to both the private and public sectors. All Government Departments are committed to ensuring that they pay within agreed terms or, if there is no contractual provision or other understanding governing the timing of payment, within 30 days of receipt of goods or a valid invoice, whichever is the later. Furthermore, my hon. Friend, the Minister for Small Firms, has offered to follow up individual cases of delayed payments to small firms by Government Departments.

During the financial year 1991-92, major spending Departments are undertaking surveys of their payment performance and making a return to the Department. The surveys will encompass payments to businesses of all sizes. The results will be published as soon as possible after the end of the financial year.

Employment Action

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish a table showing the number of employment action places in London which were *(a)* established and *(b)* occupied, for each training and enterprise council area in London and for Greater London as a whole.

Mr. Jackson: Contracts for employment action are for the number of participant weeks to be delivered rather than the number of places. The exact terms of such contracts must be commercial in confidence.

For London as a whole we aim to have sufficient provision in place by March 1992 to help about 4,400 people. I am confident that we will meet that target.

We have instituted a system for collecting management information, including numbers of participants in place. The first returns from that system will be available shortly.

Travel to Interview Scheme

Mr. Moate: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the working of the travel to interview scheme for people seeking employment; how many people have received help with travel costs in each of the past four years; what is the average amount paid; and what help residents in the Faversham constituency may receive for travel to London for job interviews.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service Executive Agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Industrial Tribunals

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the numbers of industrial tribunal members; and how many are *(a)* black, *(b)* Asian and *(c)* women.

Mr. Jackson: I have been asked to reply.

There are 1,599 members of the industrial tribunals, of whom 382 are women. Information on the racial origin of members has been systematically collected only since 1986 and is not available in the form requested. However, of the 1,599 lay members we estimate that there are 50 from the ethnic minorities: 18 Afro-Caribbean, 15 Asian and 17 whose particular racial origin is not currently recorded.

DEFENCE

Wrens

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the number of Wrens at sea on Royal Naval ships on 1 November.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The total number of members of the Womens Royal Naval Service serving in seagoing ships of the Royal Navy on 1 November 1991 was 330, comprising 31 WRNS officers, 15 officer cadets and 284 WRNS ratings.

Hangar, Cardington

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department expects to raise from the sale of the five acre hangar at Cardington, Bedfordshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The former No. 1 and No. 2 airship hangars at Cardington, Bedfordshire, were disposed of in 1986 and 1989 respectively. The sum realised from their disposal is a matter of commercial confidentiality.

Boards of Inquiry

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will take steps to ensure that when Ministry of Defence board of inquiry reports are released by order of a judge, they are not restricted to professional advisers.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is common practice in legal proceedings to confine disclosure of documents to the parties and their professional advisers. It is, of course, for the courts to decide the precise terms of any order for the discovery of documents.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions in the last year his Department has been ordered by a judge to release documents relating to a board of inquiry report following the death of a service man; what has been the response of the Ministry; and whether all the requested papers have been handed over unabridged.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Department has been subject to an order for discovery to include a board of inquiry report on only one occasion in the last year in the case of Russell Edward Ferrante (Administrator of the Estate of Simeon Mervyn Ferrante deceased) *v.* Secretary of State for Defence. In that particular case the Department has made every effort to supply documents covered by the order to the plaintiff. Correspondence between respective solicitors on the terms of the order continue.

Anglo-French Nuclear Missile

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will publish details of the arrangements being made to supply tritium and plutonium for the recently announced Anglo-French air launch nuclear missile;

(2) what is the source of the tritium and plutonium to be used in the warhead to be fitted to the recently announced Anglo-French air launch nuclear missile; and who is to be the primary contractor to supply the tritium and plutonium.

Mr. Alan Clark: There has been no recent announcement of an Anglo-French air-launched nuclear missile. We are continuing to study options for the replacement, in due course, of our WE177 free-fall bombs. No final decision has been taken.

Army (Operating Costs)

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimated annual operating cost of *(a)* an armoured regiment, *(b)* a regular infantry battalion and *(c)* a Territorial Army infantry battalion.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Operating costs vary according to a unit's composition and its precise task at the time. Estimated annual operating costs for 1991-92 are as follows:

	United Kingdom £ *million*	*BAOR* £ *million*
Armoured regiment	15·0	15·0
Infantry battalion	12·5 to 15·0	17·0
TA Infantry battalion	2·0	—

These figures do not include either civilian support costs or the procurement costs of major weapon platforms operated by these units.

Army (Manpower Reductions)

Mrs. Heal: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence between what dates colonels and colonels commandant of the Army's regiments and corps were consulted about the proposed reductions in manpower.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: All regimental colonels and colonels commandant were involved between 4 June and 2 July 1991 in the formal consultative process which took place before decisions were taken upon how the reductions in the combat arms should be achieved. The representative colonels commandant of the logistic corps were similarly consulted on the logistic support review as it developed.

Trident

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of the cost of cancelling *(a)* the entire Trident submarine programme, *(b)* the fourth Trident and *(c)* the building projects at Coulport and Faslane, under the liquidated damages clauses in the contracts.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The costs of cancellation of the Trident programme as a whole, or of any element within it, would depend on the timing of the cancellation and would reflect the contractors' properly incurred liabilities at the time of termination. These costs should be less than the total amount committed, which currently stands at about £6 billion.

Former Ministry Property, Gosport

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action his Department is taking to assist in the resolution of the problems arising from the collapse of balconies at blocks of flats and maisonettes at Rowner, Gosport, which were originally owned by the Ministry of Defence and are now in private or local authority ownership.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Ministry of Defence officials met Gosport borough council officers on 10 October 1991 to discuss the problem and agreed to attend a further meeting once the final report from the Building Research Establishment had been received. I understand that the council now has the report; my officials will meet council officers in the near future. My Department will of course consider sympathetically any proposals for the future of the properties put forward by the council.

Gulf War (Friendly Fire)

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in the light of information handed to Her Majesty's ambassador in Washington by the United States Administration on the Warrior/A-10 incident in the Gulf war regarding British service men killed by friendly fire, if he will now launch a further inquiry into this matter to clarify the apparent contradictions in evidence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No. As I made clear in the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) on 24 July at column *706*, the board of inquiry was unable to resolve a conflict of evidence on the passing of a target grid reference to the A-10 pilots or establish why the Warrior vehicles were misidentified. The letter from the United States Administration to Her Majesty's ambassador in Washington confirms that all relevant information was passed to the board of inquiry and that no new evidence is available. A copy of that letter was placed in the Library of the House on 12 November.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Public Limited Companies

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to introduce legislation to require all public limited company auditors signing the audit report to state whether the firm within the preceding five years has been criticised by his Department's inspectors.

Mr. Redwood: No.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry following the provisions of the Companies Act 1989, from what date auditing firms will be able to set up limited liability companies.

Mr. Redwood: Since 1 October there has been no statutory bar on the appointment of a limited liability company as a company auditor provided it is eligible for appointment under the rules of its recognised supervisory body.

Supervisory Bodies

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any plans to appoint an independent ombudsman to hear complaints against the recognised supervisory bodies.

Mr. Redwood: No. When recognising the supervisory bodies my right hon. Friend was satisfied that they met the statutory requirement to have effective arrangements for the investigation of complaints against them.

Textile Industry

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will see a delegation of hon. Members to discuss the textile industry.

Mr. Leigh: The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Technology has arranged to meet a delegation early in December.

Post Office

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to reduce the £1 threshold of the letter monopoly.

Mr. Lilley: As stated in the citizens charter, we propose to reduce the Post Office's letter monopoly from its present level of £1 to a level much closer to that of the first-class letter stamp. This will require legislation.

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the negative external finance limit targets achieved by the Post Office for each year since 1979, together with the cumulative amount expressed *(a)* as a total and *(b)* at April 1991 prices.

Mr. Lilley: Negative external finance limit achievements by the Post Office since 1979 appear in the table *(a)* at outturn and *(b)* at April 1991 values. With effect from 1989-90, pay bill creditors have been excluded from working capital for the purposes of the external finance limit calculation. The effect of this adjustment is expected to be neutral in the long term. Figures adjusted to take account of this change are also given from 1985-86, the earliest date for which this information is available.

	(i) Outturn		*(ii) Adjusted*	
	(a) £ million	*(b)* £ million	*(a)* £ million	*(b)* £ million
1978-79	17	43	—	—
1979-80	34	74	—	—
1980-81	8	15	—	—
1981-82	13	22	—	—
1982-83	60	94	—	—
1983-84	62	93	—	—
1984-85	100	143	—	—
1985-86	75	101	82	110
1986-87	93	121	136	177
1987-88	80	100	79	99
1988-89	102	121	60	71
1989-90	102	112	0	0
1990-91	0	0	0	0
	746	1,039	357	457

Machine Tools Industry

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to bring about increased investment in the machine tools industry and to prevent further redundancies.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 11 November 1991]:* The Government can best help the machine tool industry by providing a stable economic framework based on low inflation. In the past year inflation has fallen from 11 per cent. to about 4 per cent., allowing interest rates to fall by 4·5 percentage points. Output is set to rise in the second half of this year and to rise still faster in 1992, with manufacturing growing faster than the economy as a whole.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Civil Service Pensions

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has any plans to extend the arrangements made by the civil service pension scheme for the payment of pensions to the widows of post-retirement marriages to include those widows of such marriages whose husbands retired before 6 April 1978.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Government's position in respect of the payment of pensions, under the civil service pension scheme, to the widows of post-retirement marriages has not changed since I replied to a similar question from my hon. Friend on 14 December last year. There are no plans to extend the present arrangements so that account is taken of pensionable service before 6 April 1978.

Banks (Interest Rates)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has any plans to introduce legislation to require the banks in their annual reports to reveal the highest interest rate charged by them during the year.

Mr. Maples: No. The rate of interest charged by banks depends on the particular circumstances in which funds are being lent and I do not think it would be appropriate to require banks to publish such figures.

Inflation

Mr. Lawson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the average underlying rate of inflation, defined in terms of the retail prices index excluding mortgage interest payments, between June 1985 and October 1991.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Between June 1985 and October 1991 the retail prices index excluding mortgage interest payments increased at an average annual rate of 5·3 per cent.

Cardiff Wales Airport (Customs)

Mr. John P. Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will instruct Her Majesty's Customs and Excise to restore permanent customs cover at Cardiff Wales airport.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The permanent customs cover at Cardiff Wales airport has not been withdrawn. The staff have been re-located for reasons of efficiency to other premises outside the airport but will continue to fulfil the same functions as prior to their re-location.

Iraqi Assets

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he intends to release the assets of the Iraqi Government in the National Westminster bank in London; and if he will negotiate with the Iraqi Government to ensure that this money is not removed from Britain but is used to fund Iraqi students studying in the United Kingdom and allow them to repay loans received from local authorities since the freezing of Iraqi assets.

Mr. Maples: The United Nations Sanctions Committee has informed national Governments where Iraqi assets are

held that they have discretion to unfreeze them to pay for approved humanitarian purposes. There could be no question of unfreezing assets for purposes incompatible with United Nations decisions.

The Bank of England will, however, continue to consider applications to debit Iraqi accounts for living, medical, educational and similar expenses in the United Kingdom of residents of Iraq. So far, no such applications have been received to meet the fees of students sponsored by the Iraqi Government.

Drug Smuggling

Mr. John P. Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take steps to improve the control of illegal drugs coming into the United Kingdom at Cardiff Wales airport.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The recent national review of anti-smuggling controls which has taken place within the Customs and Excise department has directed resources far more towards areas of risk and has increased the flexibility of staff to address those risks. Flexible anti-smuggling teams are being used at Cardiff Wales airport and these have improved the controls to combat the importation of illegal drugs both there and in other parts of the executive unit.

Companies

Mr. Hayward: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has any plans to amend the tax laws relating to groups of companies.

Mr. Maude: There are various tax provisions which treat a group of companies as if it were a single company. Two weaknesses in the legislation have come to light where tax benefits could be enjoyed by companies in a way that does not properly reflect commercial reality. We intend to introduce provisions in the next Finance Bill to correct these defects.

The first point concerns circumstances in which there are "arrangements" in existence in respect of shares and whether they are taken into account in determining whether a group of consortium relationship exists between two companies. This issue was considered in the case of J. Sainsbury plc v. O'Connor in which judgment was given by the Court of Appeal earlier this year. The effect of that judgment was that, for the purposes of the provisions of schedule 18 to the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 about one company's entitlement to profits and assets of another, share "arrangements" mean arrangements to vary rights attaching to particular shares but not, as the Inland Revenue had previously thought, arrangements involving changes in the ownership of shares. The legislation we propose introducing will extend the definition of arrangements to cover cases where arrangements exist for the whole or part of a company's holding of shares or securities to be disposed of to, or otherwise effectively reduced in favour of, another party. This is the way the Inland Revenue used to interpret the law. The new legislation will, if passed by Parliament, take effect for arrangements which come into existence on or after today.

The second point concerns the transfer of assets between companies in the same group. When this happens, any capital gain is generally deferred. When a company leaves a group still holding an asset on which gains have been deferred, a charge can be raised to recover the tax on the deferred gains. But when a company leaves a group in the course of the winding up of another group member, the company may be able to benefit from a defect in the law and avoid paying tax on those deferred gains. The legislation correcting this defect will, if passed by Parliament, also take effect where a company leaves a group on or after today.

The Inland Revenue will consult interested parties about the details of both aspects of this new legislation. We intend to publish draft clauses to help those consultations. Further details are in a press release issued today by the Inland Revenue.

Citizens Charter

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give details of all the additional charters in the various service areas which arise directly from the citizens charter; and when each of the new charters will be published.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 14 November 1991]:* I have been asked to reply. To date, 12 charters have been published:

Education
The Parent's Charter (England)
The Parent's Charter in Scotland
A Charter for Parents in Wales

Health
The Patient's Charter (England)
The Patient's Charter in Scotland
A Charter for Patients in Wales

Revenue
The Taxpayer's Charter (Inland Revenue)
The Taxpayer's Charter (HM Customs & Excise)

National Insurance
A Contributors' Charter
An Employers' Charter

Employment
Redundancy Payments Service Charter

Justice
The Justice Charter for Scotland

Further charters to be published include tenant's charters. Benefits Agency customer's charter, and charters for passengers, jobseekers and customs and excise businesses.

Charters are an important way of informing citizens about their entitlements, the standards of service they can expect; and what to do when things go wrong.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

EC Social Charter

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the United Kingdom has ratified the European social charter of the Council of Europe; if he will list the member states of the Council of Europe which have ratified the charter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The United Kingdom ratified the European social charter of the Council of Europe on 11 July 1962 and was the first state to do so. Since then, the charter has been ratified by Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Turkey. The United Kingdom regards the charter as an important statement of

economic and social principles which recognises that the same obligations can be met through a diversity of systems and practices.

Draft EC Treaties

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will state the number of new articles proposed in the material for draft treaties proposed by the Dutch presidency of the European Community; and if he will state the number and scope of new treaties which would be required to implement these draft proposals other than amendments to current treaties;

(2) if he will list the numbers of those articles of the current version of the treaty of Rome which would be amended, replaced, or repealed by the current Dutch texts of draft treaties on economic, monetary and political union.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The draft treaty amendments on economic and monetary union circulated by the Netherlands Presidency on 28 October and the draft treaty on the union issued by the Presidency on 8 November comprise a comprehensive account of which articles of the treaty of Rome it is proposed should be amended, replaced, repealed or remain unchanged. In addition, the latter includes a number of new articles relating to the establishment of a European union, as opposed to the European Community. It is intended that all these amendments and new articles should be included in one treaty. Copies of all of these proposals are available in the Library of the House.

If these proposals were retained in any treaty signed by the United Kingdom, then United Kingdom law would need to be amended to ensure that legal provision existed for us to meet our treaty obligations before ratification of the treaty could take place. We anticipate that this legislation will take the form of an amendment to the European Communities Act, 1972, adding to the definition of "the Community Treaties" therein those provisions of the Maastricht agreement which amend the Community treaties.

EC Foreign Ministers Meeting

Mr. Knapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the EC Foreign Ministers conclave meeting held in Noordwijk between 12 and 13 November.

Mr. Hurd: At their conclave in Noordwijk on 12-13 November, Foreign Ministers discussed the latest Netherlands Presidency draft treaty on political union. My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and I represented the United Kingdom.

I made clear, as did others, that nothing could be agreed until everything was agreed, and that if the package on the table at Maastricht was not acceptable to the United Kingdom, we would not agree it.

The conclave made useful progress in some areas. A broad consensus emerged on a number of treaty articles, including a number of our own proposals. These included a power for the European Court of Justice to fine member states who failed to comply with its judgments; a strengthening of financial accountability in the Community; and other non-legislative powers of the European Parliament. There was broad consensus on a text on citizenship, which safeguards the right of member states to determine who should be a national. The proposal to establish a consultative regional body was broadly endorsed.

There was a detailed discussion of proposed extensions of Community competence and qualified majority voting. No agreement was reached and this issue will be considered again at a further conclave on 2 December.

It was recognised that several other issues would be resolved only by the European Council at Maastricht. These included:

- the legislative powers of the European Parliament;
- proposals to strengthen inter-governmental co-operation on interior and justice matters, in a separate "pillar" of the union treaty;
- a common foreign and security policy, with a possible defence dimension.'

HOUSE OF COMMONS

European Legislation

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Lord President of the Council what consideration he has given to the impact of the granting of veto powers in the European Parliament on the scrutiny process of European legislation in the House.

Mr. MacGregor *[holding answer 11 November 1991]:* The proposals under consideration in the inter-governmental conference on political union to extend the powers of the European Parliament would, if agreed, have no direct impact on the process of scrutiny of European legislation in the House. The Government have made clear in the intergovernmental conference the importance they attach to effective scrutiny of proposals for European legislation by national Parliaments and has tabled a draft conference declaration to this effect.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Wild Birds (Imports)

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what action he is taking to investigate the reasons for repeated high mortality of certain species of imported wild birds including humming birds;

(2) whether, following the recent report by the joint Nature Conservation Committee, he has exchanged information with exporting and other importing countries concerning the mortality of imported wild birds;

(3) what measures he intends to take to reduce the rate of mortality among wild-caught birds which are imported into the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maclean: The Government share the concern about the mortality levels of birds in trade, which we consider unacceptably high. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment and I wrote recently to the European Commissioners for the Environment and Agriculture, urging that action should be taken through the Community to ensure much stricter controls on this trade. We have asked, among other things, for measures to be drawn up to address the problem of trade in species which are particularly vulnerable to stress and mortality as a result of transport or captivity. In relation to the conditions of transport, the Community has recently agreed a new directive on the protection of all types of animals including birds during transport. This contains some important new provisions including a requirement for

air transport to be carried out in accordance with the International Air Transport Association (IATA) guidelines. It also, following pressure from the British Government for specific action on this issue, requires the Council to adopt further conditions on transport of wild birds.

Carcases of birds dead on arrival or which die in quarantine are examined at veterinary investigation centres for evidence of infectious diseases which could spread to the national poultry flock. During these investigations it has been established that the most common cause of death is considered to be stress associated with malnutrition, dehydration, adverse environmental condition or enteropathies. Other specific causes of death recorded are salmonellosis, psittacosis, mycotic pneumonia and coliseptic aemia. In relation to nectar feeders such as hummingbirds mortality is considered likely to be associated with difficulties in adapting to an artificial feeding regime.

The Department is reviewing animal health conditions and health certification requirements for imports to ensure that only birds which are healthy and fit to travel are exported from their country of origin. Senior ministry veterinary officials have visited a number of major exporting countries to discuss with their veterinary authorities various animal health and welfare matters, the standard of health certification and the conditions under which future imports of captive birds would take place, and have made it clear that we will cease to authorise imports from countries which fail to co-operate. Letters have been sent to airlines to emphasise the importance of complying with IATA rules and of reviewing their handling procedures. There is an ongoing review of quarantine premises and their operational standards, the level of veterinary supervision and stocking rates. Additional training has been instituted for official veterinary officers responsible for approving and supervising quarantine premises.

Copies of the Ministry's annual mortality statistics among imported birds are circulated widely to various interests including importing and exporting countries.

Bovine Spongiform Encaphalopathy

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 11 November, *Official Report*, column *421*, what were the dates of birth of the three cattle; and what research he has undertaken of possible causes of BSE in these cattle.

Mr. Maclean: The dates of birth for these cattle were September 1988, November 1988 and June 1989. Detailed epidemiological investigations are being carried out into these cases to establish whether there has been any inadvertent feed contamination and assess the potential for maternal and horizontal routes of infection.

In the case of the animal born in November 1988 our inquiries have almost certainly ruled out a feed source. As its dam also had BSE we cannot rule out the possibility of maternal transmission. Even if it was, the advice we have had from the independent Tyrell committee is that all the necessary safeguards are in place and there should be no change of policy or approach. Inquiries into the other two cases are not complete.

Farmers

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of the number of farmers who stopped farming in the 10 months to the end of October 1991.

Mr. Curry: This information is not available.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list any proposal in the matters being considered by the intergovernmental conferences on economic, monetary and political union which are directly or indirectly relevant to the common agricultural policy; and if he will list the changes envisaged in the relevant articles of the present treaty of Rome.

Mr. Curry: No changes to title II (Agriculture) of the treaty of Rome are being considered by the intergovernmental conferences. However, the administration of the common agricultural policy will be affected by the United Kingdom proposals, accepted by the conference, to strengthen financial accountability and compliance with judgments of the European Court of Justice.

Triazophos

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans his Advisory Committee on Pesticides has to alter the maximum residue level of triazophos; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The Advisory Committee on Pesticides is currently considering triazophos. I shall take account of its recommendations in determining the appropriate maximum residue level.

Citrus Fruits (Pesticides)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what testing is carried out on soft citrus fruits and sweet oranges to assess pesticide residue levels at their port of entry; whether they are refused entry if they contain pesticide residues above the maximum residue levels; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Citrus fruit are monitored each year by the Government's working party of pesticide residues. Where residues in such produce are found in excess of maximum residue levels follow-up action is taken with the authorities in the supplying country to ensure that the problem is resolved.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 198**

SESSION 1991–92

31st October—15th November 1991

SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc, between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instrument etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Mr. Speaker and his deputies are brought together under the heading Speaker's rulings and statements.

Other contributions by Mr. Speaker and his deputies appear under the heading Speaker.

Opposition Day Debates, Estimates Day Debates and Standing Order No. 10 applications are listed under those respective headings and under subject headings too.

The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates etc* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

Abbreviations

Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Com = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

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